



ENG 212

Forms of Literature II: Poetry

Course Manual

AO. DasyIva, O.B. Jegede

Forms of Literature II: Poetry

ENG212



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development
Version 1.0 ev1

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ISBN 978-021-848-3

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provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, iPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka
Vice-Chancellor

International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

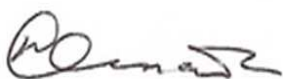
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre's provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.



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Prof. Bayo Okunade

Recent development in modern poetry, particularly the emergence of modern African poetry, is a pointer to new efforts being made to bring about necessary and gradual de-mystification and de-mythification of poetry. It is with this in mind that I intend to introduce to you, using the DLC, University of Ibadan, adopted methodology for effective study of modern poetry. In addition, it is intended to stimulate students' interest in poetry and possibly assist them in writing their own original poems.

Part I informs students on the general background and possible sources, as well as the distinguishing features and forms of poetry. Part II focuses on major movements and traditions in English Poetry, except in the case of the epic whose peculiarities I find expedient to draw, largely, from the Anglo-Saxon "Beowulf," John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and other selected African epics. Besides, Part II introduces students to the study of some poets and their works, and to understand each poet's spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." This is a culmination of the informing ethos that catalyses the poet's creative (manner of crafting of the poems) and critical sensibility (the poet's expressed opinions on different subjects, and his level of consciousness which, in turn, informs his interpretation of the reality around him). It involves the poet's society-including his general background, experience and exposure, ideological alignment or philosophy, among other things.

ENGLISH POETRY

Major Movements and Traditions

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Epic Poetry

Introduction

The development of English literature (not literatures in English) can be identified under five major historical movements. These movements, otherwise known as periods or ages are determined by the prevailing language or ruler or world philosophy or literary technique or prominent writer(s), or any best thing that characterizes the age or movement. It must be emphasized, however, that there is no clear-cut demarcation between one stage and the other. The historical literary ages have been suggested to include, The Anglo-Saxon (Oral tradition), before 55BC; 450-1500 Medieval; 1500-1660 Renaissance; 1660-1700 Restoration; 1660-1798 Neo-Classical; 1798- Modern; 1939- Contemporary. This study session deals with the first literary age.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 discuss the significance of epic poetry.
- 1.2 differentiate between primary and secondary epic
- 1.3 discuss the interaction between the humans and the supernatural in epic poetry.
- 1.4 highlight the elements of the epic formulae.
- 1.5 locate the hero of John Milton's 'Paradise Lost'.

1.1 Form and Significance

Epic poetry is known to be one of the earliest literary forms, and indeed one that has attracted discussions right from the days of Homer up to this present day (Brass 1989). These various discussions at different times and in different places show that the epic is a long narrative poem that is conceived on a grand scale. It treats a serious theme that has both national and international significance. This theme is presented in a style that is elevated. In treating its theme, it centres its narration on the celebration of the achievements of one or more heroic personage of history or tradition.

It presents characters of high position in a series of adventures (Brass 1989). These adventures form an organic whole in two ways (i) through their relation to the central figure who has heroic and superhuman proportion; and (ii) through their development of episodes that are important to the history of a nation or race.

The works of Homer and Virgil are the main examples of classical literary epic while "Beowulf and Paradise Lost" are the most obvious examples of English epic. In Africa, some of the popular epics include *Ozidi*, *Sunjata* and *Chaka*.

(Excerpts from) Beowulf

(Anon.)

The Coming of Grendel

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing
Call and the poet's clear songs, sung 5
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making the earth, shaping
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon
To glow across the land and light it; 10
The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:
So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall 15
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,

Not hell but earth. He was spawned in that slime,
Conceived by a pair of those monsters born 20
Of Cain, murderous creatures banished
By God, punished forever for the crime
Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove
Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,
Shut away from men; they split 25
Into a thousand forms of evil-spirits
And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
A brood forever opposing the Lord's
Will, and again and again defeated.

Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel 30
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's
Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws: 35
He slipped through the door and there in the silence
Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
The blood dripping behind him, back
To his liar, delighted with his night's slaughter. 40

At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
Broke their long feast with tears and laments
For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
In Herot, a mighty prince mourning 45
The fate of his lost friends and companions,
Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
His followers apart. He wept, fearing
The beginning might not be the end. And that night
Grendel came again, so set 50
On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
No savage assault quench his lust
For evil. Then each warrior tried
To escape him, searched for rest in different
Beds, as far from Herot as they could find, 55
Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
Distance was safely; the only survivors
Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.

So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
One against many, and won; so Herot 60
Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped
The seas, was told and sung in all 65
Men's ear: how Grendel's hatred began,
How the monster relished his savage war

No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
 In gold or land, and paying the living
 For one crime only with another. No one
 Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:
 That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old 75
 And young, lying in waiting, hidden
 In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
 Of the marsh, always there, unseen.

So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,
 Killing as often as he could, coming 80
 Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived
 In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
 Dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious
 Throne, protected by God – God,
 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's 85
 Heart was bent. The best and most noble
 Of his council debated remedies, sat
 In secret sessions, talking of terror
 And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods. 90
 Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's
 Support, the Devil's guidance in driving
 Their affliction off. That was their way,
 And the heathen's only hope, Hell
 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God 95
 Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord
 Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear
 His praise nor know His glory. Let them
 Beware, those who are thrust into danger,
 Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace. 100
 In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail
 To those who will rise to God, drop off
 Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace!

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son
 Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom 105
 Or strength could break it: that agony hung
 On king and people alike, harsh
 And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's°
 Follower and the strongest of the Greats – greater 110
 And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world –
 Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
 And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar, 115
 Now when help was needed. None
 Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
 As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,
 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf

In all, and led them down to their boat;
He knew the sea, would point the prow
Straight to that distant Danish shore.

Then Wulfgar went to the door and addressed 125
The waiting seafarers with soldier's words:

“My lord, the great king of the Danes, commands me
to tell you that he knows of your noble birth
And that having come to him from over the open
Sea you have come bravely and are welcome. 130
Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets,
But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,
Let them lie waiting for the promises your words
May make.”

Beowulf arose, with his men
Around him, ordering a few to remain
With their weapons, leading the others quickly
Along under Herot's steep roof into Hrothgar's
Presence, the silvery metal of his mail shirt
Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted
The Dane's great lord:

“Hail, Hrothgar!
Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
Name has echoed in our land: sailors
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best 145
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together.

My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes' 150
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
Dripping with my chains, chased

All of that race from the earth. I swam 155
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called

Together, and I've come. Grant me, then, 160
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,

O shelter of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me –
That I, alone and with the help of my men, 165
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
Too, that the monster's scorn of men

Is so great that he needs no weapons and fear none.
Nor will I, my lord Higlac
Might think less of me if I let my sword 170
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid

Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to death's cold grip. 175
Grendel's plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare 180
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins. 185
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!"

Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats, 190
Yielded benches to the brave visitors
And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead
Came carrying out the carved flasks,
And poured that bright sweetness. A poet
Sang, from time to time, in a clear 195
Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats
Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced.

There was the sound of laughter, and the cheerful clanking
Of cups, and pleasant words. Then Welthow,
Hrothgar's gold-ringed queen, greeted 200
The warriors; a noble woman who knew
What was right, she raised a flowing cup
To Hrothgar first, holding it high
For the lord of the Danes to drink, wishing him
Joy in that feast. The famous king 205
Drank with pleasure and blessed and blessed their banquet.
Then Welthow went from warrior to warrior,
Pouring a portion from the jeweled cup
For each, till the bracelet-wearing queen
Had carried the mead-cup among them and it was Beowulf's 210
Turn to be served. She saluted the Geats'
Great prince, thanked God for answering her prayers,
For allowing her hands the happy duty
Of offering mead to a hero who would help
Her afflicted people. He drank what she poured, 215
Edgeth's brave son, then assured the Danish
Queen that his heart was firm and his hands
Ready:

"When we crossed the sea, my comrades
And, I already knew that all
My purpose was this: to win the good will 220
Of your people or die in battle, pressed

My death!”

Welthow was pleased with his words,
His bright-tongued boasts; she carried them back 225
To her lord, walked nobly across to his side.

The feast went on, laughter and music
And the brave words of warriors celebrating
Their delight...

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty 230
Hills and bogs, bearing God’s hatred,
Grendel came, hoping to kill
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
Up from his swampland, sliding silently 235
Toward that gold-shinning hall. He had visited Hrothgar’s
Home before, knew the way –

But never, before nor after that night,
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless, 240
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch
And rushed angrily over the threshold.

He strode quickly across the inlaid
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes 245
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
With rows of young soldier resting together.
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight, 250
Intended to tear the life from those bodies

By mourning; the monster’s mind was hot
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
Grendel to gnaw the broken bones 255
Of his last human supper. Human
Eyes were watching his evil steps,
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.

Grendel snatched at the first Geat
He came to, ripped him apart, cut 260
His body to bits with powerful jaws,
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted
Him down, hands and feet; death

And Grendel’s great teeth came together,
Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another 265
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
- And was instantly seized himself, claws
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.

That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime, 270
Knew at once that nowhere on earth
Had he met a man whose hands were harder;

Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run 275
 From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
 This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
 But Higlac's follower remembered his final
 Boast and, standing erect, stopped
 The monster's flight, fastened those claws 280
 In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
 Closer. The infamous killer fought
 For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
 Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot 285
 Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!
 The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
 And Danes shook with terror. Down
 The aisles the battle swept, angry
 And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully 290
 Built to withstand the blows the struggling
 Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
 Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
 And out, artfully worked, the building
 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell 295
 To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
 As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.
 Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot
 To stand forever; only fire,
 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put 300
 Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
 Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
 The sounds changed, the Danes started
 In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang 305
 In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
 And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's
 Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms
 Of him who of all the men on earth
 Was the strongest.
 That mighty protector of men
 Meant to hold the monster till its life
 Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
 To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's
 Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
 Swords raised and ready, determined
 To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
 Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel
 From every side, trying to open
 A path for his evil soul, but their points 320
 Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
 Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
 Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells
 That blunted every mortal man's blade.

To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
 To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.
 Now he discovered – once the afflictor
 Of men, tormentor of their days – what it meant
 To feud with Almighty God: Grendel 330
 Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws
 Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at
 His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,
 But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
 And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder 335
 Snapped, muscle and bone split
 And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
 Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
 But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
 His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh, 340
 Only to die, to wait for the end
 Of all his days. And after that bloody
 Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
 He who had come to them from across the sea,
 Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction 345
 Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,
 Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes
 Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,
 A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
 Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering 350
 Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people
 By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
 The victory, for the proof, hanging high
 From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's
 Arm, claw and shoulder and all. 355

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
 Herot, warriors coming to that hall
 From faraway lands, princes and leaders
 Of men hurrying to behold the monster's
 Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense 360
 Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,
 Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
 And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
 Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed
 And already weary of his vanishing life. 365
 The water was bloody, steaming and boiling
 In horrible pounding waves, heat
 Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
 Surf had covered his death, hidden
 Deep in murky darkness his miserable 370
 End, as hell opened to receive him.

Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
 From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hardhooved
 Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
 Slowly toward Herot again, retelling 375

On earth or under the spreading sky
Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men. 380
(But no one meant Beowulf's praise to belittle
Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)

Example of an African oral epic

IZIBONGO: Zulu Praise-Poems.

Shaka

Dlungwana son of Ndaba!
Ferocious one of the Mbelebele bridge,
Who raged among the kraals,
So that until dawn the huts were being turned upside down.
5 He who beats but is not beaten, unlike water,
Axe that surpasses other axes in sharpness;
Shaka, I fear to say he is Shaka,
He is the chief of the Mashobas.
10 He of the shrill whistle, the lion;
He who armed in the forest, who
Armed in the forest, who is like a madman,
The madman who is in full view of the men.
He who trudge wearily the plain going to Mfene;
The voracious one of Senzangakhona,
15 Spear that is red even on the handle.
The open-handed one, they have matched the regiments,
They were matched by Noju and Ngqengenyane,
The one belonging to Ntombazi and the other to Nandi;
20 Brought out by the white one of Nandi.
They called him to Mthandeni despising him, they said
We cannot compete in dancing with this Ntungwa from up country,
Whereas he was going to annihilate Phakathwayo in the return competition.
The small beast of consent flying like a flag,
25 Why did the ferocious one consent?
Why has he accepted Godolozzi,
Thinking that he was on this side at Nandi's place?
Whereas he was far away at little Ntombazi's place?
The sun that eclipsed another with its rays,
30 For the present it eclipse the one of Mthandeni.
There are two words for which I am grateful,
I am grateful for that of Mpandaba and that of Ndungenkomo,
Saying 'The string of beads does not fit the neck'
Please inquire from the people of Zinkondeni,
35 They said he who is frustrated they would stab at Hlohloko,
The curdled milk got spilt and dish got broken.
The joke of the women of Nomgabhi,
Joking as they sat in a sheltered spot,
Saying that Shaka would not rule, he would not become chief,

And all the ridges heard its wailing,
 It was heard by Dunjwa of the Yengwenikraal,
 It as heard by Manggcengeza of Khall's kraal
 45 Fire of the long dry grass, son of Njokwane;
 Fire of the long grass of scorching force,
 That burned the owls on the Dlebe hill,
 And eventually those on Mabedlana also burned.
 He who travelled across to Ndimma and Mgovu,
 50 And women who were with child gave birth easily;
 The newly planted crops they left still short,
 The seed they left amongst the maize-stalks,
 The old women were left in the abandoned sites,
 The old men were left along the tracks,
 55 The roots of the trees looked up at the sky.
 He who reached the top of the Bhuzane mountain,
 He came across a long line of buch,
 He passed by Mcombo as the cattle were leaving.
 He whose routes they inquired from Dunjwa,
 60 Whereas they should have asked Mbozane about them,
 As for him he was hurrying to go to Nomagaga,
 A cock came and prevented him.
 He who is only the adults who will flee by themselves,
 65 Dunjwa alone it has crushed
 He who went and erected temporary huts at the Thukela,
 Where a leopard was ensnared in a trap,
 He defeated Khungwayo by means of the Ngobizembes.
 He who moved slowly along one ridge and returned on another,
 70 Attacking Bhoyiya son of Mdakuda;
 Ndaba did not intend to go there
 He was going to fetch Macingwane of the Ngonyameni kraal.
 He who moved slowly along a long ridge,
 He traversed the bones of the people of Tayi
 75 Who were cold going to Macingeane at Ngonyameni.
 The people of Zihlandlo...
 I criticized them, the evil-dowers,
 They did not tell the king the ford,
 80 Which was recently vacated by Ntube of the Majolas:
 They made him cross at the one with hippos and crocodiles,
 The hippos and crocodiles gaped with mouths wide-open
 He who looked down towards Hadungela,
 The cattle of Sihayo returned,
 85 And then there followed those of Agfongosi,
 That were mildred by an hysterical person at Mavela's place.
 He who was a pile of rocks at Nkandla,
 Which was a shelter for the elephants in bad weather,
 Which sheltered Phungashe of the Butheloziclan.
 90 And Zihlandlo of the Mkhize clan,
 And the elephants ran away from the place;
 Feather that bobbed down on the side of Nkanla,
 Bobbing down always and devouring men.

They were not contending over castor-oil seeds in deserted sites,
They said just a moment, wait for the pigeons,
And he came and killed them both.

100 Pursuer of a pursued Zwide son of Langa,
Talking him from where the sun rises
And sending him to where it sets;
As for Zwide he folded his two little shoulders together.

105. It was then the elder Was startled by the younger.
Fierce animal in the homes of people;
Wild animal that was in charge at Dibandlela's
He who dressed late was eventually overtaken,
He who puts on his fivory at the water's edge.

110. His things will be washed away.
Trickster, abstain from enemies, it is summer,
The grass is long, it will get the better of you.
Buffalo that stood glaring with a spear on the banks of the Nzimvubu
And the Pondos feared to come down to it;

115. You Gambushe and you Faku,
Do not stab him,
If you do stab him,
You will not be stabbing him,
You will then be stabbing him, Phunga and Mageba.

120. You will then be stabbing the unborn Ngqungqushe.
The attacker has long been attacking them:
He attacked Phunga she of the Buthelezi clan,
He attacked Sondaba of Mthanda as
he sat in council, He attacked Macingwaneat Ngonyameni.

125. He attacked Macingwame
Of the Mbatha clan,
He attacked Diadlamba of the Majolas
He attacked Gambushe in Pondoland,
He attacked Faku in Pondoland.

130. The young viper grown as it sits,
? Always in a great rage,
with a shield on its knees.
He who while devouring some devoured others,
And as he devoured other he
devoured some more,

135. He who while devouring some devoured others,
And as he devoured others he devoured some more,
He who while devoured others
And as he devoured others he devoured some-more;
He who while devouring some devoured others,

140. And as he devoured others he devoured some more;
He who while devouring some devoured others,
And as he devoured other he devoured others
And as he devoured others he devoured Some more.

Painful stabber, they will exhort one another,
Those who are with the enemy and those who are at home.

- with colours in circle as if they had been painted on,
 He who is hazy as the shadows of the mountains,
 When it is dark the evil-doers move about,
- 150 The rival of Phunga and Mageba
 Which looked at me until I got accustomed to it,
 Powerful limbs, calf of a beast,
 The kicking of this beast puzzled me,
 it kicked the milker and left the one holding it.
155. Hawk that I saw descending from the hills of Mangcengeza,
 And from those of Phungashe he disappeared;
 They said 'Hawk, here he is, there ho is',
 Whereas he was silent in the forest
 like the leopards and lions.
 Shaka went and erected temporary huts.
160. Between the Nsuze and the Thukela,
 In the country of Nyanya
 Son of Manzawane,
 He ate up Mantondo son of Tayi,
 He devoured Sihayo.
- 165 He who came dancing on the hillside of the Phuthies,
 And overcame Msikazi among the Nclimoshes.
 He met a long time oh haha-dedahs (ibis birds)
 When he was going to destroy the
 Foolish Pondos,
 Shaka did not raid herds of cattle,
170. He raided hers of buck,
 He who gets stiff!
 He who was cooked in the deep pot of Ntombazi,
 He was cooked and got stiff.
 He who goes about making fires
 and leaving behind conflagrations.
175. Who when he who rubbed flared like a fire
 There was no longer a beast lowing
 at little Ntombaz's
 It was now lowing at our place at Bulawayo.
 Our own bringer of poverty at Bulawayo.
 Who made Zwides destitute by great strides.
- 180 The sky that rumbled, the sky of Mageba,
 That thundered above Nomange mountain,
 It thundered behind the kraal at Kughobeken and struck
 It took the shields of Maphela and the Mankayiya,
 And the little melons of the Zam paka were left on the vines.
185. He devoured Nomahlanjana son of Zwide of the Maphelas,
 He ate up Nphepha son of Zwide of the Maphelas,
 He killed Nombengula son of Zwide of the Maphelas,
 He destroyed Dayingubo son of Zwide of the Maphelas,
 He ate up Sonsukwana son of Zwide of the Maphelas;
190. He devoured the chief wife, daughter of Lubongo,
 He ate up Mtimona son of Gaqa of the Maphelas,
 He killed Npondo-phumelakwezinde of the Maphelas,

195 He devoured Sihla-mth ini-munye of Zwide' d people
 He destroyed Nqwangube son of Lundayane,
 He belonged to our side, having turned round his shield.
 Return, Tricksters, indeed you have finished this matter,
 As for Zwide, you have made him into a homeless criminal.
 200 And now today you have done the same to the son.
 The people of Zwide, Shaka, you have left over them
 Sikhunyana is a girl, he has married you,
 He found you sitting in council in the cattle- fold at Nkandla,
 Not knowing that your soldiers had a cross-questioning.
 205 Bearer of the homed viper, they have beaten you!

- What distinguishing mark may first become obvious to you at the sight of an epic poem?
- The length. The entire oeuvre of some poets may not attain the length of a single epic.

1.2 Types of Epic Poetry

As already mentioned, there are two types of epic poetry - traditional or folk epic, and literary or written epic.

1.2.1 Traditional epic tells the tale of a man who has superhuman qualities that other men do not have. These qualities are used for the benefit and development of his people. Such an epic is a product of a non-literate society. The poem is “narrated” or “performed” by a bard or a griot who accompanies his rendition with musical instruments. The bard, like most oral poets, is conscious of his audience and he performs with deep sense of public image (Finnegan 1981). When this poem is orally transmitted, information passes from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation. There are no specific authors for specific poems. Each poet builds on and improves on the information that he has received about a particular epic poem. In other words, the content does undergo some changes from time to time. It could treat subjects that are heroic, romantic or historic in nature.

1.2.2 Literary epic like the traditional epic, tells the tale of a man who has superhuman qualities which he uses for the development of his generation. It has similar content with traditional epic. However, the poetry is in written form because it is a product of a literate society. So the issue of performance does not arise. It is different from traditional epic in that it has specific authorship.

Both traditional and literary epic poetry aim to please through the medium of word and the images that are created through them (Okpewho 1979). The basic difference between traditional and literary epic is in how they are transmitted and the process that is involved in transmitting them.

Hint: Primary epic—memorised and recited; secondary epic—written and read

1.3 Basic Requirements of an Epic Poem

In whatever form and through whatever means epic poetry is transmitted, there are certain basic requirements that are generally agreed upon for it to be regarded as an epic. They are as follows:

1.3.1 Action

The action should normally consist of deeds of great valour which would require superhuman courage. It depends heavily on ancient legends and depicts the adventurous exploits of some great warriors. The action further tells of the nature, character and spirit of their national heritage. In general, it reflects an age, a race, a civilization and a culture through its hero's life. “Beowulf” involves the values of a warrior society where there is mutual trust and respect between a warrior and his lord.

The action of the traditional epic stresses the conflict of the individual against his society or against himself. Beowulf, the hero of “Beowulf” concerns himself with fate. He tests his relationship with an unknown destiny by attempting to slay mother-dragon, Grendel and later, Grendel's siblings. He is very much aware that he either kills them or he gets killed by them. He is lucky to kill the siblings but he is not as lucky when he challenges the mother-dragon. Fate is against him so he is killed. In John Milton's “Paradise Lost”, Satan's downfall also comes about by fate (line 116-119):

This downfall since by fate the strength of God
 And this Empyreal substance cannot fail,
 Since through experience of this great event

1.3.2 Interaction between men and the supernatural forces

Supernatural forces like gods, angels and demons interest themselves in the action of the poem. They usually constitute problems for the human characters in the poem. It is this problem that the epic hero usually faces, challenges and conquers. For example, Grendel, her mother, the dragon and the worm are some of the supernatural forces Beowulf had to contend with. In “Paradise Lost” all the characters that peopled the poem apart from Adam and Eve, are supernatural forces – God, Satan, Beelzebub and the other fallen angels. Similarly; in the African epic, for example, Clark-Bekederemo’s “Ozidi” the supernatural forces are either directly engaged or Ozidi seeks their support.

1.3.3 The Epic Hero

The hero is a figure of imposing stature. When Beowulf the hero of “Beowulf” appears with his party on the coast of Danes, he is immediately noticed by the Danish coast guard who is attracted by his good looks: (“Beowulf” *line 247-251*):

I have never laid eyes upon earl on earth
More stalwart or sturdy than one of your troop
A hero in armor, no hall-than he
Tricked out with weapons, unless looks believe him
And noble bearing.

He is of national and universal significance in view of his great historical and legendary relevance. The hero is like the spokesman and saviour of his age and community. In other words, he embodies the mores and the aspirations of his society. In the case of the hero of most African epics, there is usually something mysterious about his birth and his early youth. Sunjata is an example of this. He stayed seven years in his mother’s womb before he was born (lines 48-49). This advantage of his supernatural conception puts him above his peers. For example, the hero of “Sunjata” is the son of a king and also an emperor. When finally born, it is during the dry season. The sky darkens, there is great cloud with thunder rumbling and lightning flashing and strong wind blowing. Rain starts and then stops and immediately, the sun appears, as conveyed in the following lines:

Suddenly, the sky darkened and great clouds coming from the east hid the sun, although it was during dry season. Thunder began to rumble and swift lightning rent the clouds, a few large drops of rain accompanied by a dull rattle of thunder burst out of the east and lit up the whole sky as far as the west. Then the rain stopped and the sun appeared and it was at this moment that a midwife came out

of Sogolon’s house, ran to the antechamber and announced to Nare Maghan that he was the father of a boy.
(“Sunjata” IV, 13).

These mysterious circumstances set the hero apart from the natural course of life. This serves as a source of inspiration for the hero who sees himself as possessing superhuman qualities. It serves as a source of awe about the hero for other people who see him as possessing “storage” qualities. His growth and development from childhood is usually extraordinary. He appears too advanced, too serious for children of his age. Sunjata could not associate with children of his age. When they are playing, he is too serious to join them. Apart from this, he starts walking (at the age of seven) as a result of his step-mother’s cynical comment about his inability to walk. On the same day he uproots a whole baobab tree. In addition, he bends an iron rod made by his father’s blacksmith into a bow. Before the age of ten, he has become a master hunter, a titled that is reserved only for men who have distinguished themselves.

1.3.4 Setting

The setting of the poem is vast in scope covering great nations, the world or the universe. In “Paradise Lost”, the setting covers the whole of heaven, hell and the earth.

1.3.5 Style

The poem has a grand style of sustained elevation and grand simplicity. It usually has sublimity of style and grandeur of content. There is extraordinary richness of rhetorical elaboration, which alternates and, at times, combines with the barest simple statements. In one of Beowulf’s speeches during his first meeting with Hrothgar, the King of the Danes, he concludes his mission in his determination to come back and challenge the monster thus:

But I shall show him soon now,
The strength and the courage of the Geats, their warfare.
Afterwards he will walk who may be

1.4 The Epic Formulae

There are common devices and conventions which are employed in most epic poems. They include the following:

1.4.1 Theme

The poem opens by stating the theme. In “Paradise Lost”, the theme is man’s first obedience, fall and eventual restoration. This is declared in the first lines of the poem:

Of man’s First Disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal test
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

1.4.2 Invocation

This is a call for help from a more powerful being such as God, the ancestors, etc. He implores the Muse to inspire and to instruct him. In “Paradise Lost” the poet calls on a muse in lines, 6-19, for example:

Sing, Heav’nly Muse, that on the secret top...
I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
Instruct me for thou know’st;

1.4.3 *in medias res*

He opens the narrative not from the very beginning but in the middle of events. He later gives the necessary exposition in the latter portion of the epic thereby filling the missing gap. *Paradise Lost* begins with Satan and his legion of angels discussing their miserable fall into Hell. This is obviously the middle of events. Apparently, so many actions had taken place before then - Satan had rebelled, had lured some angels to his side, had ruined his relationship with God, lost his position in heaven, and had been thrown out of heaven before the reader encounters him and his cohort. The chaos accompanying their condemnation into the burning lake and their confusion thereafter are also exempted at the beginning of the poem. Similarly, Beowulf was in his early fifty’s and already had a record of great achievements at home and abroad as a great warrior by the time the reader first encounters him.

1.4.4 Sporadic Wars

These include catalogues of warriors, ships and armies. After the arrival of Beowulf and his company, the poet describes the situation thus:

The boat lay fixed, rested on the rope,
Boar-images shone, over check-guards
Gold-adorned gleaming and fire-hardened...
The warriors hastened, marched together...

1.4.5 Epic Oration

The poem gives extended formal speeches by the main characters. For example, in introducing himself in the presence of the people of Heorot, Beowulf states his mission in this formal speech before the gathering of people. (C.W. Kennedy, *Beowulf* 1978, lines 407-421).

‘Hail! King Hrothgar! I am Hygelac’s thane,
Hygelac’s kingsman. Many a deed.
Of honour and daring I’ve done in my youth.
This business of Grendel was brought to my ears
On my native soil. The sea-farers say
This best of buildings, this boasted hall,

The best of my people, prudent and brave,
 Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
 They had in remembrance my courage and might.
 Many had seen me come safe from the conflict,
 Bloody from battle; five foes I bound
 Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.
 Hard-driven in danger and darkness of night
 I slew the nicors that swam the sea,
 Avenged the woe they had caused the Weders.
 And ended their evil-they needed the lesson!
 And now with Grendel, the fearful fiend,
 Single-handed I'll settle the strife!
 Prince of the Danes, protector of Scyldings,
 Lord of nations, and leader of men,
 I beg one favor-refuse me not,
 Since I come thus faring from far-off lands-
 That I may alone with my royal earls,
 With this hardy company, cleanse hart-hall.

1.4.6 Epic Simile

Epic simile is a simile of great length and ramification which functions as a separate ornament within the poem (Onsby 1992). Its function in the poem is lyrical rather than narrative.

Unlike the straightforward simple simile, it suspends the action of the poem by causing a digression from it. In other words, rather than advance the action, it suspends it. These digressions are largely responsible for the unusual length of the epic. A good example is found in "Paradise Lost" when Satan and all his legion of angels, out of confusion and shock, talk of how to overcome their calamity. They talk of what reinforcement they may gain from hope. The poet suspends the actions of this scene but comes in with an extensive comparison between Satan and Leviathan the whale in the poem. Satan is said to be as huge in length as the whale (Lines 192-209).

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate (4)
 With head uplift above the wave, and Eyes
 That sparkling blaz'd, his other Parts besides
 Prince on the flood, extended long and large
 Lay floating many a road, in bulk as huge.
 As whom the fables name of the monstrous size,
 Titanian, or Earth born, that warr'd on Jove,
 Briarier or Typhon, whom the Den
 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
 Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream.
 Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam.
 The Pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff,
 Deeming some Island, oft, as sea-men tell,
 With fixed Anchor in his scaly rind
 Moors by his side under the lee, while Night
 Invests the sea, and wished Morn delays:
 So stretch out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay.

But from line 242 the poet resumes the discussion of Satan and his angels on their discovery of the truth, and their dismay about their situation.

1.4.7 The Structure of an Epic

An epic, as I have mentioned earlier, is a very long narrative poem. Usually, the traditional (oral) epic may take about seven days for the bard or griot to perform. The performance is unique in many ways. For example, the structure of a traditional epic is foregrounded in the multiplication of singularized units of episodes in the daily celebration lasting about seven days.

Each episode is a complete narrative experience with a beginning, middle and an end. In addition, the copious use of digressions, suspense, rhetoric, repetitions, and allusions, particularly, the epic simile, is largely responsible for the unusual length of the epic.

1.5 The Example of John Milton: *Paradise Lost*

John Milton's "Paradise Lost" readily provides a good example of a literary epic. Even though it is a Renaissance protestant epic, it is unique in many ways as a very successful Christian epic. Therefore, I shall briefly discuss its theme and some aspects of the technique employed by the poet shortly.

1.5.1 Theme

The thematic preoccupation of an epic, as I have mentioned earlier, is usually of great importance. Even though most epics have their subjects revolving around such issues as destruction of cities, or the foundation of an empire, the subject of *Paradise Lost* revolves round the fate of man and the world, the revolution in heaven and on earth, the rebellion of Satan and his cohorts against God and the overthrow of their host and punishment of their crime. John Milton clearly states his mission and theme in the introduction: "And justify the ways of God to Men" (line 26). This he achieves by showing God's efforts following the defeat of Satan and his host and their expulsion from Heaven. The efforts include the creation of a new race of reasonable creatures and their original state of happiness and innocence, their morality, all of which they forfeit because of the sin of disobedience, their final restoration to hope and peace through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Milton himself, a young and uncompromising gentleman, is determinedly moralistic in *Paradise Lost*. Like any standard epic, the book involves issues that directly bring humanity and the supernatural together. It celebrates the heroic hinged partly on greatness and partly on rare virtues. The question then arises: whose heroism does Milton celebrate in *Paradise Lost* – Satan, man (Adam) or Jesus? This question tops the list of the controversies that this poem has generated.

John Dryden has described John Milton as being "of the devil's party without knowing it". This position is justifiable, considering that Milton is more comfortable celebrating the daring and promethean spirit of Satan, his exploits and doggedness. Given the romantic spirit and thrust which Lord Byron readily recognizes as the propelling force that informed the actions of Satan/Lucifer, it is correct to say that Satan vehemently opposes and rejects the monopolist *status quo*, that he remains defiant, uncompromising, promethean in the face of defeat, and as a true leader of the fallen angels, leads where the action is hottest, and being fully aware of the consequences of his actions, takes full responsibilities for the same, all qualify him as a romantic hero or Byronic hero.

In the context of Milton's vision and thematic concern, a romantic hero is not good enough. Therefore, Satan, put in a clearer perspective, is a tragic figure. Despite his qualities, like Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Satan/Lucifer remains stubborn, adamant, and unrepentant. His spirit is undistilled, his being turned into a serpent that must crawl and forever eat ashes; all these have nothing noble in it. There is nothing about Lucifer and, or his cohorts that is worth emulating. Therefore, he qualifies better as a tragic figure.

Man (Adam) is believed by some critics to be the hero of *Paradise Lost*. A critical study of this character, Adam, will help in this regard. Adam, in the beginning, is in a perfect state: immortal, he is the King of the new world. A temporary separation of his wife, Eve, from his "protective side" at the instance and insistence of the latter leads to her eating of the "forbidden fruit". Adam also made a deliberate choice of the path of destruction by taking the forbidden fruit. The full implication of his action qualifies him as a romantic hero. However, as the plot unfolds further, Adam undergoes a distillation of spirit, he comes thoroughly purged and repentant. He is as repentant and purged as Sophocles' King Oedipus or Ola Rotimi's King Odewale. Adam (Man) in the context of Milton's artistic vision is a tragic hero, but certainly not *the* hero in *Paradise Lost*.

Is Jesus the hero? If we cast our mind back to Milton's thematic concern: "And justify the ways of God to men", it is obvious that Jesus Christ's choice to leave His glorious throne and His choice to give Himself up as the scape-goat qualifies the boundless love that God has for mankind. Jesus, in effect becomes the carrier-hero and through His death and resurrection He defeats Death and restores Man to his original state of immortality and perfection. Jesus, therefore, becomes the hope and peace of those who care to accept Him as God's medium of reconciliation. As a Christian epic, Jesus Christ is the hero in *Paradise Lost*. In the context of Milton's vision, therefore, the poet has been able to "justify the ways of God to men".

1.5.2 Hints on Milton's Technique

John Milton is fond of the use of apposition. In this case, he introduces a new dimension through the use of semi and full colon to emphasize *cause* and *effect*; e.g.

"She eat:

Earth felt the wound" IX, 782-2

“This intellectual good” meaning “Fruit/Death”.

Milton uses parallelism to achieve a balance between abstract and concrete terms, to balance opposites, and to equate time and space e.g., “Day/Cloud”.

The poet uses copula (word joining the subject and predicate) for equating abstractions in didactic statements not only for startling metaphors but for throwing doubt on identities in a way that often reflects real uncertainty and achieves meditative or ironic effects.

Through his use of simple reference (SR), Milton avoids vagueness and deliberately creates double literal meanings by his use of “the” and “my”

“the faithful side...my conduct”

There is the use of *make-link* with its strong active element that suspends disbelief for vivid expression such as “flight/wheel”, “heaven/hell”. At times, the link is combined with others to suggest several things, even ambiguously, e.g.:

“The rest, we live,
Law to our selves” (IX, 653-4)

Milton also makes use of the *genitive link*. That is, the use of “of” and the “possessive”, which he uses for all relationships instead of the common apostrophe and “s” (‘s), e.g.

“Nature...her seat
...words...gave signs of woe” (IX, 782-3).

Milton’s use of adjectives is very flexible and varied. The adjectives are employed to create sensory effects such as taste, pain, light and dark. They are also employed to humanized the divine and divinize the human.

The poet’s choice of sentence structure is Latinate; this explains the unusual placement of the subject and the accusative in a sentence. It is an apparent imposition of the Latin liberal sentence structure, e.g., “Adam, by sad experiment I know” X, 967.

We have examples of the use of epic simile which constitute the major source of digressions in *Paradise Lost*, e.g. (I, 198-209 see Pg. 41.)

The issue of technique may remain inexhaustive in our discussion on *Paradise Lost*. What we have done is to bring out units that tend to confirm this work as a standard “modern” epic.

Summary of Study Session 1

We have attempted, so far, to explore the epic poetry tradition in general and identify its basic characteristics in particular. However, it is instructive to note that not all epic poems satisfy all the characteristics we have considered here. Where this is the case, it does not mean that such a work is not an epic. It is our hope that our discussion so far will serve as a guide to any student who wishes to identify the basic characteristics of an epic poem in works that we have not examined in this study.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 1.1 (tests Learning Outcome 1.1)

The epic does not fall into the category of personal poetry; it revolves around nationally, internationally or even universally significant themes. Recognize traces of this in Beowulf.

SAQ 1.2 (tests Learning Outcome 1.2)

The primary epic is produced by pre-literate societies while the secondary epic is produced by literate societies. Put differently, the former is oral but the latter is written. What other differences are there between them?

Show, from epic poems that have been used in this study session, how the world of humans and that of the supernatural intermingle.

SAQ 1.4 (tests Learning Outcome 1.4)

Invocation and epic oration are some elements in the formulae of an epic, what are others?

SAQ 1.5 (tests Learning Outcome 1.5)

There is controversy on whether Satan, Man (Adam) or Jesus is the hero of 'Paradise Lost', who really is the hero and why?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1

SAQ 1.1 Beowulf fought for the Danes, a whole nation. His destruction of Grendel is of national significance to the Danes as Grendel had been a terror to the whole nation.

SAQ 1.2 The primary epic is meant to be performed by griots before an audience but the secondary epic is written and so meant to be read by any individual who lays his hands on it and usually to her/himself; though one cannot rule out the possibility of a reader reading it aloud to few persons around him/her, it is ordinarily not an audience thing. The primary epic is transmitted orally and thus subject to embellishment and modifications by individual griots, but the secondary epic is open to no embellishment or modification because it is written. The primary epic is collectively owned by a whole nation or ethnic group but the secondary epic has an author. All the differences hinge on the oral/written status of the poetic form.

SAQ 1.3 The setting may span both worlds, as in 'Paradise Lost'. The hero may have supernatural beings to battle with or beseech for support; he may even have had a supernatural birth. Events may be largely on supernatural beings.

SAQ 1.4 Statement of theme in the beginning, *in medias res*, sporadic wars, epic simile and so on

SAQ 1.5 The hero is Jesus. This is because in the actions and sacrifices of Jesus is the theme—"And justify the ways of God to Men"—realised.

Medieval Poetry

Introduction

In the former study session, you studied the poetry tradition of epic. In this study session, you will learn about something close to the epic but also different in some ways, the medieval poetic tradition of romance. The principal beliefs and general atmosphere of Medieval England, constituting the background for the romance, will be exposed. You will learn about the characteristics of romance, principal figures in the tradition and some of their masterpieces, which will be analysed.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 2

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 analyze the structure of the society within which the medieval tradition flourished.
- 2.2 differentiate between romance and epic.
- 2.3 contrast the works of Edmund Spenser and Geoffrey Chaucer

2.1 Medieval England and the Romance

Medieval England was a predominantly Christian nation. Its literature, particularly poetry, was largely a by-product of the Christian religion and doctrines: the bottomline of which is that man could receive divine grace only through the love of Christ and obedience to God's commandments. Indeed, the society was of the belief that the whole world manifested the presence of God. The red rose, for example, was often associated with the blood of martyrs, and the twelve calendar months with the twelve apostles, etc.

Furthermore, the Medieval English poetry expressed *death* as a welcome phenomenon because by it man is freed from the world's boredom. Like the Anglo-Saxon society, the Medieval English society was stratified and the king was at the apex of the hierarchy. Being a feudal lord and the sole central figure in the society, the king was next only to God. Directly under him were the knights who owed him allegiance like their counterparts, the Lords, in Anglo-Saxon society. The king was apparently a feudal lord. A number of the medieval English poems reflect the society.

The religious themes of the Anglo-Saxon poetry were also carried over to the early period of the medieval time. By the second half of the Medieval period, there was a modification informed by the influence from France. It was the allegory mode which suggests an indirect way of communicating message. Therefore, instead of a direct narrative poem having just one straight meaning, the allegory mode has two levels of meaning, the plain/surface (or primary) meaning, and the underlying (hidden) or secondary meaning which may have historical, philosophical or moral connotations, as we have in a parable.

There is a basic difference between this allegory imported from France and the dream-allegory which had been in vogue since the Anglo-Saxon era. The dream-allegory is properly so called because, in it, somebody falls asleep, dreams and later narrates his dream. In such a narrative, the dream-vision technique neither gives room for a logical sequence of events nor plausibility in a strict sense. The advantage of this mode is that it allows for unbridled freedom of expression.

Let me quickly warn that by "romance" as used in this context, it has nothing to do with necking in some park, or under some tree. No, it was strictly a literary tradition believed by literary historians to have its origin in Rome. Romance, however, characterized the literary poetic tradition in medieval England about the eleventh century, the influence of which was traceable to France. The Romance generally belonged to what came to be regarded as the "escape" literature of the medieval aristocracy because it presents life not as it was lived, but as it was desired (or ought) to be lived. Like the epic poetry, the romance is a long narrative poem but not as long as a standard epic. Also like the epic, it has an episodic plot-structure. However, unlike the epic, the romance is written in a less elevated style and language.

The romance tells a tale of chivalry involving an elegant, highly cultured gentleman on horseback. The central character is often presented battling against awkward people or situation in order to portray the kind of desired life. The romance is usually categorized according to where the story originates from. Some of the stories that are drawn from classical literature are classified under "The Matter of Greece". Other historical legends are given different titles.

Under "The Matter of Greece", there existed the classical romances with the following stories;

- i. Alexander the Great

Under “The Matter of Greece”, the romances centre on the adventures of Charlemagne and his knights. *The Song of Roland* is the most popular in the series. “The Matter of English” concentrates on the careers of the English and German heroes. Finally, the romances in “The Matter of Britain” revolve round the activities of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

In the romance, the ideal is, among other things, to present the marvellous. The woman is idolized, elevated to the pedestal of a goddess and worshipped by a horse-riding knight. The romance involves different adventures, which includes fighting with dragon and giants, and displaced heirs fighting to regain their lost kingdoms. The romance may also present beauty and the love of beauty, besides portraying life as it ought to be lived. Love of external beauty is often shown through the beautiful houses, castles, medieval streets, and beautiful men and women that we come across in the poems.

- ITQ Apart from the Medieval Romance treated here, there is another tradition, a contemporary one, that some people also call romance. What differentiates them?
- The romance treated in this study session is poetry of knighthood and chivalry. The romance of Harlequins and others are novels about romantic relationships. The former is a poetry tradition and is elevated art while the latter is constituted of novels and is popular literature.

2.2 Characteristics of the Romance

Women aristocrats were especially fond of romance, and because they had enough leisure time, they occupied themselves by reading. This partly accounts for the unusual length of the poems. The poetry, however, fails to take into account the struggles of the lower class people as individuals and as a group.

It is characteristic of the romance to dwell so much on minute description, e.g., of shoes, the shirts, colour of the hats, the sky, etc. Like the epic, digressions abound in the romance some of which do not seem intelligible. The digressions like those of the epic, are largely responsible for its length.

The romance is characteristically monotonous and subjective. For example, the noble class characters are presented hardly with any observable fault, quite contrary to what obtains in most literary works where the good and the bad characters are represented. Chaucer, the greatest poet of the age parodied the characteristics of the medieval literature in the “Tale of Sir Thopas.” It was the romance that actually set in motion the interest in character development, setting, plot development, among others, which were to lay the foundation for the realistic novels of the eighteenth century.

2.3 Two major Medieval Poets

The two that will be focused on are Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400).

2.3.1 Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)

Sir Gawaine and the Knights of the Greene Castle is one of the best Romances of “The Matter of Britain.” It is perhaps the most popular about King Arthur, and a perfect example of all romances of the period. This is because many of the shortcomings observable in other romances are not found in “Sir Gawaine”. For example, there are no digressions in a strict sense, the loose plot are hardly distracting, and no monotony. In other words, it does not leave room for any extreme idealization of characters. Similarly, regardless of the different events that constitute the narrative, the poem has a unified plot that is made up of different episodes and plausible central hero: Sir Gawaine, who is both human and humane.

Again, a significant feature in this poem that is not found in other romances is the poet’s conscious check on the excesses earlier discussed. The poem is divided into four fitts or cantos, and each fitt is subdivided into verse-segments. There are ninety-one verse-segments in all, with a total of 2530 lines. The first two verse-segments attempt to draw a similarity between the Sir Gawaine story and the long established story of the Trojan. Without necessarily making any claim to originality, the poet gives a background to the history of Britain, upon which the story was based.

The introductory part narrates the height and the quality of civilized life lived in King Arthur’s Court, by the king and his knights, and the celebration of Christmas. From line 45, we are introduced to the delectable and overwhelming joy of the most celebrated knight(s), as well as the most cunning people. The intention of the poet is to bring out all the celebrated Arthurian ideals for people to admire and be influenced by.

Fitt 1. vii announces the advent of the Green Knight, while Fitt 1.viii, ix and x, give the general description of the unusual glamour, and the awesome appearance of the Green Knight. Note also the poet’s restrained description of the minute things

Fitt 1. xiii, the Green Knight throws a challenge. In Fitt 1. xiv, Sir Gawain reacts and accepts the challenge because he does not want the highly revered King Arthur to be exposed to ridicule and danger. Like Jesus Christ, highly referred to as the “Saving Christ” (Fitt 111 line 51), Sir Gawain voluntarily accepts to bear the burden of the King, and by extension, the burden of the whole English race in order to free the King and the society from shame and perpetual captivity of the strange Green Knight. The King, now relieved, advises Sir Gawain to strike with precision, and well. Fitt 1. xix, describes how the blow is dealt. Despite the Green Knight’s decapitation, he still talks and threatens.

Fitt 2. xxii, describes the passing of time. Fitt 2. xxiii, ushers in another year. It is now twelve calendar months after the visit of the Green Knight. In Fitt 2. xxv, Sir Gawain gets prepared for his journey. He is armed for the long and dangerous trip. Note the medieval English love for beauty in Sir Gawain’s elegance and the caparisons on his shield is indicative of his excellent virtues. Fitt 2. xxviii, gives the meaning of the Pentangle.

Sir Gawain’s journey is in itself a trial. The journey is described as a most difficult one. He is courageous and neither falters nor runs away. In the course of his journey in search of the Green Knight, he encounters many difficulties, fights dragons and defeats many giants. Sir Gawain is a model of a true Christian who prays because he recognizes his own inadequacies and fully acknowledges God’s omnipotence and omniscience. Fitt 2. xxxvi, introduces the magnificent castle where Sir Gawain prays on his way to the Green Knight. The castle is owned by Sir Bertilak, the elegantly dressed knight. Although there is a striking similarity between this castle and King Arthur’s Camelot in terms of elegance, wealth and importance, there is more orderliness in Sir Bertilak’s castle as observed by the poet.

In Fitt 2. xiv, an argument ensues between Sir Bertilak and Sir Gawain. Fitt 3. xlvii, describes how animals are hunted and killed, Sir Bertilak’s games hunting skills. Note Lady Bertilak’s adulterous moves. Note also how Sir Gawain resists the temptation.

Even though Sir Gawain is a wonderful knight, he is a human being; therefore, he is not perfect. The poet rightly observes this: none on earth is perfect but God. When Sir Gawain finally meets the Green Knight the blow is returned but Sir Gawain is protected by the magic girdle given him by Lady Bertilak. After the blow is dealt, the Green Knight is revealed to be no other than Sir Bertilak. This discovery makes Sir Gawain to feel downcast. He finally returns to Camelot where he narrates his ordeals.

Generally, the medieval poets found it more convenient to celebrate only the joys of spring and summer because winter was too harsh to sing about. However, unlike this common tradition, the poet of “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”, chooses to celebrate the inclement weather of the mid-winter: the rain, snow, fierce wind, hostile storm, the uninviting topography of the landscape of uncharted regions in the then Northern England. The poet twice makes a dramatic contrast between the warm indoor joys of human life and fellowship, and the stark loneliness of the icy desolation in the wilderness.

The poem can be divided into two broad parts: the beheading game, and the trials (temptations) of Sir Gawain. Critics are of the opinion that the two parts have two different sources and, indeed, constitute two different stories. The poet, however, has succeeded in fusing the two stories into a unified plot. The highlights of the plot include, the introduction, which presents the life of the cultured English society; the challenge of the Green Knight, which precipitates the action; Sir Gawain’s acceptance of the challenge which begins the action; Sir Gawain’s journey to the North; and the interlude at Sir Bertilak’s castle represents the complication in the plot. The resolution or denouement includes the expected blow and the shocking discovery (the exposure) of the Green Knight’s true identity. The discovery includes the Green Knight’s appraisal of Sir Gawain’s triumph over his trials, and the reasons why things happen the way they do. There is a pre-enactment and the Christian Catholic Faith, in particular, rituals of confession, penance and forgiveness.

Apart from the poet’s effective management of the story in the main plot highlighted above, there are aspects of the internal structure which are, by every standard, unique. For example, the use of parallelism and symmetry: Sir Bertilak’s castle parallels King Arthur’s Camelot in beauty. Similarly, the exchange of gifts between Sir Bertilak and Sir Gawain is asymmetry in the poem. Other examples of parallelism include the conditions Sir Bertilak and Sir Gawain set for themselves with their symbolic implications.

Sir Bertilak kills a deer on his first hunting day. A deer is known for its speed and stealthiness. This parallels the way Lady Bertilak makes her adulterous moves to her guest, Sir Gawain. Sir Bertilak, on his second hunting day, kills a boar. The boar symbolizes persistence; and as we know, Lady Bertilak presses further on her adulterous plan on Sir Gawain. On the third hunting day, Sir Bertilak kills a fox. This suggests the cunning and rough manner in which Lady Bertilak makes a final move to influence Sir Gawain. She succeeds in giving a magic girdle to Sir Gawain. The magic girdle is capable of making Sir Gawain invulnerable to any serious harm. Similarly, important events are made to happen in “threes”.

- Sir Bertilak hunts three times in three days, and kill three different animals;
- Lady Bertilak makes three separate efforts to seduce Sir Gawain;

Finally, the Green Knight's appearance is recorded three times: at King Arthur's Camelot, at Sir Bertilak's castle disguising as Sir Bertilak and finally at the discovery that he is one and the same person as the Green Knight. The medieval English society believed that the circle is the most perfect of all geometrical symbols. It seems, therefore, that the poet of "Sir Gawain" consciously made his poem to have a circuitous movement, suggesting a perfect plot. For example, the poem begins at King Arthur's banquet at Camelot, it moves out far and wide, and ends at Arthur's Camelot.

The descriptive power of the poet and his ability to make his subjects (characters, events, vegetation, etc.) come alive so vividly in the lines of the poem is another excellent characteristic of the poem. For example, the audience is made to see through the powerful description of (i) the season of summer in Fitt 2 xxiii, (ii) Sir Bertilak's manner of hunting and killing an animal in Fitt 3. liii (iii) the bedroom where Sir Gawain is lodged in Sir Bertilak's castle in Fitt 2. xxxvi and xxxvii.

Even though one observes the celebration of nobility, courage and chastity as represented by Sir Gawain's triumph over all obstacles and ordeals, particularly, moves of Lady Bertilak, Sir Gawain, being a mortal, is not a perfect man. This is because he accepts the magic girdle from Lady Bertilak and hides it from Sir Bertilak despite the agreement to hand over to each other whatever each gets from wherever either is. This is infidelity on the part of Sir Gawain. Perhaps if he had accepted the protective girdle or hidden it from Sir Bertilak, he probably would not have had a scratch at all, perhaps not. His acceptance of the protective girdle presupposes that any mortal man however powerful or courageous is bound to be overwhelmed with fear in an encounter with death. His acceptance of the protective girdle as well as his slight faltering at the approach of the Green Knight's stroke, therefore, suggests panic, a failing faith and lack of absolute trust in the Almighty God.

In the end, Sir Gawain seeks forgiveness. He also denounces all women from Eve, Delilah to Bethsheba and others. Perfect as Sir Gawain seems in the various trials and test of heroism, courtesy, and loyalty up to the time he accepts Lady Bertilak's girdle and hides it from Sir Bertilak, it is when he prepares to leave Sir Bertilak's castle to face the barbaric and incredible head cutting game that Sir Gawain reaches his breaking point. His final panicky choice is more vividly circumstanced by the icy dawn, the cruel snow, (ref. Fitt 4. Lxxx). The poet's choice of moment is perfectly conceived and realistic, such that what Sir Gawain loses in ideal perfection he gains in human credibility. It must be emphasized that the thematic contention here is, among other things, that besides Christ Jesus, no mortal person is perfect. In other words, the issue in the poem is not the proof of heroism, or a celebration of chastity. Rather it is the proof of failure even in the best of knights to keep perfect integrity. Therefore, in keeping the girdle that might save his life, as we have earlier pointed out, Sir Gawain breaks his promise and betrays his own faith. However compassionate and understanding Bertilak's remarks might have been, they still hit on target:

...But here your faith failed you, you flagged somewhat,
Sir, Yet it was not for a well-wrought thing, nor for wooing either,
But for love of your life, which is less blame worthy
(Fitt 4. xcv. 2366-8)

Overwhelmed with shame, Sir Gawain returns to King Arthur's Camelot and confessed publicly a failure for which he blames only himself. Through his admission of his shortcomings, Sir Gawain gains a nobility, a deeper fellowship with his kind and a deeper significance for the reading audience of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knights*.

2.3.2 Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

A. The Man

Chaucer was one of the greatest of medieval English poets. His greatness was partly through the circumstances of his birth, and partly by virtue of his chosen career. He was born into aristocratic family in London city. Apart from his advantageous social class, Chaucer, through sheer determination and hardwork contributed to his own greatness. He was never a "spoiled child". John Dryden, a much later poet, said of him, "Here is God's plenty". His father was a wealthy wine merchant through whom he got introduced to the royal family, by chance.

His appointment as the controller of customs offered him the opportunity to come in contact with people of different makes and callings. He was also exposed to literary works of different nation – Italy, France, Germany, etc. which had great influence on his creative sensibility. It is surprising though that despite his very busy career schedule, he still had time for literary creativity. This was informed by the various literary activities going on around him, as well as his determination to satisfy his society.

Critics have attempted to analyze the evolutionary trend of Chaucer's writing career. They conclude that there are major phases that include his works which he wrote between 1359 and 1372, believed to have been influenced by the French literary style. Similarly, those works he wrote between 1372 and 1386 were said to have Italian influence. Finally, works written between 1386 and 1400, a period he was considered a truly natural writer, are thought to have had the English influence.

together but capable of existing independent of one another. Other examples of poems with similar mode and form include, *A Thousand and One Nights* (The Arabian Night) Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Boccaccio's *Decamion*. Chaucer was, largely, influenced by these models when he wrote *The Canterbury Tales*. The poem is particularly unique in the sense that the tales are made to cut across the entire English society, from the commonplace worker to the highly placed noble with the exception of the King. His choice of the church and religious activities made this possible. Of significance also is his choice of time-setting particularly at the time winter was approaching which allowed such a gathering of a people with very different orientations and background, and a systematic psychoanalysis of the characters in the *Prologue*. Their past, achievements and dispositions, the competitive spirit, the provision for an umpire and the idea of a prize to be won by the best story-teller are all contributive to the uniqueness of Chaucer's technique.

B. His Work: General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

It is almost autonomous. Often the tendency is for interested readers to go through *General Prologue* without bothering to read the tales. Critics have often regarded *The Prologue* as Chaucer's greatest literary achievement. Here he presents the romantic image of spring, in part, his own general impression of, and response to the setting, the ways the birds grow and little birds filling the air with their melody. The high-spiritedness is suggestive of his audience's similar anticipation in the tales proper.

In addition, Chaucer achieves realism and concreteness through tell-tale names such as Tabard Inn located at Southwark, and through the heterogeneity of a people united by a common purpose and impulses: the pilgrimage, though not necessarily on religious basis. It is through a consciously imposed fellowship caused by Henry Bailey, reported, so it seems, by a faceless observer. There is a primary introduction of the pilgrims who later exhibit same traits in the unfolding plot. In other words, the tales (proper) are an extension of the *General Prologue* in the sense that the story of each pilgrim quite reflects the information we already have on each character in the *General Prologue*.

Similarly, Chaucer succeeds in devising connection links that ensure a natural flow of the tales. These are in form of exchange of opinions, comments, quarrel, argument on the standard, or spirit of the tales.

Chaucer's England was a society in cultural, economic and religious transition; a society moving rather steadily towards a new economic order – capitalism. The composition of the pilgrims clearly shows the mixture of characters representing the different social classes: the aristocrats, the church, artisan, the businessman, etc. It shows a truly stratified society.

Pilgrimage is considered a more suitable forum for gathering of this nature. Chaucer's technique of description varies from character to character in detail and in length. This is probably because of his characters' unique individuality. There is, for example, less time given to characters of lower class. Often, he merely summarizes their characters through their physical appearance in vivid and enduring images. The Yeoman, for example "his head was like a nut, his face was brown" suggests the Yeoman's toughness and, perhaps, penchant for hard work. Chaucer's description of the cook seems to be shortest of them all. His professional ability is linked ironically with his open ulcer. The most apt of the physical description is that of the miller. It hints on the inner character of the miller. One also suspects that this manner of description could have influenced Chinua Achebe's description of Okonkwo the central character, in the opening paragraph of his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*.

Again, Chaucer's direct references to personalities are often reinforced with characters' previous pilgrimage, or past experience and professional (mis) conduct. For example, the Knight's description shows his past heroic war experience. The wife of Bath is portrayed through her appearance, the man of law and a physician by profession. In every case, there is an overwhelming use of irony. Often, the human reality is made naked; thereby exposing the pretext, subterfuge or deceit with which it is masked. A good example is the legal expertise of the man of law which Chaucer commends but goes further, through irony, to imply that the man of law pockets his client's money without exerting himself in a way commensurate with the huge fee charged. Chaucer says of the man of law, "All was fee-simple to his strong digestion". By "strong digestion", he refers to the lawyer's greed for exorbitant fees. The physician is also praised for being, "a perfect practicing physician" who cautions his diet but remains imperfect in the knowledge of the bible.

Chaucer sometimes approves of the misdemeanour of his characters by presenting disrespectful comments in the guise of approving observation. Chaucer observes, for example, the wife of Bath's appetite for experience as though with admiration, pretending to admit the irregularities of her younger days. She had had five husbands all at the church door. The poet goes further to mention that she had had other companions in her youth but lightly dismisses further comments on her, saying there is no use going any further.

Ironically, again, Chaucer agrees with the monk's blasphemous argument that the so-called tradition be discarded with. This is because the monk desires a monastery life that is not different from that of a franklin with no religious rules restraining his personal enjoyment. The poet reports the argument as though impressed by it.

settle like the flame under a kettle. Other such characters include the clerk, Bath's wife, and the cook. It is instructive to note too that on the point of view, Chaucer is both the poet and a pilgrim. He exploits the dualized persona to the fullest by being omniscient and not just an observer but a detached and amused insider. By presenting the characters through the eyes of his co-pilgrims who seem not to notice the ironic implications of his own remarks, he achieves and sustains the ironic thrust.

The *General Prologue* abounds in elements of social satire, particularly in his account of the representatives of the church. It shows the poet's concern in the alarming degree of moral decadence and the materialistic outlook of the generality of the people. For instance, the prioress whose passion is directed at dogs and rats rather than human beings, and whose sophistication surpasses that of a nun too. The friar too, a character so plausible, is but a hypocrite, greedy, snobbish and, strangely enough, promiscuous. The summoner also takes to bribery and encourages adultery among men.

On a more general note, Chaucer's attitude is that of mocking amusement at man's ambivalence and contradictions, a pointer that man is good and bad at the same time. For example, the poet's description of the skipper shows on the one hand, efficiency. Similarly, the pardoner's dark side is capped with the fact that he sings well and reads the lesson well. All of the above go to show Chaucer as a highly creative and imaginative poet whose "novel" approach forms the basis for modern satire.

Summary of Study Session 2

In this study session, you have studied the literary tradition of romance as well as its background: the hierarchical structure of the Medieval England society, the king being on top, empowered by God, the Lords and the knights being under him (the king). The dominant characteristics of the tradition were exposed to be knighthood and chivalry. The works of Edmund Spenser and Geoffrey Chaucer are used to exemplify the romance tradition. Both works are analyzed.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 2.1 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)

The general structure and atmosphere of the society of Medieval England falls under which of the following systems:

- a) Democracy
- b) Communalism
- c) feudalism

SAQ 2.2 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)

- (a) Romance and epic bear affinity in their digressions but differ in what?
- (b) What is one major flaw of the romance?

SAQ 2.3 (tests Learning Outcome 2.3)

The works of Edmund Spenser and Geoffrey Chaucer both exemplify the romance tradition. Contrast the works of the two poets.

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2

SAQ 2.1 Option C—feudalism

SAQ 2.2

- (a) The epic is longer than the romance, and the former treats themes of more significance than the latter.
- (b) The noble class characters are presented hardly with any observable fault, quite contrary to what obtains in most literary works where the good and the bad characters are represented.

SAQ 2.3

in irony and elements akin to satire s.

Metaphysical Poetry

Introduction

The metaphysical poets existed between mid seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. They were so called because they wrote differently from their Elizabethan contemporaries, and poets in the preceding period. They included John Donne, George Herbert; Andrew Marvell; Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw. In this study session you will learn about the pattern in their works.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 pinpoint the major difference between metaphysical poetry and poetry of former ages.
- 3.2 demonstrate knowledge of works and guiding philosophies of metaphysical poets.

3.1 Nature of Metaphysical Poetry

The Elizabethan poets wrote under the Petrarchan tradition. They wrote poetry of embellishment: flowery and rhetorical. Their attitude to women was that of impassioned platonic love. It was always the man's love which was never reciprocated however he tried. This attitude is similar to chivalric love of the fourteenth century- an unfulfilled love between the man and the idolized lady. The lady was often placed on a pedestal of a goddess. In addition, the physical appearance of the lady was usually exaggerated with the use of Petrarchan epithets (that is, appellations, adjective expressing qualities). Furthermore, there was also usually a uniform verse structure such as we have in a Petrarchan sonnet, and that of a lyric. This was because the Elizabethan poetry was informed by a tradition.

The tradition however witnessed a radical twist with the coming of the metaphysical poets. They included John Donne, George Herbert; Andrew Marvell; Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw.

John Donne (1572-1631) rejected the Petrarchan tradition. Instead, he dragged women to the beggar floor of his own tradition. Women, according to him, are not to be worshipped for the sake of love. The Elizabethan technique is artificial, rhetorical, ornamental and literary. But Donne wrote in colloquial, casual manner. He wrote the way he really felt about women.

- ITQ What attitude towards women differentiates poets of the former ages from John Donne?
- ITA While the former extremely adored, almost worshipped, women, the latter demystified them, treating them like normal people that they were, casually.

John Donne was versed in law, cosmology, philosophy, logic, classics and religion. Therefore, he often brought to bear on his poetry this knowledge. This approach was rather new and unusual and quite contrary to the familiar poetry before him. He belonged to the metaphysical school of poets because it was difficult to comprehend this poetry. To be difficult was an achievement to him. He had a selected target audience of a few people who were as knowledgeable as him. Therefore, he often used metaphysical conceit. John Dryden was the first to formally identify this obscurantism in the poetry of John Donne and his school. He, therefore, used the term "metaphysical" to describe the poetry. Furthermore, Donne employed dialectics in his poetry. His poetry is argumentative in a manner that is dramatic (a dramatic monologue). The argumentative poetry often takes the form of syllogism: A three-part mathematical approach the question, the working and the answer. Donne's lines do not read smooth when compared with Elizabethan. His verse can best be described as "rugged rhythm". He wrote love and religious poems with equal vigour and temperament.

In criticizing John Donne's poetry, Ben Johnson dismissed Donne as a good poet simply because Donne failed to write in the Elizabethan tradition. It was T.S. Eliot and a few other modern poets who discovered Donne as a great poet because their own poetry was informed largely by Donne's tradition. John Donne was unrivalled in his tradition even though poets like George Herbert had also been described as great after him. Significant among such poets are Crashaw, Vaughan and Marvell. They did not copy Donne but they consciously strove to be individualistic in their approach as Donne was. For example, Crashaw is associated with baroque sensibility, Vaughan with hermetic philosophy, while Marvell's use of metaphysical wit qualifies him as a cavalier poet.

Metaphysical poetry is synonymous with the use of (metaphysical) wit and conceit. Wit, in this case, is the inventive power of the mind. That is, the poetic faculty or imagination itself. It has to do with the ability of the mind to create. Conceit is the unusual (strange) far-fetched comparison – metaphor or simile. In this case conceit is subjected to metaphysical wit.

He affects the metaphysics not only in his satire but in his amorous (poem) where nature only could reign and perplexes the mind of the fair sex with nice speculation of philosophy when he should engage their hearts and entertain them with the softness of love.

Dr. Samuel Johnson remarks in the same vein:

The metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their sole endeavour, the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence (together) nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparison and allusion.

To His Coy Mistress

(Andrew Marvell)

HAD we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast;
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart;
For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapt power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

it is in the light of the significant contributions of metaphysical poets and the prominent place they occupy in English poetic tradition that we intend to discuss some metaphysical poets and their works.

3.2.1 John Donne (1572-1631)

A. Elegie: To His Mistress Going to Bed

The language is highly colloquial, while the opening is both dramatic and conversational. The second line is ironic. Donne's impatience with the monarch is betrayed. There is hyperbolic comparison – thinking of the woman's body as a universe, the hair-do as coronet.

Sometimes, Donne praises and celebrates the woman's beauty as the Elizabethan do but unlike the latter, he imposes himself on her. He is the master, not the helpless supplicant. Note the use of conceit: hallowed temple refers to bed kingdom, America, Paradise –all refer to women.

Note also the use of classical allusion, the myth of Atlanta and Hippocrene. Atlanta was a fast runner but Hippocrene (a trickster character) used fruits to distract her attention. This slowed her down. He succeeded in marrying her in the end. The rhythm is rugged, jerky with occasional couplets. The tone is devoid of ceremony, it is conversational. Besides, the poem is largely argumentative. At the end the poetic persona has the woman on his side but not with the intention to worship her.

B. The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
Confess it, this cannot be said
A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to this, self murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
In what could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself, nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true, then learn how false, fears be;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The argument in this poem is more forceful: the sucking of blood of both man and woman by a flea (an insect). Since their blood has become mixed in the flea it is no use for the woman to resist the love advances of the man.

In term of rhythm, the lines of the poem are, as usual, rugged (masculine). The force of the argument is responsible for the occasional pause in the movement of the lines. The tempo rises gradually and, finally, suspends at a point.

The poem is a good example of metaphysical wit associated with John Donne, in particular. Associating an insect with love and using marriage as a point argument to win a woman's love amounts to pure academic exercise.

C. The Sunne Rising

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys, and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time. 10

Thy beams, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both the Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay. 20

She is all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic; all wealth alchemy.
Thou sun art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere. 30

The man (poetic persona) does not want the Sun to interrupt their lovemaking. He feels more secured with the woman around him than the Sun which travels. By this he seems to suggest that he values the woman because her presence gives him a sense of consistent security which the mobile Sun does not guarantee.

The poem has a dramatic and colloquial opening. The style is conversational. The crux of the argument is that love should be eternal. It should know no bounds, no reason, day or hour.

The poetic persona does not want to brook the appearance of the sun, because the woman is prettier than all kings and states of the world. He contends that no wealth is greater than that of the woman. The bedroom becomes the centre of the universe (of love). The first has an emblematic mode – Sun spreading.

D. A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
‘The breath goes now, ‘and some say, ‘No’:
So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempest move,
‘Twelve profanation of our joys

Men reckon what it did and meant;
 But trepidation of the spheres,
 Though greater far, is innocent.
 Dull sublunary lovers' love
 (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
 Absence, because it doth remove
 Those things which elemented it.
 But we by a love so much refined
 That ourselves know not what it is,
 Inter-assured of the mind,
 Care less eyes, lips and hands to miss.
 Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.
 If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses are two;
 Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if the other do.
 And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet when the other far doth roam,
 It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as it comes home.
 Such wilt thou be to me, who must
 Like the other foot, obliquely run;
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end where I begun.

The idea that is powerfully sustained through the use of conceit in this poem is that of a pair of compass where perfection is attained when the longer hand (the man) is being followed by the shorter hand (the woman), in order to complete the circle. There is reference to virtuous people who have passed away peacefully.

The conceit is further extended by the comparison of their love with the movement of the heavenly bodies. The planets of the universe make perfect, graceful and peaceful movements. The movement of the earth causes harm and fear. Their love could therefore, not have been earthly, it is transcendent.

He contends that human love does not admit absence such that when one goes away, the love goes away also. However, heavenly love is consistent and permanent even when the woman is not around. There is also comparison with gold which can be purified until it expands and becomes refined. There are images of alchemy, compass, and mathematics. The poem, a love poem, is one of Donne's secular poems.

John Donne also wrote a number of poems grouped under *Sacred Poems*. Most of those in this category are sonnets, the topicality of which includes God, Death and the soul of Donne himself. Donne had a sense of guilt. This was due to his deliberate betrayal of his catholic faith. He was born a catholic but because of the discriminatory attitude towards Catholics in being denied public offices, he had to renounce his Catholicism. He became an Anglican but he was not converted deep down in his heart. So there was always this sense of guilt that kept haunting him. He even felt he might be damned, hence his holy sonnets, always asking God for the salvation and safety of his soul.

When he lost his mother and later his wife he became very miserable. He actually began to write his religious poems after his wife's death. He later became sickly and had thought he was going to die. He was always thinking about what would happen to him after life. Donne might be called the first poet who wrote religious poem of an intensely personal and mystical form. Even though, there had been religious poems before him, they were impersonal and only contained biblical stories. They lacked intense personal touch.

E. Holy Sonnets

John Donne followed the *Petrarchan* (or the Italian) form. His sonnets are about man's unworthiness in the presence of God, the consequences of sin, and the love of paradise. Donne was always haunted by a sense of guilt caused by his denial of

minority life he led before becoming a priest. There might also have been other reasons. One thing is however certain, his religious poems were of intense personal and mystical as well as of spiritual agony.

i) Holy Sonnet 6

DEATH, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure-then, from thee much more must flow
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones and soul's delivery.
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die.

ii) Holy Sonnet 4

AT the round earth's imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go:
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold god, and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space.
For if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent: for that's as good
As if thou hadst sealed my pardon with thy blood

iii) Batter my heart

Batter my heart, three-personed God for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new,
I, like an usurped town to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captivated and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy.
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste except you ravish me.

God is knocking to enter but he could not because the poetic persona is already under the control of Satan. There is the image of a military garrison. The persona is the city. We also have the image of *love* – marriage, matrimony. In the octave the persona is a captive, over-run by the enemy's army. In the sestet we have the image of marriage- the persona is, against his will, married to God's enemy, Satan. He is, no doubt, in love with God. There is also the image of divorce. He calls on God to rescue him from Satan. We have a very strong paradox running through from line two to the end. He can only be chaste, or be a virgin if God ravishes (rapes) him; he can only become free (from Satan) if God imprisons (enthralls) him.

in his last days, Donne became so sickly that he was obsessed with the idea of death and of dying. He therefore prepared himself for death. He built a coffin and prepared a bed but he was confident in God that he would go to heaven. It is a poem rich in metaphysical conceits. His body is now a map on which cosmographers work. 'A passage to India', a country flowing with gold and fortune – it was fashionable in Donne's time to seek such fortunes "abroad", understandably, India. Hence the idea of passage to India is used metaphysically in the poem. The conceit here is also associated with geography, cosmography, etc. Donne seeks a southwest passage, a strait passage. It was the passage people sought after in Donne's time. It reminds one of the Strait of Gibraltar. Here, in this poem, it symbolizes Jerusalem or paradise.

This *strait* is symbolic. It is narrow and difficult – like the Christian "straight and narrow path to righteousness or to heaven." So the persona is passing through a narrow passage. He likens his sickness to his passing through fire for a resurrection into paradise.

West becomes an image of death because the Sun sets in the West. East becomes an image of life or resurrection because the Sun rises in the East. There is also the paradox that death is not an end in itself (also see "Death be not proud"), but a transition from one form to another form. Death, therefore, is a prelude to a new birth.

In the time of Donne, it was a common belief that paradise was in the far sea. That it was after the deluge that the sons of Noah spread abroad to bring about the whole world. Again, Donne plays on the idea (which was common in his time) that the place where Christ was crucified was the earthly paradise - the Garden of Eden, hence the belief that life started with the Calvary. The location of the two places is one and the same, the people of his time had contended.

But Donne also plays on the idea that crucifixion is the source of resurrection into eternal life. Donne's rhyme scheme is consistent. Some of the rhymes are more important than the others. For example, *East* and *West*. Finally, there is a hymn to God the father.

3.2.2 George Herbert (1593-1633)

George Herbert was a poet of High Anglican ideal. His poems celebrate Anglican piety and love. In addition, he was preoccupied with affliction and death in some of his other poems.

Herbert's collection of poems titled *The Temple* was posthumously published in 1633. It celebrates religious themes. Herbert did not write love poems like Donne or Marvell did. Of all the metaphysical poets, Herbert was the closest to Donne even though he was twenty years younger. His mother, Magdalene, was a friend of Donne's; it is no wonder, therefore, that Donne had an influence on Herbert's poetry. Herbert's career is strikingly similar to Donne's. He started as a courtier, then secretary, but because of his love for God, he became a priest and settled at Bemerton as a rector. Before his mother's death he had written informing her that his poems would be devoted to God. This expressed decision must have informed his religious concern in a manner similar to Donne's. The only difference is that Donne was a much more diversified and comprehensive poet whose topicality embraced all aspects of human experience.

Unlike Donne, Herbert was less metaphysical and scholastic. Like Donne, however, he was down-to-earth and casual in expressing his own inner anguish of the soul. Herbert wrote about this anguish of the soul in a quiet manner than the violent and turbulent Donne (ref. *Batter My Heart*). Herbert's poems end with a note of acceptance of the ways of God. At times he might begin as a rebel, but there is always a peaceful reconciliation at the end. Because Herbert died three years after he began writing his poems, it was not possible for him to be vast. He could have written more and gained more experience had he lived longer.

Herbert's poetry appears to be more polished, more well structured and his imagery more accessible than Donne's. He wrote of his journey to God. His experiences were less complex; therefore he was able to convey them in a simple and more direct way than Donne's. Herbert seemed to avoid being as scholastic or metaphysical as Donne. He had two poems "Jordan I" and "Jordan II" in which he thought of how to write his poems, there is no use of elaborate images. In "Jordan II" Herbert criticized the Elizabethan convention as well as pastoral images.

Herbert employs the use of *emblematic conceits*. Emblematic poems are usually in the form of a picture with details about a picture which concerns a basic idea. In "Easter Wings" or "The Alter" he suggests concrete visual picture, while *Denial* has a rather subtle use of emblem. In his letter on *The Temple*, to Nicholas Ferrar his great friend, Herbert has this to say;

The Temple was a picture of many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my master in whose service I have now found perfect freedom.

We shall now discuss some of Herbert's poems. They include, "The Agonies", "Redemption" and "The Flower".

Israel. There is a visual image of the man's agony. Also in stanza two sin is personified. Sin causes the pain that torments an individual. Herbert attempts a visual image and an allegorical representation of sin and suffering. His conceit is allegorical; Throes..., (stanza three) – suffering, death, love are all personified. Furthermore, 'sacrifice' is an emblem of love and for love to be understood and fulfilled, the sour juice on the cross must be taken. The blood of Jesus is the wine that is served at Holy Communion. There is an attempt to define love, peace and agony in the poem.

The poet begins by rebuking mankind for expending all resource on scientific investigation without making any effort to understand the nature of sin and love.

The stanzas are evenly structured, and that is a common feature in Herbert's poems. The rhyme scheme is also regular. "The Agonie" is similar to "Vanitie".

B. Redemption

(George Herbert)

HAVING been tenant long to a rich Lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel the old.
In heaven at his manor I him sought.
They told me there that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearly bought
Long since on earth, to take possession.
I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts:
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts.
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of thieves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died.

Like "The Agonie", this is also an allegorical poem. Redemption literally means "buy over". The basic image is that of a legal transaction especially between the Lord of the Manor (Jesus Christ) and his tenant (mankind). The rich lord owns lands and can lend to his tenants who pay in cash or through service. Apparently, our physical earth is the land owned by Jesus Christ. Sin took over the world (the land) and Christ, being the landlord, has to "buy over" the land by paying with his blood. This way, the Christian idea of redemption is worked out.

The form of the poem has for sometime been a subject of controversy. Some critics believe that it is not a sonnet even though it has fourteen lines. Others argue that it has all the characteristics of a sonnet. And yet some are of the opinion that since a sonnet has ten syllables and "Redemption" has ten also, it qualifies as a "sonnet manqué."

C. The Flower

This is George Herbert at his best. It is a very emotional poem. The tone is that of meekness and humility. The flower makes effort to grow towards god, but when frost comes it ruins the flower and stunts the growth. A decline sets in. So also the soul of man, like the flower, strives to go straight towards the direction of God. But then like frost, or the wind or winter to the flower, human weaknesses, frailties (sin) do not allow the virtuous soul to link with God. The return of spring that makes the flower forget the inclement winter is likened to the return of God's grace which makes man forget the waiting tribulations.

In stanza one, there is subdued exaltation. For the exaltation not to have been disciplined amounts to arrogance. In stanza two, flowers of spring symbolize a virtuous soul, while "underground" can be physical or a symbol of death, purgatory, or hell. Flowers going underground in a natural cycle of the seasons suggest that just as sin might be a natural sequence of events leading to redemption, we go underground and the blood of Jesus redeems us. Redemption belongs only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. The word "quicken" in stanza three is important to Herbert. It is loaned from Christian mythology, therefore, it is a biblical register. The idea of falling and rising, killing and quickening suggests "bring[ing] from death to life." "Passing bell" is the traditional funeral bell rung with a single tone at intervals.

In stanza four, there is expansion of the flower: groaning (groan-ing) is an *onomatopoeia*. We have groaning in pains; but groaning to God is a completely different thing. We have a rather functional rhyme in stanza five. A straight line and a declining line – quite suggestive of contrastive intentions. God's anger is the worst frost, worse than the severest cold; so is

D. The Pulley

WHEN God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
'Let us', said he, 'pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.'

So strength first made a very;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure;
When almost all was not, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

'For if I should', said he,
'Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

E. Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,^o
Through foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poor: 5
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me. 10

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin. 15
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory:
For, if I imp^o my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me. 20

- ITQ Like Donne, Herbert was down-to-earth and casual in expressing his own inner anguish of the soul. Unlike Donne, however, he differs in what?
- ITA Herbert used less diversification, unlike Donne whose topicality embraced all aspects of human experience. His poetry was less complex and more accessible; it was considered tame, more polished and well structured.

3.2.3 Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)

Vaughan cannot be separated from Herbert. Vaughan had set out to do the same thing Herbert did though with less success. Vaughan also wrote poetry of religious meditation like Herbert. His poetry is largely informed by Hermetic philosophy.

Herbert, Vaughan was a Christian and a mystic. He uses biblical images for consolation like Herbert too. He studied law in London, and during the civil war (1642-1649), fought on the side of the king. He believed strongly in the divine authority of the king. However, he became disillusioned at the divine authority of the king. However, he became disillusioned at the defeat of the king, and therefore retreated to his village, Breckonshire. This could also have been responsible for his intensely personal religious faith. Besides, Vaughan made an open admission of Herbert's influence on his life and art. He confesses, "George Herbert whose holy life and art gained many pious converts of whom I am the least."

Despite the influence on Vaughan, he cannot be denied of originality. He was his own personal voice. Unlike Herbert and Donne, Vaughan is not troubled by any sense of guilt in his poems. However, he thinks of man's soul as being imprisoned in our human body. The soul is uncomfortable in the human body because of the desecrating or polluting effects of sin. The soul always wants to return to its origin. There is, therefore, this overwhelming spiritual nostalgia. If the soul is not comfortable here, there is a promise of reconciliation in death. It is a reconciliation with the great beyond. Thus, we have some elements of mysticism in his poems.

Vaughan talks of a place where we lived before coming into the world. He acknowledges *Nature* in his poetry because he believes that God dwells in the nature and nature has been more faithful to God than man and that nature expresses the beauty of God, and that nature is more united with God than man ever is. An example of this can be found in "The Morning Watch."

The idea of "retreat" is important to Vaughan. He expresses the desire to go back to the origin of the world - the pre-Adamic fall experience. This he calls "angelic infancy." Examples abound in "The shower" and "The Water-fall." He employs the description of nature objects to interpret and explain spiritual matters.

Vaughan's thematic preoccupations include alienation and reconciliation of soul. The soul of man is earth-bound but has not completely lost heavenly link; so it strives to enter the eternal orbit; it quests for eternity. This is what he refers to as "world of light." Light represents paradise, divine beauty.

Some of Vaughan's poems are influenced by Christian ethics. For example, the poem on *Easter* celebrates the virtue of Christ and His supernatural powers, love and devotion. Alchemy, neo-Platonism, and Hermeticism are among the philosophical premises upon which Vaughan's poetry is based. Often, there is a fusion of both Christian beliefs and Hermetical philosophy. Neo-Platonism and Hermeticism are, in a way, related. They share a common belief in an alien, distant world of perfect beauty from where we all came and to which the soul of man longs to return.

We shall briefly discuss a few of his poems.

A. Water-fall

The physical fall of water here suggests the fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. (the Adamic fall). It is a mistake all right; but a fortunate incident because it is through the fall that we have redemption through Jesus Christ. Note the followings: fall – suspense, chide – murmur of water; end – finality (but not the end of the water even though it *has* fallen into a grave; longer course – the water flows into a larger water "more bright and brave.") The poet's concern here is that we should not be afraid of death. There is the image of continuity and regeneration. Water is continually flowing, moving. This parallels the cycle of life.

B. The Retreat

This poem expresses return to a world from which one came. In other words, it is a withdrawal from the world in order to become holy and to avoid all vices of the world.

"Shoots", the persona, sees himself as a flower or a plant the growth of which Satan seeks to destroy (ref. Herbert's). The soul always quests after immortality, that is, the continuity of life perhaps by returning to the source from where Man originated.

C. Morning-Watch

It suggests prayer and religious meditation. There is an affirmation of life, the acceptance of the joy of living, while the soul serves as tool to a perceived receptivity. It is a soul that submits itself to divine blessings. The soul, as a result, blossoms. As presented in the poem, nature is an affirmation of the glory of God, for example, the spring and bird, etc. There is a mood of exaltation; of nature singing and praising God. There is also a prayer: "Prayer is the world in time". The persona wants his soul to rise to God through prayer – a veritable "ladder" to God.

form of death. That though the soul is clouded in sleep, yet it is alive and still sees the heavenly radiance. Sleep, therefore, is a temporary setback for the soul. There is an apparent dichotomy between the body and the soul.

D. The world

The poem again suggests two worlds-human and eternal; and the dichotomy between body and soul. The human world is identified with body and the eternal world with soul. The image of a doting lover in stanza 1, the pursuit of a statesman, in stanza 2 and the miser in stanza 3. These are fools. We have the images of light and darkness; a fusion of Christian and hermetic images and beliefs. For example, sun, light and day all symbolize the eternal world. Night, at times, does not suggest darkness. It is also associated with meditation.

The image of marriage: Christ as the bridegroom and the elect (the church) as the bride is graphically represented. The ring, an image of perfection, seals a marriage pact. The poem begins with the striking image of "ring". The ring has a divine radiance destroying every impurity. Eternity is timeless while the human world is time-bound. In stanza 2, darkness suggests lives in the dark, earth-bound; while eclipse is associated with absence of sunlight. Being an Epicurean himself, Vaughan in stanza 3 uses fearful miser to suggest the fear of Christians, the epicureans who have the love of Christ.

3.2.4 Richard Crashaw (1613-1649)

Crashaw's poetry represents a new trend in metaphysical poetry. This trend conveys the baroque sensibility observable in Crashaw's poetic technique. Were he not English, he would not have been referred to as a metaphysical poet. This is because his tradition is continental; but this also confirms the elasticity and the comprehensiveness of the term "metaphysical".

Crashaw knew Donne and other contemporary poets of the period but then, he was different. For example, like Herbert, he attended Cambridge. He also became a priest of the High Anglican Church in 1639. Even though he was a royalist, he harboured strong Romanist inclinations. He was devoted to ecclesiastical exercises of the Jesuit order. The liturgy of the Catholic Church appealed to him very much; same for incense smell, worship, etc., what he calls "that beauty of holiness". This overwhelming impact of Rome resulted in his conversion to Catholicism between 1645 and 1646. He physically left England and went to Rome. Rome had always been his spiritual home, not England. In addition, he submitted himself aesthetically to the influence of Italian writers.

Italian poets like Giambattista Marino (1569-1625), a user of popular conceit, strongly influenced Crashaw's art. There were other influences, like the writers of emblem books, as well as the Jesuit writers of Latin epigram. Unlike his Italian counterparts and other metaphysical poets Crashaw brought his Christianity to bear on his poetry. His love poems and conceits are strictly expressing love for God. He, like Marino, wrote spiritual love poetry.

While Herbert's employs *visual* emblems, Crashaw uses *verbal* emblems. There were sacred objects that stood for his conceits. The emblem, the epigram, the conceits, all contribute to the rhetoric in his poems. Rhetoric was and still is, the language of ritual worship.

The use of wit and conceit is the exhibition of descriptive ability. It operates by piling metaphor upon metaphor, and image upon image. This explains why we have extravagant metaphoric images, hyperboles, ingenious elaborations, and excessive ornamentation otherwise known as baroque. Therefore, we say Crashaw's wit is baroque's wit, and his conceit, baroque's conceit. His Baroque sensibility, in other words, distinguishes him as a metaphysical poet. This is apparent in his sensuous treatment of sacred objects.

Baroque is a word associated with architectural designs and art between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It marked a great departure from what obtained in the Renaissance architecture of art generally. The Renaissance of fourteenth century was ordered, formal, logical, classical and disciplined. Baroque architecture was picaresque with strange excessive ornaments. It was wild, fantastical and bizarre.

This is why Crashaw's poetry appears exuberant and hyperbolic. For example, in "To Our Lord..." we have such metaphors like water and wine. In "The Weeper", he was the metaphor of tears: he equates tears with floods.

His lines are not as rugged as Donne's. "The tears" refers to Mary Magdalene's tears (weeping at the feet of Jesus) not his (Crashaw). His poems could have been more convincing if they had been personal. He acknowledges Herbert's efforts to return poetry to God. *Urania* is his heavenly muse and Helicon/Cleon his earthly muse. The titles of his poems are very close to those of Herbert. While Herbert wrote "The Temple", Crashaw wrote "Steps to the Temple". He regards his poetry as steps (or ladder) which one can climb to reach heaven or God. Apart from "Caritas Nimia" none of Crashaw's poems was influenced by Herbert's technique.

diversification of knowledge on the part of its central figures as well as their desire to bring this profound learning to bear in their works. The four central figures: John Donne, George Herbert; Andrew Marvell; Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw were discussed in details and their works were analysed.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcome 3.1)

Metaphysical poetry is different from the poetry of previous ages mainly because while poets of the former ages were following one tradition or the other, the metaphysical poets were inspired by something else; what is it?

SAQ 3.2 (tests Learning Outcome 3.2)

- (a) The metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their sole endeavour, the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence (together) nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparison and allusion.

How is this remark by Dr. Samuel Johnson demonstrated in Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'?

- (b) Differentiate between John Donne's love poems and religious poems.
- (c) While Crashaw is associated with baroque sensibility, Vaughan and Marvell are associated with what?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3

SAQ 3.1 Materials for their poems are from eclectic sources, and that is the defining factor of their poetry.

SAQ 3.2

- a) The theme of romance is yoked together by violence with ideas from religion and history as well as knowledge of foreign lands
- b) His love poems are casual and philosophical while his religious poems are of deep feelings and agony
- c) Vaughan with hermetic philosophy and Marvell as a cavalier poet

Neo-Classical Poetry

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about the precursor of neo-classical poetry. Much will be revealed about the history of England consequent upon which neo-classical poetry evolved. The works of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson will be analysed in exemplification of the tradition. Lastly, the two will be compared.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 4

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 discuss the historical background to neo-classicism.
- 4.2 expose the main theme in the works of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson
- 4.3 compare the works of Alexander Pope with Samuel Johnson.

4.1 General Background to Neo-Classical Poetry

The metaphysical tradition phased out under the overwhelming influence of John Milton. He was critical of metaphysical poetry both in topicality and style. Milton's position is that poetry is neither an expression of the poet's own fear or hope, nor any of his idiosyncracies, but a driving force for high moral principle, ethical objectives, and moral intents foregrounded by ethical considerations. So Donne and other metaphysical poets were regarded as vulgar rhyming experts. A poet, according to Milton, is a seer engaged not with love affairs but with public themes of undisguised moral purpose. Milton stands distinctly alone in the history of English language and yet distinguished himself in lyrical mode, poetic drama, etc.

Milton had anticipated the neo-classical age in his classicism, hence he made use of classical mythology, etc. He had also anticipated this period in the language of his poetry through his use of highly elevated diction. He agrees with Dryden that elevated poetry demands elevated language. Milton to this end creates for himself poetic idioms which are quite different from everyday language. However, his classicism is very unlike Dryden's, Pope's or Dr. Johnson's. He does not imitate classical poets as they did. He simply makes use of their literary heritage such as the use of Roman and Greek gods and myths.

After Milton, English poetry suffered a decline because none other was as comprehensive nor as dedicated to poetry as Milton was. Therefore, in the Restoration period, there was no great poetry. Restoration was an age of drama, particularly, comedies, not tragedies. It was an age that could not even equal the dramatic fulfillment of the Elizabethan age.

The English civil war (1643-1649), the execution of Charles I (1649) and the restoration of Charles II (1660), all had their psychosocial implications. Shortly after the dust settled, the society began to acknowledge and appreciate virtues of restraint, good sense and reason. The causes of the English civil war had been attributed to lack of these virtues. Now that order returned, people were prepared to keep the place; to remain united and to do only things humanly possible. The great philosopher of the age John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* has pointed to the frailties and limitation of human knowledge. In the same spirit, scientific quests were disapproved of, while the Elizabethan concepts: "know yourself", became the guiding philosophy.

The English society was aware of the role of Emperor Augustus who brought peace, order, and restraint to Rome after the death of Julius Caesar. Under Augustus, art had grown remarkably. And since Charles II was now back, people regarded him as the "Augustus of England", because he brought peace, order, and moderation. Art also grew towards a new dimension under him too. Therefore the period was referred to as Augustus Age. The writers were called by his name because the age and the art were considered parallel to those of his time. In other words, the Roman poets of Augustus age were their classical models, hence the return to classical Rome (neo-classical age).

In addition to the English situation of the period, poetry and art generally witnessed, at the continental level (in France, etc.), a radical change, a rebirth, a phenomenon. There was opposition to extravagance, unwieldy boldness and exuberance in literature. Writers began to favour simplicity, clarity, restraint, good sense and positive behaviour in art and life. Ambitious experiments in literature were also disapproved of. Man as a social animal must have his conduct guided by ethical norms, the age insisted. Consequently, the poet found himself an additional responsibility: the voice of social conscience. The poet's social responsibility gave rise to the use of satire, burlesque, etc. such that those who failed to conform to the social norms fell under his critical sledge. The role of literature became more distinct: to entertain and teach.

The lyrical poem gave way to longer poems for the purpose of accommodating social criticism. Even though, wit is one significant faculty which makes a poet, the metaphysical wit came under attack. Alexander Pope vehemently opposed it as we have in his, *Essay on Criticism*, which he modeled after Horace.

4.2 Contributions of two Major Neo-Classical Poets

4.2.1 Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

To Pope and his school, wit does not consist in *thought* but in *form*. They advised that a poet should concern himself only with beauty of expression, that is, *technique* and *form*. Pope defines wit as “thought but never expressed” while the neo-classical poets were opposed the use of *wit*, they favoured *invention* of new poetic techniques. Under form is technique informed by the use of conceit-heroic couplets and measure poetry (verse) by classical poets. Pope improved upon this. His poetry makes for natural and easy reading. There is craftsmanship in his poetry: balanced anti-thesis, ellipsis, etc., which makes the poetic voice seem to simply be talking to its audience.

Similarly significant is *nature* as a concept. The neo-classical poets regard *nature* as the *superior reality*; and what is *universal* in human experience is that which is permanent or constant in human behaviour. Pope, for example, equated nature with Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare and other great writers of the past. To him, Nature and the Ancient are one and the same. In this case, nature does not constitute in plants or vegetation or birds, etc. (ref. *Essay on Criticism*).

Hint: Pope sought nature in the antiquity, not in the natural environment.

Therefore, neo-classical literature, poetry in particular, concerns itself with human nature, norms that determine social behaviour and acceptable to the society. It is those who fail to conform to the social norms that fall under the critical sledgehammer of the neo-classical poets. So Pope is both a moral poet and social critic. In the same vein as Plato, Pope and his school regard poetry as an imitative art, therefore imitating what is best in the great authors of the past. This was the reason for Pope’s translation of Homer’s and Virgil’s epics. He was of the opinion that since these great author had done virtually all there was to do, what was left was to imitate them, hence the mock heroic poems. In the poem *Rape of the Lock*, we have a very trivial event elevated to epic proportions, while Samuel Johnson imitated Juvenile satire in “Vanity of Human Wishes”.

There are two types of satire:

- (1) The Horatian mode: through gentle, mild and happy mockery;
- (2) Juvenilia mode: through a serious and savage reprimand.

However, Pope appears to have combined both modes in most of his poems except in *Rape of the Lock* where he adopts a more gentle Horatian mode.

Hint: Neo-classical poets believed the ancients, the classical figures, embodied purity and the best of literary productions, so he believed in imitating them.

From “the Rape of the Lock”

(Alexander Pope)

The Toilet

AND now, unveiled, the Toilet stands displayed,
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
First, robed in white, the Nymph intent adores,
With head uncovered, the Cosmetic powers.
A heavenly Image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes the rears;
The inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling, begins the sacred rites of Pride.
Unnumbered treasure so peat once, and here
The various offerings of the world appear;
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And decks the Goddess with the glittering spoil.
This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux.
Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;

And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy sylphs surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;
And Betty's praised for labours not her own.

Rape of the Lock

The feud between the families of Lords Petre and Fermor informed the poem. The two families were catholic like Pope. He wanted to poke fun in order to provoke laughter that would bring the warring families into reconciliation, hence his choice of mock-heroic mode.

Belinda's pettiness is compared with the heroic world of Helen of Troy, etc. Belinda is raised to this pedestal of a "goddess" to heighten the mockery. Therefore, she is endowed with divine eyes reserved only for gods and goddesses. This is ironic. Similarly, the title of the poem is ironic. Ordinarily the word "rape" is not associated with the lock of hair but with a woman's forceful and unpleasant dishonour. The poet intends to cause a deliberate distraction through the use of contrastive irony.

This he achieved by the transfer of the trivial, that is, the loss of hair lock to the significant. Even though we may not be impressed by it, we are nonetheless, amused. The lock of hair leads to other chain of actions and reactions. It generates clash of forces as if there is an epic battle. Simple activity like drinking coffee assumes an ironic dimension, almost a ritual as the coffee cup becomes the vessel. Significant among the thematic concerns of Pope is loss of reputation questioned by him. Loss of reputation is represented in the lady's turning down of request (?) openly. There is an allusion to corruption by the king of England, among other satiric elements.

There is, among others, a celebration of the joy of the living after the civil war, of unity, of peace of the eighteenth century England. We admire Belinda's say, sparkling world, and the freshness of her dressing room. Her body is ivory-gold, beautiful and charming.

In the fifth Canto, there is a twist. The theme of transience or impermanence or ephemerality becomes apparent. The image of death looms all over as the ultimate terminator of life. Perhaps this awareness, the poet seems to argue, should make Belinda happy that a man proposed love to her. This is one of the arguments of the persona in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" – a metaphysical poem – the awareness of the limitations of a woman's beauty. Similarly, Belinda's life is relatively short, it is only wise to respond positively while she is youthful and beautiful.

In canto five (lines 145-150) even though the physical body may die, yet Belinda could be immortalized. The eighteenth century had witnessed serious attacks on woman's vanity and weakness. The poet must have reacted to this attitude in his gentle criticism of Belinda's charming and polished world.

The poem, even though simple, has the complex epic parallels: (epic) journey to the underworld; invocation to the muse at the beginning which reminds one of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In "Rape of the Lock", the epic battle is fought by women using their eyes (blinking or winking). This is mock-heroic and not actually an epic battle. Even though Pope is indebted to John Dryden who initiated the heroic couplet as a technique in poetry, he succeeds in perfecting the same with ease. We also have the use of Caesura, that is, the use of pause in between a line of a poem. At times, a line balances an idea on another line – antithesis. Use of balance was a common feature in the eighteenth century poetry. It is believed in literary quarters that neo-classical poets unwittingly crippled imagination. The crippling of imagination (poetic) necessitated a poetic revolution after Pope.

Rape of the Lock stimulates a charmed atmosphere. There is too much superficiality and dream/vision technique in the poem. The characters are larger than life and therefore unreal: small (tiny) spirits instead of having the usual intervention or interaction of real gods as often common in real epics. The characters are extremely feminine. The men are effeminate and therefore, masculine vitality is absent. It is a deliberate inversion from the masculine world of a true epic. But the inversion also gives Pope's poem its unique form (mock-heroic). In this poem, Pope talks about sylphs, airy, moonbeam shine, indecent charm. These words seem to reinforce the argument that *Rape of the Lock* is a dream, not a poem.

However, the factor that necessitates the poem: the feud on a trivial matter between two families, and the poet's intention to make a mockery of the whole event for the purpose of reconciling the two families, makes it a poem of leisure, unlike Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This explains why "Rape of the Lock" has, more or less, household admonition at the end.

4.2.2 Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

We shall consider Johnson under two distinct headings; as a literary critic and as a poet (ref. *Lives of Poets*). Dr. Johnson applied the neo-classical critical standard in his judgement of a literary work. He believed that a poet must of necessity instruct and delight. The poet, he had instead, must present what is universal in human nature which must adhere strictly to the Aristotelian prescriptions. Johnson had described Shakespeare as a Nature-poet, who supremely expressed, and evoked human passions – love, jealousy, etc. To Johnson, Shakespeare was a creator of memorable characters:

Nothing can please many and please long but representation of general nature. Shakespeare is above all writers, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life; his characters are the genuine progeny of common humanity such as the world will always supply and observation will always find... in the writings of other poets, a character is too often an individual, in those of Shakespeare, a character is commonly a specy.

Johnson's comment on poetry is very important too:

Aristotle has called poetry an imitation act and he is a father of criticism. Poetry is the act of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason.

On moral and poetry, Johnson pontificates further:

The poet's first work is to find a moral...afterwards to illustrate and to establish [it].

On this note, he praises John Milton's poetic intention:

Milton's purpose was the most useful and the most arduous to vindicate the ways of God to man, to show the reasonableness of religion and the necessity of obedience to the Divine law.

According to Johnson's comments on grandeur expression;

Great thoughts are always general and consist in positions not limited by exceptions and in descriptions not descending to minuteness.

Johnson is noted for word balancing which gives his language its Johnsonian uniqueness. As a poet, Johnson is indebted to Juvenal, a Roman poet. Juvenal was the inspiration behind two of his major poems: "London" (1738) modelled after Juvenal's third satire and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749), modelled after satire number ten. In both poems, Johnson adheres strictly to the Latin original. In the 3rd satire Juvenal had extolled country virtues against the inconveniences and complexities of the city. This Johnson did in "London". London is shown as an uninhabitable city, as the centre of crimes, and as the breeding ground of all the forces that destroy the soul of man. Johnson suggests that we live our lives in far away, isolated yet unpolluted country – side. Similarly, "The Vanity of Human Wishes" is Johnson's contribution to the C18th moral and philosophical poetry. It is in the spirit of the great Roman critic of society. The poem begins with an attack on PRIDE which in C18th had a biblical connotation. It was synonymous with Satan's crime against the Almighty God. It was a tragic flaw in Satan. Pride is synonymous with ambition and with human insatiable nature in the poem. *Reason*, according to Johnson in this poem, is a great enemy of pride. Johnson, therefore, attacks six major factors in human life: Human desire for *wealth* (22-48), *political power* (78-134); *(academic) knowledge*, (135-175), *(military) honour*, (175-254) *longevity* (255-318) and *(physical) beauty*.

4.3 A Comparison of Johnson and Pope Works

If metaphysical poetry relies on thought for its form, neo-classical poetry seeks for a perfection of form through syntax. This makes the former a lot easier to understand than the latter. Pope's poetry, particularly, "Rape of the Lock" is highly artificial and has a lot of juxtaposition and intermingling of objects. Johnson's poetry, on the other hand, is less compact and less sophisticated. Pope is more of a poet while Johnson is more of a literary critic, a prose writer and less of a poet. Poetry to Johnson is rather incidental. Nevertheless, "The Vanity of Human Wishes" is more vigorous, action-packed, and masculine than Pope's "Rape of the Lock". On matters relating to artifice and style, "Rape" is a better poem.

The poetic cosmos of Pope is peopled with polite and elegant men and women. On the other hand, the poetic universe of Johnson is peopled with heroic passions of ambitious and power hungry soldiers in "Vanity". Johnson employs poetic statements with historical illustrations of abstractions. The personification is often dramatic, tangible, and active. This approach injects life into the lines. Furthermore, he is fond of the use of line – fillers even where he would have done without them. He is equally fond of extreme use of epithets – conventional qualifiers, for example, lines 166, 172, 176, 236.

knows what man wants. Neo-classical universality is also acknowledged in his poetry: uniformity of human thought, of emotions, aspirations, wishes, etc., and the consequence of inordinate ambition.

Like Pope's "Rape of the Lock", Johnson's "Vanity" comes to an end with a Christian moral.

In essence, common place ideas which are not new are all there in the poem. This is because, in line with the belief of neo-classical poets, ancient poets have said all there is to be said. What Pope has done is simply to imitate them.

Hint: Above all, neo-classical poets believed in order, reason and the use of poetry towards didactic purposes (that is, to teach morals).

Summary of Study Session 6

The study session commenced with the effect of the English civil war on literature, how it evolved the neo-classical poetic tradition. The two dominant figures under the tradition, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, were discussed alongside their main works, the themes of their works and the techniques they favoured. Their works were revealed to be didactic, with some making use of satire. It was revealed that they favoured order and the imitation of classical figures.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcome 4.1)

Discuss the historical background to neo-classicism.

SAQ 4.2 (tests Learning Outcome 4.2)

Didacticism is a common feature in neo-classical poets' works: what main theme shows this in the major works of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson?

SAQ 4.3 (tests Learning Outcome 4.3)

Pope's poetry, particularly, "Rape of the Lock" is highly artificial and has a lot of juxtaposition and intermingling of objects. Johnson's poetry, on the other hand, is less compact and less sophisticated. What is one other point of divergence between the works of the two poets?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

SAQ 4.1

At the close of the English civil war, the society attributed its cause to the lack of restraint, good sense and reason and began to acknowledge and appreciate those virtues. Now that order returned, people were prepared to keep the place; to remain united and to do only things humanly possible. The English society was aware of the role of Emperor Augustus who brought peace, order, and restraint to Rome after the death of Julius Caesar. Under Augustus, art had grown remarkably. And since Charles II was now back, people regarded him as the "Augustus of England", because he brought peace, order, and moderation. Art also grew towards a new dimension under him too. Therefore the period was referred to as Augustus Age. The writers were called by his name because the age and the art were considered parallel to those of his time. In other words, the Roman poets of Augustus age were their classical models, hence the return to classical Rome (neo-classical age).

SAQ 4.2

The main thematic intention in Johnson's and Pope's works is satirization of vanity; this is embodied in Pope's 'Rape of the Lock' and Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes".

SAQ 4.3

The poetic cosmos of Pope is peopled with polite and elegant men and women. On the other hand, the poetic universe of Johnson is peopled with heroic passions of ambitious and power hungry soldiers in "Vanity".

Romantic Poetry

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about the informing ideology of romantic poets and how this sets them apart from their neo-classical counterparts. The effects of the French revolution, the German movement and transcendentalism on romanticism will be examined alongside the precursors of romanticism in England. You will learn about the place of nature and reasons for lamentation in romantic poems. Lastly will come the life and works of major romantic poets.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 recognise the dominant spirits and ideas of romanticism; differentiate between romanticism and neo-classicism.
- 5.2 point out the precursors of romanticism.
- 5.3 relate romantic ideas to the works of romantic poets

5.1 Romanticism versus Neoclassicism

Romanticism is a reaction against neoclassicism. Romantic Movement is synonymous with enquiry; quest; spirit of investigation; the urge to challenge established *status quo* and, or assumptions. Though much more pronounced in literary circles, it swept through all fields. Romanticism is identified with the spirit to aspire towards greater knowledge, and challenge the established status quo.

It was an intellectual movement that challenged the social, political and literary assumptions of neo-classicism (i.e. the age of Alexander Pope – or the Augustan age). If we associate neo-classicism with Apollonian instinct for *order in life and art* (spirit of rigid conservatism) we could connect the Romantic with the Dionysiac impulse for *the free expression of the human spirit in life and art* (spirit of freedom).

Romanticism encourages the cultivation of what is eccentric or idiosyncratic, the free expression of the revolutionary will, it endorses the spirit of non-conformity and of rebellion against established authority. It demands the ethical principles of prudence; it approves of the spirit of aspiration and of the urge to advance to new achievements. The moral principles of Romanticism are in conflict with the rationalistic determinism of the eighteenth century thinkers like John Locke for Romanticism is on the side of motion rather than being static; it is opposed to self-complacency and passive acceptance of one's fate or destiny.

The Germans were the first to determine the romantic trend in literature. The drift from neoclassical order and imperatives to freedom which resulted in the romantic movement began in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century. The German idealists, Schiller and the Schlegel brother and others postulated idealistic philosophy. They defined the character of the new development as Romantic, e.g., Schlegel defined the contrast between intellectual temper of the eighteenth century and that of his own age as that of classicism and romanticism respectively. In 1809, he made a distinction between poetry of infinite desire by embellished poetry and poetry of anguish and agony.

With the advent of Romanticism, there came a new definition of poetry, namely, (1) spiritual satisfaction for the soul of man (2) the expression of a reality that was profound, sometimes mystical (as in the case of Coleridge), and inexplicable and personal as we have in Shelly's poems. It is far from being a mechanical imitation of classical models. *Nature* was redefined, the physical universe, external phase of the material world. *Nature* is between the air and the forest; but then they brought in a mystical concept of nature. *Nature* was seen as the image of the divine God; a manifestation of superior reality called the *ideal-pantheism* –the divine immanence in *nature*. They believe it was only through *nature* that a man can communicate with the infinite, with God. And the only human faculty capable of perceiving the infinite (God) is imagination. *Imagination* was therefore redefined – it must be allowed to blossom; it is the greatest weapon (power) that a poet needs to get an insight into reality, to read *nature* and her symbols and her gods.

Hint: Neoclassical poets rigidly followed order; romantic poets freely deviated from it.

Johnson and Pope reacted sharply to the overdependence of romantics on *imagination*. They considered imagination unrealistic, deceitful and, therefore, a false weapon that should not be trusted. Imagination, according to them, must be checked and disciplined by judgment. The duo (i.e. Johnson and Pope) saw themselves as neo-Platonists in search of the ideal, superior reality which appears to be unattainable; a quest for the eternal. Poetry, according to neo-Platonists, is an endless quest for beauty, the elusive, the unattainable. Each role is subjective, symbolic and mythic language to which only the poet has the key.

5.2 Highlight of the Romantic Tradition

- (a) New definition of poetry as an expression of profound, personal and sometimes, mystical emotion.
- (b) A new interpretation of nature as a pantheistic phenomenon.
- (c) A new interpretation of imagination as a free creative spirit in man.
- (d) The use of myth as symbol and as significant tools of poetry.

5.2.1 Romanticism in England (1798-1832)

In 1798 *The Lyrical Ballads* co-authored by Wordsworth and Coleridge was published. The German movement and the French revolution influenced the English movement. The German movement influenced Coleridge while Wordsworth was affected by the French revolution which was in favour of freedom.

Romanticism in England was, however, not only as a result of foreign influence. At the period, people were more than bored, they were dissatisfied by the mechanical and artificial rigidity of the literary practice of the seventeenth century in England. Wordsworth and Coleridge championed the cause for a necessary and imperative change. Even while Pope was alive, people doubted (his style and rigid adherence to classicism) if he was a poet. His poetry was said to be mechanical and artificial. But, indeed, Pope cannot be said to be a non-poet though his technique might be questioned; this is responsible for the revival of the *Ballad*, (*Shakespeare* – the poet). There was the urge to revive Shakespeare's natural speech and his artistic charm which was its simple imagination. The new spirit led to people writing without artifice, no mechanism unlike the rigid mechanical techniques of Dryden and Pope.

Hint: Romanticism was prominently influenced by the French revolution, which stressed freedom, and the German movement. There were also some poets even during the neoclassical age whose poems were closer to the romantic tradition.

Before *The Lyrical Ballads* was an earlier publication, Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The publication was welcomed because it was the type people were expecting. It included a lot of Ballads and words of Shakespeare and Chaucer. This book influenced Wordsworth a great deal. Said Wordsworth;

“The poetry of the age has been revealed by it.”

So we have Thomas Percy as one of the pioneers of Romanticism in England. There are also pre-Romantic poets who were precursors of the Romantic movement in England. In their own way, they preached against the neo-classical poetry. There was James Thomson 1700-1748. He published *The Seasons* (1730) which includes: Winter, Spring, Autumn, etc., poems of graphic description of nature and its elements. Others include; Thomas Gray (1716-1771) “The Elegy Written in Country Churchyard; William Collins- (1721-1759) “Ode to Evening”, Gulliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) “The Deserted Village”, and William Cooper (1731-1800) “The Cast Away”.

They may be referred to as transitional poets because they were between the “fence” that separates neo-classical age from Romantic age. This explains certain trails and characteristic features identified with both ages:

- (a) Natural description
- (b) A reaction against Industrial Revolution (Wordsworth and Blake)
- (c) Use of native dialects, simple speeches, consideration and appreciation of natural objects (Coleridge)
- (d) Poem about simple characters put in simple life.
- (e) Expressions of death wish and graveyard sentiments (Gray).
- (f) Some still use heroic couplets and rigid meter; some also have poetic diction as Pope.
- (g) Concept of imagination.

William Blake is sometimes considered as a pre-Romantic poet. But for the purpose of this study I shall prefer to put him in the centre of the Romantic movement for being revolutionary during his time. He developed the concept of imagination. Imagination, for him, is the only means of reaching the Godhead. This principle is similar to that of Schlegel of Germany. Blake also distrusted reason and Newtonian Physics, which he considered as abstractions. Intuitive life and the life of imagination were the only things that mattered to him.

Blake rejected society as arbiter and absolute custodian of moral. For him morality consists in the wish or judgment of the individual and in the expression of the individual will. There should be neither lawyers nor judges since what may be good for you may not be good for me. Blake said that Milton was of the Devil's party without even knowing it. According to him, we cannot reject the fact that good could have mixed with evil and that if there is no evil, we cannot know good; that it is even difficult to discern what is good or what is evil. We therefore have the theory of contraries in which he sought to demonstrate interpretation of *good* and *evil*. Blake also extols the expression of his energy (Dynamism of revolutionary will: that Rebellion against the status quo is important for revolution and social change). He welcomed the French and the American revolutions. However, people (critics) though Blake was eccentric. He was not accorded much recognition until the nineteenth century when interest in him was significantly revived. Note the particular conception of poetry he introduced.

(ii) Poetry – became an expression of profound emotional feelings or of mystical (dimension) experience.

(i) Nature – redefined as outside world but also inhabited by spirits.

(ii) Imagination – a creative agent, vehicle of communication.

Note: The term, romantic, here, has nothing to do with amorous passion and actions; it is about the literary movement of romanticism, in which strong feelings are seen as more important than reason.

5.2.2 The Informing Philosophy of Romantic Poetry

(Aesthetic Movement: The Concept of Transcendentalism)

The Romantic poets believe that reality is ugly. They, therefore, have a tendency to escape into platonic *estopia* either by direct physical separation from the ugly everyday life by escaping into quiet countryside called locus *amoenus* or paradise. Others do it via psychic projection, that is, by means of powerful imagination they take a poetic flight to evoke a different kind of world (And still some by the use of opium, dope, etc.) John Keat's "Ode to a Nightingale" offers a good example of the working of the mind of poets in this category.

However, it is the destiny of man to live in this ugly world. So the escape into this paradise cannot be long. It is for this bitter truth of reality that we have a lament in most of their poems – viz. on how ugly this world is, especially in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. In their works, contraries and conflicts are suspended to make use of being realizability or achievability.

In Shelley, the celebration of energy and of nature on violence appears to resolve something in him. In Blake, it is a quest for revolutionizing society; getting rid of the status quo and appreciating the fact that none can judge others (*Songs of Innocence*).

Our preoccupation in the next pages will be on selected three major Romantic poets. Earlier in the chapter, we had attempted to trace the history, the philosophy and the unique aesthetics that informed the creative sensibilities of these poets. To really understand each poet and his works, however, there is need to know some details such as the family, educational background, and facts about each poet's emotional response and reaction to issues raised in his poems and suggest reasons for the marked differences in their work even though they belong to the same literary tradition, the Romantic tradition. Examples:

(I) London

(Williams Wordsworth)

I WANDER through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening church appalls;
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the newborn infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriages hearse.

(II) My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold

(Williams Wordsworth)

So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

(III) Upon Westminster Bridge

(Williams Wordsworth)

EARTH has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ship, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

(IV) The World Is Too Much with Us

(Williams Wordsworth)

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!^o
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon; 5
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not, – Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; 10
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.^o

(V) Ode to a Nightingale

(John Keats)

MY heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm south!
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and lies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Our Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy;
Though the dull brain perplexes and retard:
Already with thee! Tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-May’s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain
To thy high requiem become a sod.

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fabled to do, *deceiving elf*.
Adieu! adieu! thy *plaintive anthem* fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and how 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades;
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:---do I wake or sleep?

(VI) Ode on a Grecian Urn

(John Keats)

THOU still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities of mortals, or both,
In Temple or in the dales of Arcady?
What men of gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What will ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter, therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Nor to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no time:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not le
Thy song, nor ever can those threes thou kiss,
Bold lover never, never canst thou kiss,
Through winning near the goal---yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul, to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

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

Hint: While the dominant spirit of neoclassicism was order and the following of it, the romantic poets had imagination and freedom as their defining tool and feature, and nature as their inspiration.

5.3 Major Romantic Poets

5.3.1 William Blake (1757-1827)

Born in London, and of a rather poor parentage, he had no formal education having left school at a tender age of 12. He went to an art school to become a painter and an engraver. In 1788, however, he went to the Royal Academy as an Art student. He was in love with sculpting, carving, etc. Joshua Reynolds was the principal of the Academy. He was an eighteenth century art critic. But Blake hated Reynolds. Blake was a revolutionary, a rebel and non-conformist. Reynolds, as far as Blake was concerned, was a symbol of the establishment, who drew and painted as the society would want him to. But Blake wanted to do these as *he* (Blake) had always wanted. It is in this sense that he became the first Romantic. Blake was critical of the university dons and wits because they prostituted their learning by serving the establishment. They were enslaved to conventions. As far as Blake was concerned, the university wits were in bondage. He therefore criticized the artists of his time because most of them were fettered with the attitudes and values of an elitist society and they served the establishment rather than God and humanity. Though he had no formal education, he was well read in philosophy, religion, history and Arts. He earned his living as an engraver. He became what he was because he lived in a period of revolutionaries. He attacked the society and its rigid norms; it was for these reasons that he was considered rather queer.

Blake's time was marked by political, industrial and intellectual revolutions and all of this affected him greatly e.g., the America and French revolutions. The Industrial revolutions and the Anglophone wars also happened in his time and these, no doubt, contributed to his revolutionary attitudes to issues, and life in general. Blake was also a visionary. He believed in the life of the spirit – imagination. He saw himself –the poet, as a seer or a visionary. He said: “The nature of my world is visionary or imaginative”.

(I) Blake's Philosophy and Influences

Emmanuel Swendenbory and Jacob Boeane were mediums and theosophists who influenced Blake in his mystical tendencies. He became confined in *imaginations* – the most important faculty in man. Imagination is the creative instinct (God) and also the intuitive spirit that can perceive the divine of the infinite nature. The spiritual world to Blake is real and concrete. One can communicate with the spiritual world if one knows how to. Blake led two forms of life:

- (1) The corporal (physical) life
- (2) The spiritual – life of the soul; imagination. It is transcendent and idealistic i.e. superior to the corporal life. The spiritual life can at the same time, become the state of the mind. It does not have to exist in the other world. It can exist in a trained mind i.e. trained into a state of superior awareness. What the soul visualizes as perfect must of necessity be perfect.

A kind of practice that can best be elsewhere and in man.

The purpose of Art according to Blake is to recover or bring back the golden age. The England of his time was dirty and ugly because of the industrial revolution. Blake however worked beyond the criminal pollution of smoke and industrial lethal gasses of technology and machinery, for the pleasant land of “Songs of Innocence”. He longed for the sunny aspect of the eighteenth century London that could be perceived by a boy who could see vision (the best), who could see through the

Hint: Romantic poets lament the destruction of the natural environments through the Industrial Revolution and show a profound yearning for paradisaic conditions.

(II) Technique

Blake was a mystic, hence his technique has profound symbolic implications, though of simple diction. He was a rebel whose energy waged war against the society and societal norms and conventions which deny the man in us and the achievement of our aim etc. Important vocabularies associated with Blake include *spectre*, *emanation*. By *spectre*, he meant those things that prevent us from being ourselves, (society, self, etc), while *emanation* is the *self* that yearns for fulfillment (energy, Jesus, Jerusalem). The *spectre* therefore is the negative frustrations in human element in any situation. *Emanation* on the other hand, is the positive element; the divine potentialities in everything. It is by realizing its emanation that the holiness of each thing is revealed. The *spectre* can appear in many forms – tyranny, empire, false reason and conventional ethics as in “Songs of Innocence”.

We must emphasize that Blake is not calling for social anarchy; he would want order in society. He was not calling for licentiousness either, but for the fulfillment of individual life; freedom from unnecessary constraint. Some laws could be very rigid or stupid, those laws should be modified, after all, they are especially meant of the welfare of humanity. Blake did not believe in conventional religion. As far as he knew one could realize Jesus in oneself. Jerusalem (does not have to be in ‘heaven’ – the unreachable) becomes the promise land (Greenland) where there is neither pollution nor social dislocation. He believed in revolution that would set man free from conventional beliefs. There was a constant conflict in him between *spectre* and *emanation* – spiritual (mental) and corporal war i.e. the spiritual versus the material. Blake used a phrase, *The Great Positive* which, according to him, is humanity itself; the supreme emanation. Man’s duty is to reject the spectre and to seek after the emanation. It is possible only to have spiritual fulfillment when one or one’s soul is associated with emanation. Hence in Blake’s “Songs of Innocence”, we have emanation blossoming and flourishing.

The most powerful of the spectre is the Reasoning power of man. Romanticism marks the conflict between Imagination and Dialectics. Blake associated Reasoning with the rejection of imagination. Reasoning is associated with dialectics. This, Blake found in the eighteenth century philosophers – Bacon, Locke, etc and the established church. So he had to evolve a personal religion and distrusted Bacon, Locke, Descartes etc. who rejected imagination and failed to accept the validity of the intuitive life.

Blake often withdrew to the pastoral mood, viz., simplicity of vision and nature images. City landscapes are condemned where we have them as in *London*, a city full of crime and materialism. At times, he uses naïve assonance (adults who speak like children) while there are allusion to the countryside and the seasons. Often in his poetry there is an overall simplicity of ballad.

Blake was very much interested in Isaac Watt’s *Divine Songs for Children* published in 1715; therefore, he modelled most of the *Songs of Innocence* after it. They develop from pastoral convention/experience and children songs. For children, freedom and joy is much more important than discipline. Blake hated ‘Jehovah’ because this is a symbol of denial, mortification of the body, discipline, etc. Blake preferred and tolerated Jesus. Jehovah according to Blake is a God of vengeance. One finds the celebration of unity of all creations – trees, birds etc. At this time when Blake was writing, the issue of child-abuse was rampant as children were subjected to a kind of slave labour, especially the orphans (they were usually put in the cold or in the charity homes). Black children were common sight in the orphanages. Blake was not only moved by their dehumanized condition but also angry at the treatment meted out to them.

(III) Dominant Themes

- (a) *Innocence*: Simplicity of a child’s mind and the hardship children undergo. We are called to have a childlike, naïve attitude of life.
- (b) *Experience*: tyranny from authority e.g. the harshness of – father, government, those in authority in charity homes. These are condemned, including lack of openness in love relationships. People who undergo suffering find it difficult to express themselves.
- (c) *The Shepherd* – image and theme of Jesus.
- (d) *Infant Joy* – Only children attain this joy and also adults who possess naïve minds like children.

(IV) Decoding Blake’s Symbols

Heaven	-	is only in the mind
White	-	is the colour of angel

The statement “white as snow”	-	symbolizes authority
School-boy	-	revolting against school authority. The need for school children to be free.
Angel	-	an agent of Jehovah, symbol of authority
Rose	-	traditional symbol of love
Crimsom Joy	-	not real joy; it is a red joy.

Hint: Blake believed in the dismantling of oppressive authority. He believed that to be truly happy, one must be free and must have a childlike heart.

5.3.2 John Keats (1795-1821)

John Keats was perhaps the best Romantic poet in terms of technique. He was more of a conscious verse-man. Unfortunately Keats died at the age of 26. At childhood, he was a sort of tragic figure for he was an orphan. He took the art of poetry very seriously and he believed that a poet must express sensations and feelings with no business with ideological or sociological commitments other than that of Art as perceived in *nature*. Remember the question of *nature* coming up again – however in a different dimension from that of Blake. Poetry should essentially be the poet’s expression of his own feelings; that is, a sort of art – for art’s sake. To this end, Keats was a poet of pure luxury but more importantly, a poet of sensations.

Keats had a profound faith in *imagination* (a common factor that binds others of his ilk to the same tradition – Romanticism) which he called *the authenticity* of the imagination so that the imagination sees as *Beauty* and *Truth* must indeed be *beauty* and *truth* whether it existed or not. Keats stresses:

“I am certain of nothing but of the heart’s affections and the truth of imagination”.

We have here an opposition between *science* and *poetry*. According to Keats, truth cannot be discovered by reasoning except *only* by means of poetry. Hence he longed for a life of sensations rather than of thought. Reason, logic and arguments made him uneasy. He talked of his ability to enter into the position of the other and feeling the empathy as the other does. This is so because he developed his capacity for feelings.

“If a sparrow came before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.”

Keats believed in what he called the *Intensity of feelings*. In this regard, the essential function of art is to arouse the intensity of feeling either of joy or sorrow. He was at his best when poetry is devoted to excitement of feeling. He contends:

The excellence of every art is its intensity which is capable of making all disagreeable evaporate from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth.

Keats also talked of Negative capability. It was in this theory that he summarized his reaction to reason or thought, as opposed to emotion and feelings which, according to him, the creative artist must possess. Negative capability is the ability to be in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any... reaching out of facts and reasons.” By this standard, the poet should not be committed like Coleridge who was incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. A true poet must encounter uncertainties, mysteries and doubts.

Keats, frightened by the poetry of Pope and Johnson, emphasized that poetry should not of necessity be didactic. He argues:

We hate poetry that has palpable desire upon us.

We do not want to be bullied into a certain philosophy

Poetry, according to him, should come *natural* to the poet as leaves come naturally to a tree. Poetry to Keats is self-expression, an expression of feelings rather than of ideals or moral precepts. There is in Keats a mixture of pleasure and pain. Pleasure is incomplete without pain and vice versa. To this end, any given situation gives off the best itself except there is a mixture of the two opposing forces – pleasure and pain.

John Keats loved Greek culture and civilization. He loved Greece because he was fascinated by its being a great source of human civilization, hence, he had many images derived from Greece (e.g. “Ode to Grecian Urn”). In this study, I shall briefly comment on one of his four great Odes; “Ode to a Nightingale”.

The beauty of the natural song of the nightingale bird triggers off the poet’s imagination. He wishes to escape to an imaginary world where there are no problems as are common to human world. He realizes that such as escape is only a fallacy and so he is forced back to reality.

symbolic death (no matter how temporary) in escaping through poetic flight, but usually returns to reality. The escape is only a temporary measure and he is always forced to accept reality no matter how unpleasant. Structurally, there are three principal movements or stages in "Nightingale" that suggest the three means of escape from reality.

- 1 First, he hears the song of nightingale and became unhappy because of the contrast within the world of the bird and that of his. He therefore desires a death-wish. But there is a suspension of this death wish and he wants to escape with the bird, his first means of escape-*death*.
- 2 The second means of escape is through *wine* warm South-South of France where we have grapevine and wine. We can picture the red bubbles of wine in glass – a vivid representation of situation with clear images, typical of Keats.
- 3 The third form is in the hyperthetical stanza. It says the world is full of many experiences. The poet wants to escape from the lot i.e. from what the bird has never known within the leaves, by means of poetic flight (imagination). There is an evocation of *Darkness*. He also says that we live in a dark universe.

Finally at the end, all the urge to escape is described as *fancy* but "fancy cannot cheat so well as it's to do". He recognizes the vanity of illusions and of his elusive desires as he is, sadly, forced back to an unattractive reality.

5.3.3 The Lakeside Romantic Poets

(I) William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Wordsworth acclaimed Blake's poetry especially "Songs of Innocence". The Romantic poets were referred to as eccentric, Individualistic and sometimes grouped according to where they lived in their time. Initially the poets were known as Romantic poets. Wordsworth lived in the Lake District with Coleridge and Southey, hence they were called *Lake District or Lake-side poets*. Keats lived in London and poets living in London were known as *Cockney School*. Poets like Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt were known to be non-conformist. There was also the Satanic (later Byronic) School (i.e. Byron Shelley) because of the "queer" ideals of the school.

The Lake District is of beautiful landscape, hence Wordsworth's love of beauty of nature. He had roamed the rural district from childhood and formed an acquaintance with other poets. He took a degree in Cambridge in 1791. It was believed that it was during his stay in Cambridge that, he went to France and Alps. It was at the time of the French revolution and he declared himself a democrat (i.e. republican). The French revolution was a historical expression of the Romantic period? This was basically the reason why the revolutionary zeal of the Republicans which went rather too far, forced most of them, Wordsworth and Coleridge inclusive, to turn against this ideal. But they became conservatives at the latter part of their lives. There are two basic school, Keatian School of Romantic poets or Cockney School; especially Byron (1788-1824) and Shelley (1792-1822).

The *Lakeside* romantic poets recanted (i.e. went back from) their initial political positions as regards the French revolution. However, they still believed in freedom of ideas. On the other hand, the Cockney School supported the French revolution absolutely. According to this school, the Revolution did not go far enough. But in terms of political ideas, the younger generation differed from the older, though in poetry their ideas are similar.

When Wordsworth met Coleridge, they found they both had common interests in the imagination of poetry, in how poetry should be, in poetic fashions of the day (Poetry written by Pope and others). This was to be the beginning of their friendship so much so that they undertook researches together in poetry. The poems they co-authored were published in 1798 as the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Note: Romanticism in poetry is not simply poetry of nature. There is an exploration of the mystical, hidden, occult. Wordsworth was in love with nature but Coleridge had an inspiration towards the supernatural, the mystical and the occult. There lies the difference.

Wordsworth wrote poems about children, vagabonds, people in humble life, lunatics, people who are socially displaced, the wretched of the earth, the rejects of society. Thus he went back to nature in its innocence and unadulterated form.

In 1800, there was a second edition of the "Lyrical Ballads". There was a preface (a manifesto of Romantic poetry) in which Wordsworth defines what he means by poetry and justifies his approach. There should be no poetic diction but diction spoken by men that would impose his feelings or emotions in his characters. "Poetry" according to him, "is the spontaneous overflow of emotion." For the first time in the history of English Poetry, what is called the lyric "I" was approved. Before this period, the "I" was not brought into poetry (self). Nature thus offers an escape from experience, a recreation of a state of innocence.

Let us briefly consider "Intimations of immortality.") The thrust of the poet's argument is that man had a pre-existence before he came to the world. Curious enough, this belief is common to what obtains in any animist society like the indigenous Africans. The basic idea is that before you were born, you lived in a world of souls where everything is spiritual. Another poet, Vaughan calls it the "Sea of life."

life, he was unable to *feel* nature as he did earlier. Nature was not making an impact as before. The loss of his inspiration is part of what is being lamented in the poem. There is the loss of his sense he was getting blurred and he could no longer feel nature as he did in his childhood and adolescent age. At that time he could see beyond the natural or physical objects into something spiritual - some kind of Buddhism. Wordsworth calls this a loss of *visionary gleam*. He traces the progression of man:

Childhood-adolescence-manhood/adulthood, virile and vital, but this is lost in old age which is associated with the loss of feeling of Nature at old age.

(II) Samuel T. Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

He was a friend of William Wordsworth. A drug (opium) addict, a brilliant philosopher but was said to be indolent. He was fond of abstract talks: he was influenced in this regard by his German philosopher-master, Schlegel. He wrote a biographical work titled *Biographical Literaria* which contains most of his thoughts and ideas on Art. Imagination to him is of two dimensions: primary and secondary imagination.

By primary imagination, he means the creative will or imagination, or the creative sensibility in every individual. Every individual is a creator, a (divine) god. This creative will, however, cannot be of use except one is endowed with secondary imagination. Coleridge says of primary imagination;

The primary imagination I hope to be living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM (I am here means GOD).

Secondary imagination is simply the moving active force that actualizes the creations itself. It is, therefore, responsible for the potency of the innate creative will in the individual. It is the ordering power on experience which becomes the artwork. In other words, it is the vehicle. It makes the artist. Commenting on secondary imagination Coleridge emphasizes:

The Secondary imagination I consider as the echo of the former (primary imagination) co-existing with a conscious will yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency and differing only in degree and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate; it is essentially vital.

Furthermore, the word fancy is made to assume a philosophical dimension in Coleridge's poetic thought. "Fancy" is not synonymous with "imagination" According to him, it is a mode of memory, while memory is a product of *Time* and *Space*.

Coleridge also expressed his view about the structure of a poem. According to him, a poem is organic and all its parts must work as a unit. He gives priority to poetry because of his belief that only poetry, not science, can save the world. In this regard, he extends the existing mechanical theory to poetry;

A poem is that specie of science which is opposed to works of science by proposing for each immediate object pleasure and not truth. And from all other species having this object in common with him, it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compactable with a distinct glorification from each component part.

Coleridge insists that all the parts of a poem should harmonize one another, explaining and supporting in agreement. He likens the whole structure of a poem to that of a snake with loops and a head. He argues that for the snake to move forward each loop constitutes a vital link and the loops must be achieved. This is similar to what he refers to as *imagination construct* in poetry.

Poems by Coleridge include: "The Rime of the ancient Mariner". "The Eolian Harp"; "Forest at Midnight"; "Dejection Ode" and Kubla Khan."

Coleridge gives much of his poetic thought to what is serious, or mystical, or supernatural, sober, and hidden element in man and nature. The mystical or the supernatural is what informs the Romantic Movement. Wordsworth temperament is lightheaded, but Coleridge's is not as can be observed in the latter's poems. While Wordsworth's poetry is descriptive, Coleridge's poetry is highly reflective and meditative. A good example is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." His poetry conjures an atmosphere of mystery or some dream-vision evoking something immense and almost incomprehensible. The open lovely sea symbolizes this vast incomprehensibility, provoking a frightening suspense and death. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is simply about crime, punishment and expiation.

The Albatross symbolizes a benevolent spirit which is, inadvertently, killed by a Mariner. The Mariner has, through his crime, affected the goodly nature, turned good to evil, leading to the death of most of the crewmembers. The Mariner realizes and has to atone for the crime he commits. He blesses nature and ask for forgiveness after which his soul is saved.

the light of its thematic thrust of sin and forgiveness that we categorize the poem as a biblical allegory, in which case the “Albatross” is Christ-like figure, the “Mariner” as the sinful man.

5.3.4 Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822)

Shelley is often regarded as being in the centre of the Satanic School. He was from a rich family but decided to abandon the luxury and follow the inclinations of his mind. He quested for justice, equity and fair-play in human interaction. He vehemently opposed unwieldy privileges and concession. He was a natural rebel, a revolutionary, iconoclast and destroyer of myth. He had a high contempt for orthodox religion and had professed atheism.

Shelley attended Eton and Oxford, but got expelled from Oxford on account of the pamphlet titled, “The necessity of atheism” which he co-authored with Jefferson. In many ways he was like William Blake such as not believing in the institution of marriage. Marriage to him is a tyrannical social institution. His belief was that orthodox religion and conventional morality were at the root of social evil. His life indexicated this belief to the degree that he lived only by instinct and disregarded all moral and social codes, thus marrying and divorcing as many times as his instinct would permit him.

William Godwin, a social philosopher of Shelley’s time had wielded immense influence on people like Shelley. *Godwinism* preaches a doctrine of necessity. It insists that religion and other similar social institutions should be abolished, and that man should return to Nature. It calls on people to do only what they felt like doing regardless of religion and moral etiquette. Shelley fell out with his family on account of his frequent marriages and strange philosophy. He was regarded as a social outcast on account of his self-alienation. This “lonely voice crying in the wilderness, forsaken by man and God” is given a rather graphic representation in his poetry. By his own judgment, God is not just nor the universe natural. He was skeptical of the society and this skepticism informed his Romantic spirit.

He believes in the law of change or mutability: that neither are human laws nor anything constant, there is no protection from cosmic power, that man is trapped in a web of flux; that nothing is constant except man’s transience and nature’s inconsistency. In other words, the only thing constant is change. In “Mutability” and another sonnet he wrote for Wordsworth he had celebrated “change”. His usual image for man and human condition is cloud which often undergoes change. Similarly, he had many images to represent alienation or isolation of man. He believed that only a change could bring about continuity.

(I) Neo-Platonism and Intellectual Beauty

There is the quest for the ideal, perfect world. Shelley believed that there were signs or emanations from this world of ideal visiting the human world. Shelley claimed he was in contact with the emanations which, according to him, are sources of inspiration, capable of consoling him in time of trouble and possibly transform (or translate) him or any poet into a peaceful (perfect) state. These emanations he referred to as intellectual beauty which is eternal, indestructible not subject to decay, and through which all things are perfected.

In his, “Hymns to Intellectual Beauty”, Shelley celebrates the temporary visitation of emanations symbolized by an incandescent streak of light. It is an ode celebrating the beauteous form. The experience of the momentary visitation causes Shelley sorrow and lamentation.

(II) Nature and Imagination

Nature manifests itself in natural forms such as wind, rain, water, etc. Shelley celebrates nature in this light in “Ode to the West Wind”. Shelley’s cloud and wind are ever in changing, violet motion, a spectacular means by which nature proves itself. To him nature is heroic, nature is dynamic, and he had always identified with the dynamic wind, active thunder, proud wind and the cleansing rain. The fact that he had always identified with nature marked him out as a different specie of the Romantic school of poets.

Imagination to him is a creative principle of synthesis, while poetry is the vehicle for actualizing it. In his critical essay “In Defence of Poetry”, Shelley defined the poet.

Criticism of Shelley’s poetry has not been favourable. He is not a popular poet. He is accused of being a narcissist – celebrates always himself, makes himself the poetic persona in virtually all his poems. Unlike what we have in Keats or Wordsworth where the poet distances himself from the “I” of the poetic voice, Shelley is both the poet and voice.

In addition, Shelley is accused of romantic self-pity, as we have in “Ode to the West Wind.” Besides, he does not have a firm grip on his images. But can we take these views as the absolute truth? We shall, on this note, examine some divergent views of some critics on Shelley in order to arrive at a more objective criticism of Shelley’s poetry.

Shelley's style, according to William Hazlitt, a contemporary of Shelley, is confused vague abstractions of a revered soul thirsting after the impossible and indulging in love of power and newness at the expense of truth and nature. F.R. Leavis had a similar view on the shortcomings of Shelley's technique. T.S. Eliot, on his part, has dismissed Shelley's informing philosophy as adolescent or puerile exuberance. Eliot states further:

I find his ideas repellant...humourless, pedantic, self-centred...a cloudy Platonist.

On the part of pro-Shelley critics, he is regarded as the great artist of his age. According to Wordsworth, "Shelley is one of the best artists of us all; I mean in workmanship of style, W.B Yeats also was an admirer of Shelley. Shelley and Yeats have had many things in common- they were both singers of intellectual beauty. Both were interested in magic and platonic ideals. Both also gave absolute power to the imagination.

Contemporary criticism does not favour Shelley; instead it maintains that Shelley is a bad poet, too sentimental and hardly uses a firmly developed image. He is accused of being not too keen on the world or ordinary perception. His gaze is always in the clouds, in the invisible.

Shelley's major poems intensely celebrate his person at different stages of his life. These include: "Ode to the West Wind", "The Cloud", "To a Skylark", "Mutability", "Ozymandias", "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty".

(III) Ode to the West Wind

It is an invocation of the mind and of the Infinite or the unseen Power. The wild energy of Nature is a reflection of Shelley's restless soul. By wild energy, it is to mean the first images of wind and its ambivalence: as a destroyer and a healer at the same time; a killer and preserver of life. In many ways it is a wildness that is akin to *ṛgùO*- in the Yoruba pantheon- god of iron and war patron: a creative force and destroyer. The poem is set in autumn – and since autumn is the period when leaves fall off treetops to begin a new life wherever the leaves find themselves, autumn symbolizes death that must necessitate a new life. The seasonal cycle is again reaffirmed: autumn – winter – spring – summer. At the end of the poem, the wind becomes a symbol of this (poem) artistic work that the world must read.

The poem has a languid tone: suggesting a movement of despair or the poet's low spirit. He desires to be as violent as the mind again (stasis). There are four main sections in the Shakespearean sonnet mode. Section 1 expresses the physical nature of the wind as observed in the fallen *Leaves*; section 2 shows the action or manifestation of the wind in the air in form of *Cloud*; section 3 shows the action of the wind in the *Sea*. The final section, that is section 4, is the synthesis which combines the whole actions in the air, sea, earth terminating in the poet's expressed desire or wish to be the wind itself.

Most of Shelley's poems are sonnets. He is always conscious of his technique and rhyme. "Ode to the West Wind", for example, ends in a couplet reminiscent of Shakespearean sonnets.

5.3.5 Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Victorian poetry, even though it lacks the vitality of romantic poetry, could be said to be a continuation of the romantic spirit. Therefore, from the point of view of time, Hopkins is more properly described as a Victorian. He, however, abandoned the Victorian dreaming, sleeping, sentimental, loose, declamatory and rhetorical poetry. Rather, he chose to revitalize the language of poetry, such that in spirit we can safely say that Hopkins is modern from the point of view of technique. This is why modern poets see Hopkins as the grand ancestor of modern poetry. Like John Donne, Hopkins wrote religious poems. Meditative poetry indeed, both Donne and Hopkins had a lot in common.

For example, like Donne, Hopkins was a conscious innovator of poetic technique. And like Donne, Hopkins was considered to be odd with unusual idiosyncrasies by his immediate acquaintance, Robert Bridges (1844-1930). Bridges believed that Hopkins went against the established norms of his time, which Hopkins considered to be inadequate and lacking in sincerity and vitality. To Hopkins, any object or any feeling has its own uniqueness and identity, and therefore it is the duty of the poet to locate and show this.

To Hopkins, his contemporaries are Parnassian poets who believed in doctrine of art-for-art's sake. According to Hopkins, this group of poets are at best described as technicians in the art of poetry; they express emotions but they do not feel in their blood the emotions or feelings so expressed. As far as Hopkins was concerned, his contemporaries could not have been inspired. Hopkinsian conceit is associated with alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, rhythm, etc. F.R. Leavis sees some sort of affinity between Hopkins and Donne's school:

"Hopkins' conceit and metaphorical symbolism link him with the metaphysical poets."

dark night – the anguish of an unworthy ambassador for God, unworthy of priestly vocation.

Hopkins' nature poems are reminiscent of Henry Vaughan. Nature to him reveals the wish and the will of God; Nature fulfills God's will. This Hopkins captures at the moment when Nature is *inscaping* itself. By *inscape*, Hopkins means the individual's quality, the *thisness*. There is, therefore, admiration for the beauty of nature scenery, natural object, natural seasons particularly spring and summer.

Another concern of Hopkins is the effect of the industrial revolution on the soul of man. The soul is destroyed by materialism and so-called progress. Further to his concern is the question of *transience* – that is, *change* as a factor of human tradition. In his poetry, God features prominently the external manifestation of which is emanation of the beauty and radiance of God.

It must be emphasized that for Hopkins, Nature's beauty is conserved by the quest progress. The destruction of nature in the name of industrial revolution implies man's unwitting rejection of the higher beauty of God while God's divinity suffers through the suffering of nature. Unlike the Romantics, Hopkins does not see Nature as a completeness and an end in itself but that it is God that gives Nature its beauty. Nature to him is not for its own sake but a preliminary step towards a comprehension of God. Therefore, Hopkins' first loyalty is to God and not to Nature.

Inscaping is Hopkins' organizing motif. In his poetry what he does is to capture vividly and to convey clearly the essence, the particularity of an emotion, a feeling, a thought or an idea, or the uniqueness of an object in Nature.

Hopkins' encounter with Duns Scotus' philosophy in 1872 gave him the idea of inscape, the theory of *selving*. Hopkins also talked about *instress*, *sprung rhythm* and *outride*. By *instress*, it means the perception of the inner order in nature which is associated with artistic perception of which he tried to inscape. It is related to primary (or artistic) imagination. Inscaping stands for secondary imagination; "Sprung rhythm," by implication suggests that poems are for the ears not the eyes. It insists that stress should be done according to natural speech. By *outride* he simply meant very long times with up to 14 or more beats in a poem.

Summary of Study Session 5

In this study session you have learned that romantic poets de-emphasized neoclassical ideals such as rigid order, conservatism and reason and emphasized reliance on the imagination, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature. You now know the precursors of the romantic tradition and the influence of the French revolution, the German movement and transcendentalism on romanticism. You have learned about the life and works of major romantic poets such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, Percy B. Shelley, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Gerald Manley Hopkins.

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcome 5.1)

While romantic poets de-emphasized neoclassical ideals such as rigid order, conservatism and reason, what did they emphasize?

SAQ 5.2 (tests Learning Outcome 5.2)

Apart from being to some extent inspired by the French revolution and the German movement, Romanticism had forerunners such as Thomas Percy and who else?

SAQ 5.3 (tests Learning Outcome 5.3)

“If a sparrow came before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.”

How does the above submission, the idea of escapism and the idealization of nature surface in Keat’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 5

SAQ 5.1 - Romantic poets emphasized reliance on the imagination, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

SAQ 5.2 - James Thomson 1700-1748. He published *The Seasons* (1730) which includes: Winter, Spring, Autumn, etc., poems of graphic description of nature and its elements. Others include; Thomas Gray (1716-1771) “The Elegy Written in Country Churchyard; William Collins- (1721-1759) “Ode to Evening”, Gulliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) “The Deserted Village”, and William Cooper (1731-1800) “The Cast Away”.

SAQ 5.3 - Keat escaped from the sad realities of life into the paradisiac reality of the bird, entering into the position of the other and feeling the empathy as the other does. At the same time he idealized and eulogized nature in a profoundly rhapsodic manner.

Modern Poetry

Introduction

In this section of the study, I like to concentrate attention on three notable pioneers of modern English poetry; they are William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). I have pointed out in the previous chapter that Gerard Hopkins even though a Victorian in terms of historical location, began what is today referred to as modern verse. In this study session, you will learn about them.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 discuss the catalysing factors of the modernist poetry tradition.
- 6.2 explain the inspiration for the poems of W. B. Yeats.
- 6.3 Account for the inspiration for some of the poems of T.S. Eliot

6.1 Modernism in Poetry

Modernism is, indeed, an extension of the Romantic spirit in its preoccupation with bold experimentation in Poetry. It is almost synonymous with revolution of the word and poetic feeling. Modernism is a continuation of this Revolution of the word and poetic feelings. Modernism is a continuation of the Revolution – of the word, poetic feelings, and techniques. Even though the modernist movement was felt in every aspect of the art; painting music, etc., in Europe, our discussion shall centre only on how it affected, and still affects, art of poetry.

Modernism in poetry was manifested in a new kind of creativeness and, or imaginativeness, and some queer sensibility. Science, in recent times, has evolved a thorough and advanced technology which made safe landing on the moon or an unmanned space-ship to land on Mars possible. In a similar vein, visual artists, musicians, poets went unorthodox the manner they went about their art. Poets within modernism trait began to evoke verbal technology for the purpose of creating an unusual but unique impression in poetry. Similarly, in visual art, artists started to favour abstract paintings as opposed to the specific; the musicians cultivated “a-tonality” – a complete disoriented harmony – all in the rebellious spirit against orders.

The revolt against order in poetry was of a different kind altogether. This does not mean there was no order in modern poetry. It was just that the emergent poets were not satisfied with the Victorian poetry of Browning, Arnold and Tennyson which was either interpreting dreams, or mourning or sermonizing. Verses which lacked the vitality of the succeeding poetry. In other words, the Victorian poetry, besides Hopkins, was indeed very passive compared with modernist poetry which succeeded it. By implication it simply means that there was a decline in the quality of American and English poetry as T.S. Eliot observed between 1900 and 1910. Poetry, according to him, has degenerated into a lifeless game, no longer a game of words. It was Ezra Pound that offered the necessary panacea at this point. He would readily qualify as the catalyst of literary modernism, particularly in poetry. Pound had come to England in 1908 in search of a new style. It was in England he met Yeats who at the time was the most influential poet. Pound became Yeats’ secretary but without success in his quest for a new poetic style.

Hint: Poets of the modernist leaning had some things in common with romanticism.

We must emphasize here also that there are three observable stages of artistic development in Yeats’ poetry. They include 1889-1914; 1914-1926 and 1926-1939. The early poetry of Yeats, that is, the poems he wrote between 1889 and 1914 were similar to the romantics, for example, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”. In this poem, the style is fraught with inversions and biblical phrases. It was at the time Pound met with him. However, Yeats developed very rapidly, particularly from the point where he wrote “Responsibility.”

Pound had insisted that the Victorian poetry rhetoric, of ideas of flavour and stylized poetic diction must be discouraged. In addition, according to him, there must be no preamble, no inversions, no verbage and borrowed book-words. Pound had insisted on direct treatment of any subject or topic in clear precise and concrete images. His suggested poetry was to be identified as *imagist poetry*. It was a poetic movement whose moving spirit was Pound. The imagist poet aspires, among other things, to present poetic ideas which may take some time to achieve. In addition, he does not use any word that does not contribute meaningfully to development of the topicality. Besides, the imagist poet favours natural internal rhythm to the neo-classical rigid metrical conventions.

Pound had defined the “image” as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instance of time”. A good example of an imagist poem is, “In a Station of the Metro”: *The apparition of these fries in the crowd; Petals on a wet,*

Apparition" suggests ghosts, the underworld, or death "faces" (robot-like, artificial, frustration or expression of anxiety or worries); "crowd" (masses, anonymity); "petals" (multitude); and "wet" (winter, cold, snow/rain).

In this poem, language is used to evolve and suggest rather than to describe or declare in the attempt to conjure a dream-like atmosphere. A French poet Mallarme once said that if a poet should mention names or identify subjects or objects to assist his audience, he would have made his audience to have lost most of the enjoyment. He emphasized that much enjoyment and satisfaction are derived when the audience is left to guess a meaning or suggest an interpretation. According to Mallarme, such a thing triggers off the imagination.

In most **imagist** (or symbolist) poetry there is absence of verb or use of connectives. In other words, the syntactic structure often suffers, dislocation. The topicality of any such means usually revolves round frustration, and ugliness in the cities, the longing of the soul of man for a more ideal world even though not the type of paradise quested after by the Romantics.

Similarly, T.S. Eliot was interested in the fact that poetry can be made out of the ugliness of the city. As for Yeats, he too was equally interested in symbolism. His reference to wind was, naturally, symbolic. Yeats' poetry has logical structure. In other words, despite Yeats' love for symbolism, he still wrote in traditional metric pattern, which the symbolist poets rejected.

Surrealism was not so much an influence in the development of modern English poetry. Like the symbolist movement, surrealism was yet another French movement.

The idea of going back to the mind which was first noticed in 1918 and was later revised in 1924 had people like Andre Breton and Louis Aragon as its early proponents. Surrealists opine that the subconscious mind is both ordered and rational in its operation. The mind, it is believed, is the home of poetic imagination. Surrealists prefer to allow the stream of consciousness to inform and shape their poetry. Therefore, what comes from the mind is what they deal with directly – a world of nightmares, dreams and hallucinations. Rabearivello and U'Tamsi (Africans) belong to this movement. **Surrealism** neither influenced Yeats nor Eliot. Perhaps Donne and Hopkins could rightly be said to have contributed to the development of surrealism. For example, it hasn't the dramatic opening and the invigorated language often come across in Donne's poems, neither does it have the eccentric use of language as in Hopkin's poetry.

Attention shall now be focused on two major modern poets.

6.2 W.B. Yeats (1865-1939)

For Yeats, poetry is the articulation of sweet verse, the ordering of emotions. His poetry is logical and intelligible. His poems seem superficially simple on the surface more significantly because he does not indulge in the use of allusions as we often find in Eliot. Besides, it is easy to read Yeats' poetry from the beginning to the end because it has transitional connectives. He retains the traditional form of syntax usage, and like Donne, his poetry is characterized by the use of colloquialism. Yeats is a highly emotional and passionate poet who uses poetry as a means of pouring out his emotions.

Easter 1916

(William Butler Yeats)

I HAVE met them at close of day

Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly

In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode out winged horses;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream
The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minutes by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.
Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death?
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse ---
MacDanagh and MacBride

Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

The Second Coming

(William Butler Yeats)

TURNING and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- ITQ The term ‘The Second Coming’ indicates intertextuality with the Bible. The title of which African novel did a line in the poem inspire?
- ITA Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

Even though Yeats always writes about himself, he is unlike Shelley because his poetry has order. For Yeats, style is putting proper words in their best order. Style, according to him, is the greatest quality a poem must have. This is why in “Adam’s Curse” his stanza form is deliberate and its parts consciously stitched into an inter-related whole. He is a more affective genius and more orderly than Pound or Eliot’s poetry. He is conscious of poetic sound, this is why, in his opinion, both have good ear.

Yeats could be said to have graduated into a modern poet. He did not start off as a modernist. His poetry spanned three major phases: 1889-1914, 1914-1926, 1926-1939.

By 1889-1914, Yeats was still suffering from Victorian rhetoric and general decadence. His poetry could not be said to be modern here. He was writing on Irish myths, legend and folktales, e.g., “A Coat”. He was involved in the Irish Dramatic Movement, through the plays he wrote and acted in, his verse became tighter by moving completely anything that did not count or that did not bear direct relevance. It is possible too that his contact with Ezra Pound of the imagist school most likely affected his theatre, hence his vigour.

Between 1914 and 1926, there were apparent changes in his poetry. While in the first phase he wrote about Irish past, here he began to write about the Ireland of that moment. Ireland was the first British colony and even now the Irish are violently opposed to British rule. Yeats was a nationalist, hence he wrote on issues of political interest such as; rebellion against British yoke as well as crisis within the Irish polity. This is largely responsible for the toughness in Yeats’ poetry stating whatever he means in simple and clear terms.

at old age.

Yeats believed in true love between man and woman. His love poems, it is believed by critics, were written from personal experience of unreciprocated love, for example, "Maud Gonne." Gonne was said to be a nationalist and a woman activist. Yeats later criticized her and advised that women should not be political agitators but should go into love.

Gonne remains a constant image in his love poems. Maud Gonne remains a symbol of beauty, like Helen of Troy. Yeats shared a number of things with William Blake. For example, they both believed in a sense of history that is cyclical: that at every two thousand years there is usually a new era marked by some violence, or some shock. This is evident in his poem, "Second Coming", which marks the end of Greek civilization and the dawn of Christian civilization.

Yeats read Blake a lot. We have mentioned earlier that "imagination" is, to Blake, God. Yeats made use of imagination too. He considered as a non-poet, any poet that does not have, or make use of it. He believed in symbols and transcendent world where one can communicate with God. The world of Arts is immortal. Whenever he wrote on nature, he made use of symbols, but whenever he wrote on Irish situation he wrote in a more clear language.

Innisfree

This is a lake in Ireland. England to Yeats symbolizes materialism and technology. The pressure of industries while Yeats was in England was so much that he wanted to move to a more quiet place away from England (cf. pastoral elegies). Every line of the poem has supportive filler. However, in the last line, there is a direct structure. He quests for peace and tranquillity. The rhythm is regular and it flows, 'Grey' here suggests materialism (or civilization) and inhumanity.

No Second Troy

The legendary Helen of Troy was said to be the most beautiful damsel in the whole ancient world. Yeats was a political agitator. The subject of the symbol here teaches "violent ways" in politics as she is here identified with a noble but not peaceful mind.

To the Rose upon the Rood of Time

The rose is a significant symbol in Yeats poetry. Shelley, in this regard, has a great influence on him. Rose stands for intellectual beauty, beauty, love; Maude Gonne, Ireland, dream. Like Blake, Yeats is a symbolist poet. It is in the light of this that the Rose represents Ireland – The oppressed colony of England, "upon the rood of time"

Ireland has continued to experience oppression in the hands of the English for quite a long time. "Proud rose" refers to Ireland considered to be a proud nation. "Cuchulain" is an allusion to a mythical Irish hero, "Druid" is associated with nature, "grey" suggests old age. "Fagus" is Yeats' way of expressing love dreaming. He is made a king and he accepts responsibility which spells his doom.

Yeats is often caught between decision and indecision. His poetry is direct and functional, always concerning itself with socio-political issues of the day; it is not just escapist. "Eire" is the Irish name for Ireland. One of the early poems where imagination is hoped to be given direction – a poetry with practical values. Thus in Yeats' poetry the tones vary from meditative and almost elegiac, dignified apostrophe, and of measure rhythm. The rhythm scheme in this case is complete.

"Down by the Salley Gardens", like "Innesfree", is also a garden location in Ireland. Here Yeats' quests for an escape from the harshness of life's reality to a place of solace and peace, far removed from worries like Blake did. Sometimes he associated these places of escape with "Bower of Bliss" (ref. Edmund Spenser's "Faerie Queene") with loved one. The embellishment of the stanza simply suggests the physical beauty of the lady, note the "snow-white" as we have in Pope's "Rape of the Lock". "The Salley Gardens" is one of Yeats' poems in quest of love or nature.

Easter 1916

It is an elegy dedicated to the executed revolutionaries. 1916 was a memorable day for those nationalist Irish who fought for the land. They seized power in Dublin. However, shortly after the brief success, the British forces overpowered them, and by May of the same year, those who led the revolution had been executed. The poem is epical in appeal, even though it is an occasional poem. Among those who led the revolution were Constance Gore-Booth (1868-1927) who was later released, those executed were Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), and Major John Mac Bride (18? -1916).

There is an imposed correspondence between Jesus Christ's crucifixion and Easter resurrection on the one hand, and the executed nationalist on the other hand. Jesus Christ was killed for the salvation of the whole world, so were the executed Irish men killed for the total emancipation of the entire Irish nation. Yeats was more or less surprised that the men could rise to this heroism. The new heroic dimension to the Irish struggle marked the birth of a terrible beauty because the Irish were thought of as being incapable of any rebellion.

about the Irish before the revolution. There is this use of paradox about a beauty that is terrible. In giving their lives, there is beauty, but that the beautiful action led to their execution is terrible. That is, it was terrible to have had them executed. The other references are to: Constance Gore-Booth (second stanza); (Pearse) his school master (line 8 second stanza); and Thomas MacDnagh (line 10).

That their hearts came together is suggested by the “stone” that was to trouble the British colonial rule (stanza 3 line 4). It also has a biblical underpinning of the “rejected stone”, or condemned stone, the image of Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world, so were the executed nationalists now who have become a significant foundation of the Irish nation. In another dimension, “stone” is the condition of the hardened mind of the Irish people. Their mind is petrified by hatred (stone) against the British colonial rule. In the 4th stanza, it is only heaven that can judge the wisdom of the action. Action here goes either way: the revolt of the Irish, and the execution of their leaders by the imperialist British government. Poets can only write about the event. Yeats’ indecision is noticed in stanza four line ten where he wonders if it was wise to have revolted at all. The “green” here symbolizes Ireland. The language and verse have taken on new form. The verse is shorter and the longer lines in his earlier period had given way to dramatic presentations.

6.3 T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

The Waste Land

(Thomas Stearns Eliot)

1. Burial of the Dead

APRIL is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And The dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock).
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

*Frisch weht der wind
Der' Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?*

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed'und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Handged Man fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine
There I saw one I knew, and stopped hi, crying: 'Stetson!
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout! Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
'You hypocrite lecteur! -monsemlable,--mon frere!

II. A Game of Chess

(Thomas Stearns Eliot)

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
G lowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of seven
branched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurks her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid-troubled, confused

these ascended
 In fattening the prolonged candle flames,
 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
 Huge sea-wood fed with copper
 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
 In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
 Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
 The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the night in gate
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.
 And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms
 Learned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

 'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad.
 Stay with me.
 'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
 'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
 'I never know What You are thinking of? What thinking? What?
 I think we in rats alley
 Where the dead men lost their boens.

 What is that noise?
 The Wind under the door.
 What is that noise now ?What is the
 Wind doing?
 Nothing again nothing.
 Do
 You know nothing? to you see nothing?
 Do you remember
 Nothing?
 I remember
 Those are peals that were his eyes.
 Are you alive, or not? Is there, not-
 hing in your head?

 OOOO that Shakespearian Rag--
 It's so elegant
 So intelligent
 'What shall I don now? What shall do?
 'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
 'With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
 'What shall we ever do?'
 The hot water at ten.
 And if it rains, a closed car at four
 And we shall play a game of chess,
 Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for knock upon the door.

 When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said--
 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 Now Albers coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
 He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
 and no more can't I, said, and think of poor Albert,
 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
 Oh is there, she said. Something O' that, I that, I said,
 Then I'll know who to thank, she said
 and give me a straight look.
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.
 Others tan pick and choose if you can't.
 But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
 (And her only thirty-one)
 I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
 It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said
 (she's had five already, and nearly, died of young George.)
 the chemist said it would be all right,
 but I've never been the same.
 You are a proper fool, I said.
 Well if Albert won't leave you
 alone, ther it is, I said,
 what' you get married for if you don't want children?
 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
 And they asked me in to dinner,
 to get the beauty of it hot-
 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
 Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight
 Tata. Goonight, Goonight.
 Good night, ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night.

T. S. Eliot who died some years back, met Ezra Pond in 1914, and he settled in London in 1915, the year *Prufrock and Other Poems* was published.

Eliot was seriously in love with English civilization even though, to him, humanity, culture and tradition, which have a peculiar way they affect the soul, were more important than technological advancement. England typifies urbane culture and civilization which informed his becoming a British subject in 1927. he emphasized that poetry, like every other art must identify with, reflect and keep abreast of the society which produces it in terms of topicality and technique. T.S. Eliot had died in a rather complex age and this probably explains his very complex poetry, and for which he not only admitted but readily offered an explanation:

Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity and this complexity operating upon a refined sensibility must produce various and complex result. A poem must become more and more comprehensive, more and more allusive, indirect, in order to force or to dislocate if necessary language into meaning.

This explanation offers a clue to Eliot's deliberate elimination of connections, transitional phrases, and a build up of a pattern of meaning through juxtaposed images without direct clue to meaning. Some critics refer to this technique as public technique, and allusions to other literary works of the past and of the present are his means of drawing an analogy between the past and the present.

Shelley was of the opinion that Eliot has a concept of impersonality of art. This is because he believed that a poet should not bring his personality into poetry. Poetry is not a means by which we loosen emotions but it is a means by which we escape from emotions and from self. This is made possible by using a persona, a situation, or an object to serve as vehicle of that emotion. Eliot called this *objective correlative*.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

This is a poem that celebrates self-defeat, frustration. A poem of someone who has some heroic aspirations but not backed up with corresponding actions. He is a typical example of what we can best describe as modern romantic hero. He is a

Eliot, no doubt, intends to express his concern about what love has become in modern times – debased and devoid of the long cherished romantic ideal to this end, Prufrock lacks the idealized rhetoric of the Elizabethan sonneteers, particularly Donne's love poems. If love is an impulse that stifles instead of elevating the soul, such that Prufrock could not even act, then he might have other pervert forms of making up for his desires. Even though, this is not clearly put in the poem but we can arrive at such conclusions based on Prufrock's retreat into the underworld of the sea where mermaids cannot sing – at the end of the poem.

Setting is important in Eliot's poetry because it has scenery. In this poem we have a middle-class setting. We perceive some air of mobility around Prufrock. A world drawing room, a salon – a society of culture. We also see the slums of the city. The setting also represents the mind of Prufrock.

The technique here borders on a dramatic monologue. Prufrock talks to himself and when there is a conflict, it is normally between Prufrock and an imaginary persona. Eliot seems to seek the metaphysical conceit once more. He is, no doubt, influenced by Donne's sheer intellectual magnitude and poetry: Donne's hardness of thought, his use of imagery and symbolism. For example, the "fog" in this poem suggests the city; compared with the movement of a cat; and the evening being like a "patient".

In addition, Eliot shares the tendency of trivializing an otherwise serious matter with Andrew Marvell. There are allusions to John the baptizer, Hamlet's indecision and Michael Angelo. They function as heroic foils to Prufrock. He is their exact opposite. Eliot's allusion to Lazarus suggests Prufrock's borrowed existence. This is also suggested at the beginning of the poem of Prufrock's psychological prison – locked away in the prison of his mind. Not at ease with the social milieu in which he finds himself; and since he cannot transcend it, he condemns it.

In the poem too, there abounds juxtaposed ideas of images and allusions without adequate connectives. In this case, the link can only be provided through the provided historical or biblical allusions through the arrangement of contrast or similarities. The language is rather colloquial but the diction is learned and disciplined with dramatic questions. Prufrock who even has occasions to laugh at himself can, at best, be described as an anti-hero. The poem evokes a mood, not necessarily, meaning. This is why it may not be possible to attempt an interpretation line by line.

The Wasteland (1922)

This is the most important of Eliot's poems. It is his poetic comments on modern situations: a picture of desolation, waste, spiritual aridity and waste land, of the ruin brought about by so-called modern civilization, of evils of a technological world where God seems to be dead and His place taken over by machines and cannons. It is a world that offers no salvation for the soul of man. *The Wasteland* is formed by Eliot's Christian background – that unless through selfless sacrifice and rituals there can be no hope for salvation of humanity. Eliot goes back to classical mythology. This God is symbolized by "thunder", the God of vegetation is absent because man has sinned against God of fertility; only a rebirth can bring back the fertility, only sacrifice can remove the curse.

In other words, "The Waste Land" is a continuation of the expressed topicality we perceived in "Prufrock". The poem is something close to an epic about humanity. The topicality is relevant to all ages. World War 1 (1914-1918) is powerfully captured here. So also are destination of lives, its dehumanizing effects, wickedness, power obsession, materialism, Godlessness etc.

During the war years, guns boomed in London. Everything afterwards seemed probational. London was no longer capital of the West. It became a ghostly city like most other European cities such as Rome, Berlin, and Vienna. As we have earlier pointed out, ancient pagan myths and rituals informed *The Waste Land*. Eliot got the idea from Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, and particularly, the chapter titled, "The Waste-land and the fisher-king". It concerns an ancient mythology about a land which was in ruin. The land was infertile, women were barren, the king was dying and could only be revived if a knight pure and whole would intervene. After the healing of the king, there was reversal of situation, the land was healed and the women became fruitful. Where a king is impotent, the myth has it that nature cannot be fruitful. In the myth adopted by Eliot, there was hope for *The Waste Land*. Someone offered to make a sacrifice. The waste land then was better than the waste land now because there was salvation, but none now.

Other works that informed and influenced Eliot included I.G. Frazier's *The Golden Bough*. It discusses legends, myths and ancient spiritual. There is information on vegetation god, and the renewal of seasons. There is the annual renewal of the land. In the extant mythology, deities were associated with the death and resurrection of vegetation and fertility cults.

In this poem, men and women are emotionally unstable; there is no water except the water of barrenness which drowns the women. We have vast arid land, and sounds of cricket that annoy instead of providing music of nature as we have in, say, John Keat's "Ode to Autumn". Instead of the rose, we have cactus and flowers with thorns.

- (b) A game of chess (euphemism for sexual game)
- (c) The fire sermon (against human passion).
- (d) Death by water (The culmination of the function of water as a destructive element)
- (e) What the thunder said (thunder the voice of God speaking to men asking them to change their ways that they may be saved. The need to control their passions and emotions if they must be saved from destruction. The necessity of love, happiness and selfless sacrifice – a humanizing process. It is essentially a religious poem.

The “hanged man” is the Christ figure image – The significance of rock of water. The five parts are interrelated and as a sequence, they constitute an epic of the condition of modern man.

Summary of Study Session 6

In this study session, you have been introduced to the poetry of William Buttlar Yeats (1865-1939) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). ‘Easter 1916’ and ‘The Second Coming’ were some of Yeats poems examined, the former revealed to have been inspired by the Irish rebellion against British rule and the execution of Irish revolutionaries. T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ was revealed to have been influenced by Eliot’s Christian background. Some other poems also were analysed in details and situation informing their themes, styles and techniques were exposed.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. Write your answers in your Study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next Study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 6.1 (tests Learning Outcome 6.1)

Poets in the modernist tradition were influenced partially by technological advancement. What other factor catalyzed their revolt against the previous poetic tradition?

SAQ 6.2 (tests Learning Outcome 6.2)

What event particularly inspired ‘Easter 1916’ by Yeats?

SAQ 6.3 (tests Learning Outcome 6.3)

‘The Wasteland’ is the most important of Eliot’s poems. It is his poetic comments on modern situations: a picture of desolation, waste, spiritual aridity and waste land, of the ruin brought about by so-called modern civilization, of evils of a technological world where God seems to be dead and His place taken over by machines and cannons. What influence was at work in Eliot that made him to write this poem?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6

- SAQ 8.1 -** They were not satisfied with the Victorian poetry of Browning, Arnold and Tennyson which was either interpreting dreams, or mourning or sermonizing
- SAQ 8.2 -** The Irish rebellion against British rule and the execution of Irish revolutionaries
- SAQ 8.3 -** Eliot’s Christian background

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