
Unit -4 □ Alastor : Shelley

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4.0 □ BRIEF NOTE ABOUT SHELLEY

Born in 1792, Percy Bysshe Shelley was the only son of an aristocratic family. After his initial schooling at Eton, an exclusive public school, Shelley went to University College, Oxford in 1810, from which he was expelled the following year for having written and circulated an essay entitled **The Necessity of Atheism**. He also went against the wishes of his family by marrying a sixteen year old girl, Harriet Westbrook. This marriage however broke down in 1814, and Shelley eloped to the continent with his new love, Mary Godwin, who was then only seventeen years old. Two years later in 1816, Shelley published his first mature poem, **Alastor**.

4.1 □ ABOUT ALASTOR ; COMPOSITION

Alastor, Mary Shelley wrote in a "Note" on the poem, was composed by the poet after she, Shelley, and two of their friends Charles Clairmont and Thomas Love Peacock - had come back from a boating trip up the river. Thames is August-September 1815. The date mentioned in the "Preface" to the poem is December 14, 1815, and this is very probably the date on which Shelley flushed his poem. It was finally published in February 1816 together with a number of other poems in a volume entitled **Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude : and other Poems**.

4.2 □ THEME

In her Note on the poem, Mary Shelley observes that **Alastor** was a poem that contained “an individual note only.” By this she meant that unlike Shelley’s earlier long poem **Queen Mab** which dealt with social issues and embodied Shelley’s revolutionary ardour, **Alastor** was an essentially psychological poem. Certainly the outline of the poem proves as much, **Alastor** being a poem about the wanderings of a solitary poet through ancient and fabled cities and lands, bereft of human company. Then, as the story of the poem unfolds, one night the companionless poet has a dream of a beautiful girl who talks and sings to him before embracing him. At this point the vision of the girl vanishes from his eyes, and he awakes to continue with his journeys restless now, till he dies all alone on a mountain top.

Shelley’s visualization of his artist protagonist as a figure in isolation, cut off from traditional community bonds was part of a larger realization. Although Wordsworth had claimed that a poet was “a man speaking to men” in his **Preface to the Lyrical Ballads** (1800 edition), many other poets of the time like William Blake in his “Introduction” to the **Songs of Experience** and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the concluding lines of his poem **Kubla Khan**, represented a poet as a bardic figure estranged from his fellow men. The issues that Plato had raised concerning the source of the poet’s creativity in such of his philosophical work as the **Ion**, **Phaedrus**, and **Timaeus**, were sought to be re-examined by the poets of Shelley’s time. In England, philosophers like John Locke, George Berkely and David Hume explored the workings of the human faculty of perception, and in France the thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau gave the self of the perceiver a central place in the individual’s pursuit of the understanding of the world. Shelley’s **Alastor** in a sense engages with many of these preoccupations.

Shelley himself provided a number of useful clues as to the meaning of **Alastor** in Ms “Preface” to the poem. **Alastor**, says Shelley here’ “may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind.”

It represents a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge and is still insatiate.... So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous and tranquil and self possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the being whom he loves.....He seeks in vains for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by Ms disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.

The **Alastor** poet, in other words, is an imaginative idealist. The “magnificence and beauty of the external world” of Nature affects him profoundly, as does his deep education. However, he is a man completely immured in his own self, living in “self-centered seclusion,” and delighting in the beautiful idealizations bred in his own mind. However, after some time, “these objects cease to suffice,” and his mind desires companionship, “intercourse” or interaction, with a mind or “intelligence” akin to itself. But this appears to be impossible in Shelley’s conceptualization, and the consequence is tragic : “The poet’s self-centered seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin.”

The mind’s desire for intercourse with something similar to itself is of course a representation, an allegorization even, of the quest for love. In his “Preface” to **Alastor**, Shelley cues in this signification by providing a short citation from St. Augustine’s Confessions :

Nondum amabam, et amare amabum, quaerebam quid amarem, anians amare.

(I was not yet in love, and I loved to be in love,
I sought what I might love, in love with loving.)

In the second paragraph of his “Preface”, too, Shelley writes of two classes of people who deny the instinct of love. The first class comprises “selfish, blind, and torpid” people who are concerned with pursuing their own narrow and limited interests. The second class however consists of intellectuals who, though they are capable of love, deliberately remove themselves from the company of their fellow men. Also, if the first type of human beings are afflicted with die “curse” of being “morally dead,” the second kind, “the pure and tender-hearted perish,” according to Shelley, “through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt.” The poet depicted in *Alastor* is clearly a member of the second group.

4.2.1. SHELLEY’S IDEA OF LOVE

An elaboration of Shelley’s idea of love is to be found in his short essay **On Love**. Here he defines love as

that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brains were born anew within another’s; if we feel, we would that another’s nerves should vibrate to our own.

Shelley in all probability wrote these words at about the same time that he wrote **Alastor**, and in the poem he indicates the drawback of such a concept of love. The solitary protagonist in the poem evidently projects his self-love, or his own need for love, on to a construction of his mind. All through his life, Shelley was conscious of the possible confusion between one's love for oneself and a love for another person as that individual really is. Thus in his last poem **The triumph of life**, Shelley represents Rousseau (whom he otherwise admired) as being essentially flawed for saying and lecluring in the precept that "I was overcome / By my own heart alone." To escape from this trap of self-love seeking its own image, Shelley postulated the necessity of man's possession of both self-knowledge and of the ability to imaginatively participate in, and even become, another being. As he put it in a key passage in his **Defence of Poetry**,

love....[is] a going out of our own nature and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good [a manifestation of love] must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his (?) must become his own. The lonely poet of **Alastor** meets his tragic end presumably because he could not identify himself with "thought, action, or person" not his own.

4.2.2. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In so far as the poem itself is concerned, *Alastor* opens with two long introductory verse-paragraphs which invoke, epic-like, the "Mother of this unfathomable world" who is both Cybele, goddess of the powers of nature, as well as Necessity, which Shelley had described as the "mother of the world" in his **Queen Mab** (vi,198). Over the next hundred lines of the poem Shelley goes on to picture his poet-protagonist as a "lovely youth", whose "infancy was nurtured" by the "choicest impulses" sent from "the vast earth and ambient air." Having drunk at the "fountains of divine philosophy", the young man felt and knew "all of great/Or good or lovely, which the sacred poet / In truth or fable consecrates". Having left (like Shelley himself in 1811) his "cold fireside and alienated home," the youth lives in solitude in the midst of nature. Evidently a vegetarian, for the food he eats is "bloodless," the youth communed with birds and animals instead of with human beings. An explorer of both the secrets of nature and those "of the birth of time" or history, he voyaged through landscapes of ice and volcanoes, bitumen lakes and secret caves, as well as through the ruins of ancient cities like Athens and Memphis and Thebes, Balbec and Jerusalem and Babylon.

All through these sojournings, the young man had spumed human company and had even remained oblivious of the secret, unspoken love of an Arab maiden who brought him food and tended to his simple needs. But then one day while he was in the “loneliest dell” in the vale of Kashmir, he fell asleep and saw in his dream a vision of a “veiled maid” whose “voice was like the voice of Ms own soul/Heard in the calm of thought.” He sees her too in all her naked beauty, and finally “yielding toirrestitible joy,” embraced her and allowed her in turn to fold in turn “his frame in her dissolving arms.” But the consequence of their brief union is not pleasant, for the poet awakes shocked and bewildered, despairing over his loss of the vision.

The poet’s dream has of course a central significance in **Alastor**. On the one hand, it is clear enough from Shelley’s observations in the “Preface” to the poem that the dream represents an ideal of love conjured up in the poet’s brain by his disregard of human love. As Shelley clarifies a few lines later,

The spirit of human love has sent
A vision to the sleep of him who spumed
Her chircest gifts.

These lines refer too to the poet’s ignoring of the love offered to him by the Arab girl. But it is important to note that the poet’s dream is not merely sensual. The girl in the dream had sung of “Knowledge and truth and virtue,” of “divine liberty,” and of “poesy, Herself a poet,” topics “most dear” to the poet himself. She is indeed a reflection of his innermost desires and aspirations, and thus Shelley makes it evident that his love is a false one, for it is not directed towards another person.

Consequent upon the vanishing of the vision, the poet in Shelley’s poem begins to look for “a prototype of his conception.” But significantly enough for the unfolding logic of the poem, this “psototype” does not mean a real living girl. In fact, many maidens did begin to fall in love with him to the extent of intuiting his woe and sympathizing with him, but he invariably remained unconscious of them :

Youthful maidens, taught
By nature, would interpret half the woe
That wasted him, would call him with false names
Brother, and friend, would press his pallid hand
At parting and watch, dim through tears, the path
Of his departure from their father’s door.

The poet’s total lack of communication with his fellow human beings, indeed so transformed him into something monstrous that

the infant would conceal
His troubled visage in his mother’s robe

In terror at the glare of those wild eyes,
To remember their strange light in many a dream of after-times.

Having cut himself off from “the bond and sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists”, as Shelley put it in his essay **Of Love**, the solipsist-poet “become the living sepulchre of himself, and....is the mere husk *of* what he once was.”

The word “sepulchre” used by Shelley in the above quotation from **Of Love** is specially appropriate in the context of **Alastor**, for the poet seeks for the girl he had envisioned in sleep through the gateway of death :

That beautiful shape ! Does the dark gate of death
Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,
O Sleep?

Sleep and death had been linked by Shelley earlier in his poem **Queen Mab** (“Death and his brother Sleep” he had written), and now the **Alastor** poet is driven by a death-urge described by Shelley as a “passion” that “led him forth/Into the darkness” :

As an eagle grasped
In folds of the green serpent, feels her breast
Bum with the poison, and precipitates
Through night and day, tempest and calm, and cloud,
Frantic with dizzying anguish, her blind flight
O'er the wide airy wilderness, thus drivern
By the bright shadow of that lovely dream
Beneath the cold glare of the desolate night,
Through tangled swamps and deep precipitous dells,
Startling with careless step the moonlight snake,
He fled. Red morning dawned upon his flight,
Shedding the mockery of its vital hues
Upon his cheek of death.

Arriving at length at a melancholy marshy land, he is impelled to move to the seashore where he sees a frail broken down boat in which he embarks to “meet lone death on the chear ocean’s waste,” He spreads his cloak as a sail on the boat’s mast and immediately the boat is caught in the frenzy of the wind and the waves and propelled inexorably into the yawning mouth of a cavern opening in the side of a mountain. Following the “windings of the cavern,” the boat moves “slowly” on the river till it is caught up in a whirlpool and diverted by a “wandering stream of wind” into a tranquil and solitary cove where yellow narcissus flowers are “Reflected in the

crystal calm” of the waters therein. Now, the poet gets put of his boat and begins to walk through the dark forest till he comes to a well beside which he senses the presence of a “Spirit” which, upon “his regard.....raised by intense pensiveness”, manifests itself to him as “two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought.” “Obedient to the light/That shone within his soul,” the poet however continues in his journey, following the river to where it disappears over a “grey precipice,” plunging into an “immeasurable void,/Scattering its waters to the passing wind.” Here, the poet comes across “a tranquil spot that seemed to smile/Even in the lap of horror.” And here in the most of loveliness, the poet ultimately dies.

4.2.3 ALLEGORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

That this story has a meaning beyond its appearance as a romantic, albeit tragic, tale of adventure, Shelley made clear in his preface when he wrote that “**Alastor** may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind.” This observation indicates that Shelley was clear in his own mind that he had written a psychological poem. Remembering this, it is easy to see that both the poet’s journeys as well as the major events -and objects in the poem are clearly symbolic. The boat which carries the poet, and which has “many a rift” in its “frail sides” probably stands for the human body. The river down which it floats, now calmly, now driven, perhaps is a symbol of the course of life itself. This reading gains more strength, too when we note that Shelley explicitly indicates that it runs initially “like childhood laughing,” before flowing with a “wintry speed” and finally disappears into an “immeasurable void.” Likewise, the sea over which the poet travels must be the sea of life and death— an image Shelley was to later use in his **Adonais**. But the fact that the poet initiates his journeys, that he himself puts his cloak to use as a sail, indicates that he is ultimately responsible for his fate. Shelley in fact made this explicit enough in his “Preface” where he wrote of his poet-figure : “He seeks in vain for a prototype of Ms conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.” The poet in **Alastor** had fallen in love with his own conception of an object to be loved and consequently had turned away from all that which was external to him and was worthy of his love. In thus failing to manifest the outgoing nature of true love, he had killed the “power of love” within himself and had become (as Shelley puts it in the concluding sentence of his essay **On Love**),

“sepulchre” or tomb or embodiment of death himself.

Two of the earliest commentators on the poem— Shelley’s wife Mary and his friend Thomas Love Peacock— have also thrown light on the meaning of **Alastor**. In his **Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley**, Peacock claimed that it was he who had suggested the title of Shelley’s poem : **Alastor : or, the Spirit of Solitude**. “The Greek word [Alastor] is an evil genius”, wrote Peacock. “The poem treated the spirit

of solitude as a spirit of evil. I mention the true meaning of the word because many have supposed Alastor to be the name of the hero.” Shelley must have accepted this title since he felt that the “spirit of solitude” was indeed the moral and evil antithesis of the spirit of love. But that the poem had also a personal genesis is indicated by Mary Shelley in her note on the poem in her edition of the **Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley**. As Mary Shelley indicates, from 1811 onwards, after he had been expelled from Oxford, lost the love of Harriet, and had been driven out from home by his father, Shelley’s life had been marked by “the various ills of poverty and [the] loss of friends... [and] Physical sufferings”. The pursuit of love and the thought of death had been ideas present in Shelley’s mind a few months before his writing of Alastor, and they do seem to have affected the choice of his theme. Of course it is only too easy to over-stress the autobiographical element in the poem, but even without a knowledge of this it is possible to respond to and be moved by the strange beauties of the poem, by the fantasy landscapes which are representative of a mental mimescape of obsession and enclosedness.

4.4 □ SAMPLE QUESTIONS :

● **A. LONG ANSWER TYPE :**

1. What is Shelley enquiring into in Alastor? Does he reach a satisfactory conclusion?
2. Describe Shelley’s view of the poet as it emerges in Alastor.
3. Write a note on Shelley’s use of imagery with special reference to Alastor.
4. Who or what is “Alastor” ? Consider in this context the appropriateness of the title of Shelley’s poem Alastor.
5. What typical features of Shelley’s poetic art are exemplified in his Alastor? Illustrate your answer with references to the text of the poem.

● **B. SHORT ANSWER TYPE :**

1. Discuss the significance of the Poet’s dream in Shelley’s Alastor.
2. “Red morning dawned upon his flight, Shedding the mockery of its vital hues Upon his cheek of death.”
Comment critically on these lines and bring out their significance in the context of the poem from which they have been quoted.

4.5 □ RECOMMENDED READING :

The text of *Alastor* can be found in many editions of Shelley's poems. A good one is the Norton **Shelley's Poetry and Prose**, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, New York : Norton, 1977. A good biography of the poet is Richard Holmes' **Shelley : The Pursuit**, London : Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974.

CRITICAL STUDIES :

- (1) Kenneth Neill Cameron : **Shelley : The Golden Years**, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974.
- (2) Donald H. Reiman : **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, New York: Twayne, 1969.
- (3) Patrick Swinden (ed.) : **Shelley : Shorter Poems and Lyrics**, London : Macmillan. 1976.
- (4) Earl Wasserman : **Shelley : A Critical Reading**, Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1971.
- (5) Timothy Webb : **Shelley : A Voice Not Understood**, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- (6) Stuart M. Sperry : **Shelley's Major Verse : The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry**, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1988.

Unit -5 □ The Major Odes : John Keats

Structure

- 5.0 Keats and the Tradition of the Ode in English
- 5.1 Ode to Psyche : Critical Analysis
- 5.2 Ode to a Nightingale : Critical Analysis
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- 5.5 Ode on Melancholy : Critical Analysis
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- 5.7 Sample Questions
- 5.8 Recommended Reading

(Ode To Psyche, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode on Indolence, Ode to Melancholy, To Autumn)

5.0 □ KEATS AND THE TRADITION OF THE ODE IN ENGLISH

Even though Keats had begun to write odes as early as 1815 when he was still an apprentice surgeon-apothecary, it was only in 1819 that in a burst of astonishing creativity he composed over a few months his greatest odes - **Ode to Psyche, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode on Indolence, Ode on Melancholy and To Autumn**. The exact order in which Keats composed these odes is largely a matter of conjecture, but scholars generally agree that **Psyche** which Keats wrote out in his Journal-letter to George and Georgiana Keats on 30 April, 1819, is the first that Keats composed, and that this was followed by the **Nightingale, Grecian Urn** and **Indolence** odes all written in the month of May, at the end of which month Keats also wrote the **Ode on Melancholy. To Autumn**, finally, was written on 19 September 1819.

Before Keats, the ode-form had been “naturalized” in English by a number of poets. The classical models of Pindar (c. 522-442 B.C.) in Greek and Horace (65-8 B.C.) in Latin both contributed in feeling and form to the English ode. The first ode in the English language, Ben Johnson’s ode “To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Gary and Sir H. Morison” (1629), was a deliberate attempt to reproduce in English the complicated stanza forms of the Pindaric ode. The Horation model, which was more personal and reflective, was imitated by Andrew Marvell in his “Horation Ode upon Comwell’s Return from Ireland.” Later in the same century, Abraham Cowley’s collection **Miscellanies** (1656) made popular a kind of “irregular” or free Pindaric Ode which did away with the strict Pindaric form of conforming to a pattern of “strophe” (i.e. the chorus in Greek tragedy moving singing or chanting from right to left), “antistrophe” (movement from left to right), and “epode” (the chorus standing still), and allowed instead the poet to use variable rhyme schemes, numbers of lines and line-lengths. In the Romantic age, poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats used the ode form to effect on social, personal and aesthetic themes either meditatively or descriptively, or both. Hence, apart from Keats’ great odes, we have instances of such highly philosophical and emotional odes as Wordsworth’s **Ode on Intimation of Immortality**, Coleridge’s **France : an Ode** and **Dejection: an Ode**, and Shelley’s **Ode to the West Wind**, **Ode to Liberty** and **Naples**.

5.1 □ ODE TO PSYCHE : CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In so far as Keats’ odes are concerned, it is difficult to categorize them beyond saying that they are intensely personal, deeply speculative, and extremely idealistic or philosophic. The first of the major odes – **Ode to Psyche** – Keats claimed in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats of 30 April 1819, he had taken “moderate pain” over. The legend that Keats drew upon is that of Psyche, the human soul, who so excited the jealousy of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, by her beauty that she (Aphrodite) sent her son Cupid to harm Psyche. However, Cupid fell in love with Psyche and used to visit her by night without disclosing his real identity. Ultimately, Aphrodite forgave Psyche who was subsequently made immortal, though never worshipped as a goddess. Keats has come across the legend of Psyche in Apuleius, **The Golden Ass** in William Adlington’s translation of 1566, and in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats he thus wrote : “You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist, who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancients forever.” In fact, it is because Psyche never received only

traditional worship, that Keats can make her an icon of the cult of beauty of which he visualizes himself the “priest.”

The poem itself begins with a kind of an inversion of a Miltonic intexts, Keat lines “O Goddess! Hear these tuneless number, wrung/By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear” both evoking and reversing the tragic undertones of Milton’s remembrance of his dead friend Edward King in **Lycidas** : “Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear.” Indeed, both like and unlike **Lycidas** which is a poem about death and transfiguration, **Ode to Psyche** is one about the passing away of what had been a “fact” in the classical past and its revival by a modern poet. On a different key, however, Keats’ poem is a love or nuptial ode, presenting Psyche as an erotic goddess-in-love, first in the opening 23 lines of the poem and again at its conclusion. Yet, these descriptions do not completely exhaust the significant meanings of this ode, for it is also about as its name suggests the creative mind of the poet. In deed, Ode to Psyche celebrated the potency of the artist’s imagination to recreate, albeit mentally or conceptually, the exact shape of nature, myth and history lost through the erosions of time. This explains too the repetitive or derivative structure of the poem as Keats moves from the acknowledgment that Psyche had no

virgin choir to make delicious moan upon the midnight hours;

No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet.

From chain-swung censer teeming; No shrine or grove, no oracle, no heat of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming,

to the assertion that he will compensate for all these **gregarious** lacks through the reparative agency of his function as a poet-priest :

So let me be thy choir and make a moan

Upon the midnight hours.

Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet

From swinged censer teeming.

Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat

of pale month’d prophet dreaming.

The creative aspects of the Psyche mind are also foregrounded right at the beginning of the poem when Keats writes:

Surely I chant today or did I see

The winged Psyche with awakened eyes’?

The dream vision, as in his description of Adam’s dream (“he awoke and found it truth- letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817), is Keats way of affirming

the reality of the imagined perspective. The postcoital slumber of the goddess to be and her lover is thus brought to life, the imagined mythological details of calm-breathing, arms embracing lips not touching but not having bade adieu, being a mirroring of the reality of Keats, relationship with Fanny Brawne, then at Wentworth Place near Keats.

But if the past underlines the present, so too does the present constitute the past. In Hymn to Psyche, Keats had intended to evoke the “large utterance of the early Gods” but had failed. In **Ode to Psyche** however, Keats speaks authoritatively of his own present ability to evoke the past :

Yet even in these days so far retired
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.

“So let me be thy choir”, writes Keats, and he subsequently asserts: “**I will be thy priest**” [emphasis added]. And so he goes on to create his duplication of Psyche’s now-lost paradise within the infinite spaces of his “working brain.” Here, there are sleeping Dryads or wood-nymphs lying on banks of moss just as Psyche and Cupid had bedded down on grass, “lull’d to sleep” by the soft music of the wind passing through the “branched thoughts” of the poet, all sited within a “rosy sanctuary dressed “with the wreath’d trellis of a working brain,” and adorned “with all the gardener Fancy e’er could feign.” This last reference to “the gardener Fancy” directs our attention to Keats’ poem **Fancy** which came immediately after the **Ode to Psyche** in his 1820 volume of poems and in which he wrote of Fancy as capable of bringing together

All delights of summer weather;
All the buds and bells of May,
From dewy sward or thorny spray,
All the heaped Autumn’s wealth.

Yet, it is well to remember that the last stanza of **Ode-to Psyche** is not descriptive of a total restitution of Psyche’s lost past. “Dark-cluster’d trees” for instance have replaced the pine forest, the “brooklet” transformed into “streams”, the colourful flowers substituted by mental ones, and most important of all, the immortal lovers are quite absent. The last pictorial tableau in fact represents a mind made alluring for Psyche to inhabit. In this sense, the poem represents not an achievement but an anticipation, Keats forward-looking or futuristic apprehension” of a reality yet to be constituted. Thus does **Ode to Psyche** span the temporal zones of past (the mythology), the present (Keats’ singing or writing of his poem), and the future (“I will be thy

priest, and build a fane....”A rosy sanctuary will I dress....”)- But beneath all this lies Keats central preoccupation in the poem— his idealization of Love and Beauty and his conceptualization of himself as a priest-participant in the worship of these immutable values.

Of course, notice must be taken too of Keats’ craftsmanship in this ode. The “sensuous” Keats is very much in evidence in **Ode to Psyche** with a single line like “Mid hush’d cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed” evoking a range of sensations from those of hearing (“hush’d”), touch (“cool”), smell (“fragrant”), and sight (“rooted flowers”). The complexity of the sensory experience provoked is here instanced best by the compound image “fragrant eyed” which not only refers to the olfactory and visual sensations together but images the object seen or contemplated as the physical organ of visual sight. Yet, there is much more involved here than a superficial sensuousness. The complete reconciliation of object and perception is symptomatic of Keats idealized fusion of Love (the Body/Flesh) and Beauty (an imaginative or mental construct continuous with Truth, as Keats famous declaration “what the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth”, illustrates). Certainly Ode to Psyche may be read “more richly”, as Keats asserted in his 30 April letter to George and Georgiana Keats.

5.2 □ ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE : CRITICAL ANALYSIS

If Ode to Psyche was “done leisurely,” Ode to a Nightingale was’ composed, according to Charles Annet Brown in whose garden Keats heard the nightingale sing, in a matter of “two or three hours” only. This makes Keats’ accomplishment all the more unique, for as generations of readers have attested, the poem is a near-perfect work of art.

Poems on nightingales were not unusual in Keats own age; Coleridge, with whom he had discussed “Nightingales, Poetry” three weeks before writing his ode, had composed a poem on a Nightingale too. But it is important to note that Keats’ ode is really not on the bird proper, but on its song, and that when he writes “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird,” he actually refers to the song of the bird which has remained unchanged over the countless generations of human existence. However, neither the Nightingale nor its song is the sole focus of Keats’ ode, for the poem is also centrally about the poet and his fancy. The ode begins in fact with the sensory and feeligful locus of the poet’s sense of pain and enervation as he contemplates, too happily, the happiness of the bird manifest in its singing “of summer in full-throated ease”,

In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows number less.

The poet's identification with the bird is terms of a shamed ecstasy of happiness in however under shadowed by an implicit death-wish. This is what Keats implies when he writes in the very first quatrain of the poem as having drunk hemlock or some ammesiac drug ("opiate") mat makes him sink, as it were, "Ledie-wosds". The some wish of self-annihilation, or at least desire for oblivion, runs through the second stanza in Keats longing or "a draught of vintage." The initial imagined attributes of and associations with, the wine link the second stanza with the first. The detail of the "deep-delved earth" is related to the "melodious plot" and to the poet's sinking lethe-words. The words "country green" refer back to the "bechem green" in the frist stanza, and "Flora...../Dance, and Provencal song, and suubumt mirth" are related to die invocation of summer by the bird's song in the last line of the first stanza. But this is not all, for the wine, a bacchic intoxicant, is also an "opiate", even as Keats forces upon it the attribute of the real drink of inspiration, of Hippocrene which was the sacred fountain of the Muses on Mount Helicon.

The word "fade" next links the third stanza with the second as Keats follows "And with thee fade away into the forest dim" with "Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget....." But significantly enough, their wishes for oblivion dissolution and evanescence reinforce in the poet's mind the stality of suffering existent in the quotidian world. Human beings, Keats suggests, are prey to diseases and afflictions, to pain and worry realities of mortal human existence the bird "among the leaves hast never known." Yet, Keats is not as focussed in his perception as this description may suggest. Perhaps because of the "drowsy numbness" he had admitted to at the opening of his poem, or perhaps because of the wine he imagines he might drink, Keats' listing of the illls the mortal flesh is susceptible to is an amorphous cluster of generatizations and symbolizations or allegorizations. Thus we are offered first a general panorama of "weariness....fever....felt", and a representation of the world as a place "where men sit and he as each other groan," before being given the personified figure of palsy shaking" a few, sad, last grey hairs" and of youth growing "pale, and specte-tliim" and dying. Neither does Keats discriminate between this death and the escapist one he longs for, for even in his acknowledgement that "to think is to be full of sorrow," he forgets mat he has been thinking of the happiness he may gain upon union with the bird. Thus now, he can only think of die ravages wrought upon Beauty and Love by time :

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Upto this point in his poem, Keats had been driven by the urge to deny his own

self and his human identity. But in the fourth stanza he implicitly acknowledges his own human condition, admitting even to his possession of a “dull brain”, even as he takes on “the wings of Poesy” in his endeavour to join the Nightingale in its shadowy, leafy bower. This is easily, even instantly achieved - “Already with thee!” is Keats’ joyous exclamation of accomplished pleasure and he enters the paradisaical enclosure of sensory pleasure :

Already with thee! tender is the night.
And haphly the Queen Moon is on her Throne,
Cluster’d around by all her stary Fays.
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

The operative word here is “heaven” which refers both directly to the night sky lit up by the moon and the stars and indirectly to the darkness covered inner-chamber inside the tree which is described with great particularity in the next (the fifth) stanza. The function of imagination, of thought, continues here as Keats “guesses” the flowers around him and creates in the process a virtual world of verdure and efflorescence continuous in both time and space. The sense of space is, for instance, suggested as Keats speaks of the “flowers.....at my feet” and then goes on to mention the boughs above him, before implying a similar spatial stratification through his references to the “grass” on the ground, to the “fir-tree” reaching up to the sky, and to the “thicket” mid-way between ground and sky. And somewhat similarly is the order of time explicated in this stanza with the “Fast fading violets” of Spring being succeeded by the “coming musk-rose” of Summer. But of course this is not the time, damaging and destructive, that had figured in the third stanza, but one that substitutes one delight with another.

From this bower of sensuous bliss, a world parallel to ours but superior in its possession of a time that is generative and a beauty that replenishes itself, Keats moves in the sixth stanza to himself once again. “Darkling I listen,” he writes in reminiscence of Milton’s lines on the nightingale in **Paradise Lost** Book III (ll. 39-41):

.....the wakeful Bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal note.....

But where in the leafy bower in the fifth stanza of his ode Keats had had his sensuous imagination sharpened by the darkness around him, in the sixth stanza of **Ode to a Nightingale** the darkness triggers off in his mind intimations of mortality. “Now more than ever seems it rich to die,” reflects Keats,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul aliroad
In such an ecstasy!

The richness of this death-without-pain at the height of an almost orgasmic pleasurance would seem to be the most perfect of escapes from the miseries of human existence Keats had catalogued in stanza III. But on the brink of surrendering to “easeful death”, Keats remembers Claudio’s convulsive terras at the thought of becoming “a kneaded clod” (**Measure for Measure**, Act III, Sc, 1, l. 120). Death, he realizes would rob him of his senses—the magic casement of hearing in particular—and he would become “to thy high requiem....a sod,”

From this anticipation of his own death, Keats moves reflexively to an imagined realization of the deathlessness of the Nightingale. In the bird’s song, there is no trace of death and so it overarches above the hungry generations. Through time and change, through social and religious history, the bird-song has remained constant, having had sounded in the ears of both emperors and peasants (“clown”) and perhaps had moved Rutes who in the Bible is referred to as gleaning in the field of Buaz. But this is not all, for moving forward from the vistas of history Keats enters in his imagination (as he has “oft-times” done) into a perception of “faerie lands forlorn.” The song of the Nightingale, in other words, had acted as a stimuler to the opening by the imagination of a window in the mind and the visualization of a scenario not benign but fearful and awesome, and not full of objects but empty and lonely and deserted—the very antithesis of the thickly populated bower which had been the Nightingale’s haunt.

Tin’s vision of lack, of solitude and desertion, is summed up by the last word of the seventh stanza “forlorn” — which also begins the eighth and last stanza of Keats’ ode. So long, the sound of the Nightingale’s song had moved Keats to thought and imagination. Now the sound of the word “forlorn” in his own mind reverberates like a death— knell signalling the death of the imaginative flight of the poet. Hence Keats laments the feeble magic of the Fancy, its inability to sustain the illusion of immortality in the company of the bird. And as if to underscore the termination of the poet’s short lived union with the bird, the Nightingale itself leaves its leafy bower for “the next valley-glades.” To the disillusioned poet, its song is now only a “plaintive an them” or dirge and the destination it finds for itself has association with death and burial :”and now ’tis buried deep” (emphasis added). And the ode itself concludes with two last bewildered questions to which Keats himself has no answers :

Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is
that music :- Do I wake or sleep?

Perhaps it is not a little due to the magic of Keats' poetic craftsmanship that generations of readers hungry for meaning have not decried this inconclusiveness of Keats at the conclusion of his poem, but have instead shared empathically his indecision and wonder. The perfection of the poem is as much a technical accomplishment as an emotional one. In **Ode to a Nightingale** Keats used for the first time a new ten-line stanza formed out of a happy union of a Shakespearean sonnet-quatrain, viz. abab, with a Petrarchan sestet : cdecde. There are also a host of literary and cultural intertexts which Keats employs to give additional fibre— intellectual and aesthetic—to his poem. These range from allusions to classical personages (e.g. “hemlock” resonant of Socrates) and myths (“Lethe,” “Dryad”, “Hippocrene”), to Biblical figures (“Ruth”) and more purely literary evocations and interpolations like the phrase “the fever, and the fret” which recalls Wordsworth’s line in **Tintern Abbey** : “the fretful unprofitable, and the fever of the world,” or “Darkling” from Milton’s “wakeful Bird/sings darkling.” There are also more submerged references to contexts in Sophocles and Spenser, and Shakespeare, but what is also noticeable is the way in which Keats adapts the “turn” in the classical ode from strophe to antistrophe to his own purpose at the end of Stanza vi and the beginning of stanza vii, as he shifts from a recognition of his own mortal condition to the deathlessness of the “immortal Bird.”

What is also interesting to note about **Ode to a Nightingale** is that despite being a poem ostensibly about bird, song, it also mediates a visual experience of no mean order. Whether the image of “the blushful Hippocrene,/With beaded bubble winking at the brim,/And purple-stained mouth”, or whether the description of the “Queen-Moon.....on her throne/Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays,” **Ode to a Nightingale** is full of pictures. There are two references, too, to real paintings that Keats had seen, his line about “Bacchus and his Pards” being inspired by Titian’s painting **Bacchus and Ariadne** which depicts leopards drawing Bacchus’s chariot and the words “Charm’d magic casements” recalling Claude Lorraine’s picture **The Enchanted Castle** which Keats had written about in his **Epistle to Reynolds**. In the case of **Ode on a Grecian Urn**, however, Keats in writing this poem did not have any single Greek urn in mind. It in fact seems more probable that Keats fused together in his mind illustrations from two Greco-Roman vases, illustrations of which he had seen in F. and P. Piranesi’s book **Les monuments antiques de la Ville de Rome** (1763), and his memory of the earlier Greek style of sculpture as represented in the Parthenon frieze which Lord Elgin had brought to London and had displayed.

5.3 □ ODE ON A GRECIAN URN : CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Written in May 1819, **Ode on a Grecian Urn** was first published in the **Annals of the Fine Arts**, a contemporary journal devoted to the appreciation of Greek

artistic artifacts. The ode indeed is an expression of Romantic Hellenism in both form and style. The stanzas are regular, the title with its inclusion of the preposition “on” pointing to the poem’s preoccupation with its subject, and the opening address (an apostrophe, a classical figure of speech) direct. There is also an implicit impersonality in so far as the speaker is concerned, Keats not obtruding his personal feelings and emotions as he had done in **Ode to a Nightingale**, but maintaining through out a kind of, classical poise, objectivity or detachment in his contemplation of and meditation upon, the Urn. Even is imagery in the **Grecian Urn** ode is restrained, there bring few synaesthetic details.

The theme of the poem is a meditation on— and a mediation between— Art, life and Truth which Keats as a poet and thinker was increasingly coming to confront. The famous opening lines of the poem—

Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness,
Thou foster child of silence and show lime,
sylvan historian.....

with the poem on the word “still” (meaning both “as yet” and “motionless”) and the stress on the Urn’s relationship with both “quietness” and “silence”, “slow time” and history, evoke the aura of something inscrutable yet provocative. Not that the Urn is mute, for as Keats goes on to add, it can “express/A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.” yet, Keats makes it clear too that the Urn does not speak out for and by itself. As a historian, it is a recorder of the traces of the past, an archive or store of presentations no longer extant but which excite the viewer to intense speculation:

What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? what struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

What is noticeable about these questions which contain their own answer is that they first define the Urn as a Greek artifact pure and simple. The motif of a fringe or garland of leaves was characteristic of Attic or Greek vases in particular, while Tempe (a valley in Thessaly) and Arcady (a district associated with the worship of the Greek god Pan) are locations specific to Greece. But the classical spirit that is evoked here (particularly in the subsequent questions) is one more of a Dionysian energy than an Apollonian restraint. For here there are gods and men and women, “mad pursuit” and “struggle to escape,” the music of the “pipes and timbrels,” and an overall “wild ecstasy.” Also, and a more technical detail, this, the evocations in

Thus, the first stanza of the ode, lead on to, or introduce, Keats deeper speculations about the music and about the bold lover and his coy mistress in the second stanza of the poem.

It Keats 'attention had been fixed upon the Grecian Urn itself in the first stanza, in the second his imagination has more free play. The "sensual ear" being limited and deaf to the toneless melodies being played by the piper sculpted on the Urn's side, the "spirit" is the site where the music works its magic. Then, this acknowledgement of a limitation and the perception of a mode or path of transcendence is extended to the trees and human figures depicted on the surface of the Urn. As Keats puts it's the trees can never be bare, the lover will forever love, and the maiden will be forever beautiful and alluring.

This realization of the enduring perfection of artistic representations leads Keats to apostrophize" the "happy, happy boughs" and the "more happy, happy love" in the third stanza. The word "still" in the line "For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd" reflexively reminds us of the Urn as the "still unravish'd bride," while the notion of temporality, of eternal permanence even, in the reiterated words "for ever" ("For ever piping...for ever new....For ever warm....For ever panting....for ever young") put us in mind of the Urn as the foster child of "slow time."

Happiness and permanence however are qualities that human kind sadly lacks, and this is the thesis that Keats spells out over the next few lines of his ode :

All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

There is much that is personal in this description, the first two lines perhaps referring to his own love affair with Fanny Browne, and the last line to the symptoms of tuberculosis, disease Keats had seen his brother Tom die of.

The shadow of the personal but is nowhere to be found in the fourth and next stanza of the ode. In this stanza Keats gazes upon the third mimetic representation of human activity carved on the Urn's side— a scene depicting a religious procession with a priest at its head leading a ceremonially decorated heifer to a ritual sacrifice. As in the previous stanzas, the picture in this one leads Keats to intense thought and speculation, and so he asks questions about the identity of the people depicted their destination, the priest, and even about their original habitation. As in the first stanza where Keats had asked question after question, so too here do the queries point to the fact that artworks are not purely aesthetic objects cut off from the responses typical of life, but powerful mediators between the accomplishments of the past and the self emotions of the present. This is why Keats' imagination is set off once again

by the picture of the processionists. In stanzas II and III his imagination, similarly stimulated by the panels on the Urn, had imagined the musicians playing in the present and the future. In stanza IV in a sort of temporal back-flow, he imagines the “little town” of the processionists to be empty forever “and not a soul to tell/ Why thou art desolate”.

Like the word “forlorn” in the **Nightingale** ode, the word “desolate” in **Grecian Urn** signals a turn in the poem. In this stanza at the end, it is as if Keats stands back from his close scrutiny of and imaginative engagement with the pictures on the Urn and looks not at its parts but at the urn as a whole. The disengagement of the earlier empathic imagination is indicated not only by the words used to describe the Urn — “shape” and “attitude” — but also by the fact that the men and maidens are no longer seen as human beings possessing passion and energy and commitment, but as “marble” men and maidens. That the “forest branches and the trodden weed” are not real is suggested by the word “brede” used of theirs, which means “braid” or “ornament” a word suggestive of human artifice. And suddenly the Urn is no longer expressive on its own but a “silent form”.

Yet, as Keats stresses, silent or not, the Urn has the power to “tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity.” Like the quality of eternity— everlastingness the Urn too has the power of transcending the ravages of time and the hungry generations, even as it holds a paradoxical balance between the coldness of marble and the warmth of the pastoral : “Cold Pastoral!” This is only one of the many appellations or inane or descriptive epithets that Keats had eyed of the Urn. A “bride” and a foster-child”, 011 “Attic shape”, a “Fair attituded” and a “silent form”, the Urn finally takes on the avatar of a friend to man.” And it is as this humanized entity that it tells all those who contemplate it,

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

Behind these lines there perhaps lie many of the “speculations” Keats had indulged in while writing to his friends. To Benjamin Bailey on 22 November 1817 he had thus written :

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart’s affections
and the truth of Imagination what the Imagination seizes as
Beauty must be truth— whether it existed before or not.....

and to John Hamilton Reynolds on 3 May 1818....

Axioms in philosophy [truth] are not axioms till they are proved
upon our pulses [beauty].

What these contexts indicate is that Keats realized that the imagination is as

order of intellectual activity as likely to apprehend the truth behind human existence as rational or philosophical discrimination. Works of art like the *Urn* bring both emanations or realized products of imagination as well as encouragers or inciters of imagination in the beholder, are receptacles of truth holding in the perfection of their shapes or forms the answer to restless humanity's perpetual quest for meaning and order, and symmetry.

5.4 □ ODE ON INDOLENCE : CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Clearly a lesser accomplishment in both poesy and philosophy is Keats' **Ode on Indolence** which though probably composed in May 1819, was not published in Keats 1820 volume of poems. The mood which gave birth to this poem is recorded in the journal-letter to George and Georgiana Keats which Keats wrote on 19 March, 1819 :

This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless : I long after a stanza or two of Thompson's *Castle of Indulgence*. My passions are all asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven..... Neither poetry nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me : they seem rather like three figures on a Greek vase a Man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise.

Both the morning indolence and the passing by of the figures representing Poetry, Ambition, and Love without any temperamental arousal as mentioned in Keats letter, recur in **Ode on Indolence** :

They pass'd, like figures on a marble Urn,
When shifted round to see the other side;
They came again; as when the urn once more
Is shifted round, the first seen shades return;
And they were strange to me.

Certainly but for a moment only, Keats is aroused from his lassitude :

A third time pass'd they by, and passing, turn'd
Each one the face a moment while to me;
Then faded, and to follow them I turn'd
And ached for wings.....

But what is important to note is that to Keats in his present mood of indolence, neither Love, nor Ambition, nor "my demon Poesy" has the power or the ability to rouse him— to "raise/My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass."

Not that **Ode on Indolence** is a poem that enacts an absence of motion. As the vase is turned around and around, the figures on it step, pass, shift, and return, to use Keats own verbs. But the point of the Ode is that such movement amount to a complete “notliingness” (line 20), an implication further underscored by the typification of the three figures themselves as insubstantial “shadows,” “ghosts” and “phantoms. Yet, this Ode does not escape its own paradox of being a poem about a reluctance to envision, to create or compose. The epigraph to this Ode which Keats sourced from the Bible— “They toil not , neither do they spin (Mathew, chapter VI, verse 28)— directs our attention to the lilies, God’s creations of Beauty which are meaningful because they are beautiful. Like the Biblical lilies, the imagined poet in **Ode on Indolence** is indolent at its beginning and at its end. But like the lilies too, indolence is a thing of beauty in this ode.

5.5 □ ODE ON MELANCHOLY : CRITICAL ANALYSIS ;

If the germ of **Ode on Indolence** came from Keats own feeling, **Ode on Melancholy** which was written at the end of Mny 1819, was inspired by his reading of a section in Robert Burton’s **Anatomy of Melancholy** entitled “Against Melancholy itseef”. Keats first wrote but then cancelled an original opening stanza which had figured Gothic representations like a ghostly bark made of human bones as instances of misguided routes to the apprehension of Melancholy. This omission of the projected first stanza gives the ode its sudden, dramatic, opening in which neither Melancholy nor the poet is made the subject but rather the reader who is identified as a quester in search of Melancholy:

No, no, go not to lethe. neither twist
 Wolfs-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
 Nor suffer they pale forehead to be kiss’d
 By nightshade, ruley grape of Proserpcine
 Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Yous mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
 A partner in your sorrow’s mysteries.....

The point of all these injunctions is meant to be educative. None of the traditional mythological (“Lethe”, “Proserpine”, the goddes of the underworld and consort of nightshade or popular (“wolfs-bave”, “nightshade”, “yew-berries”, “beetle”, “death-moth”) - evocations of mortality are effective enough to enable one to experience to its greatest intensity : “the wakeful anguish of the soul.” “Shade to shade will come too drowsily,” Keats writes of such a wooing of Melancholy, “And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.” A better way is suggested in the second stanza in which the

quester is advised to turn to naturalized beauty— “a morning rose,” “The rainbow of the salt sand-wave”, “the wealth of globed peonies”, and the “peerless eyes” of a mistress.

The rationale behind this selection and recommendation is that beauty is fleeting. This in fact is the realization that the poem moves forward to in its third stanza in a kind of apotheosis of the logic that had driven it from its beginning.

In the Nightingale’s song and in the Attic shape of the Urn, Keats had visualized a beauty that was unfading and permanent, had conceived of a joy that was never ending and had identified a pleasure that was continuous. In *Melancholy* however Keats as it were looks in the shadows of these presences. Thus here we are introduced to the three allegorized figures of “Beauty that must die,” “Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips bidding adieu,” and “aching Pleasure”. These three are the true companions and associates of *Melancholy*, according to Keats, and so

In the very temple of delight
Veil’d *Melancholy* has her sovran shrine.

This shrine of *Melancholy* is similar to that of *Moneta*, the priestess in Keats’ **The Fall of Hyperion**, which more could ascend to “But those to whom the miseries of the world/ Are misery, and will not let them rest.” Somewhat similarly in the lives he wrote in **Melancholy** a few months before composing the ones in **The Fall of Hyperion**, Keats suggests that only the protagonist whose “strenuous tongue/ Can burst joy’s grape against his palate fine” can enter the hallowed shrine of the goddess *Melancholy*. On one level, the word “strenuous” with its implications of forceful, even heroic, exertion categorizes the desirable strength of the epic quester. But on another level, perhaps there is a play on the word “tongue” in an oblique reference to Keats’ articulation of his advice, literally the speaking out of his poem.

5.6 □ ODE TO AUTUMN ; CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In a crucial way, *Ode on Melancholy* looks forward to *Ode to Autumn* which was written on 19 September 1819. Like the former poem, Keats had deviously attempted to rob *Melancholy* of its sting by imagining *Melancholy* not as a hunter but as the hunted, not as a pursuer but as the object of a quest. In the *Autumn* ode he similarly seeks to lay the ghost of his disquietude, to overcome his anxiety and tension at the inexorable onward drift of the tide of death and dissolution by acknowledging transience by embracing change. The poem began in Keats’ mind during or after a mid-September walk in the countryside near Winchester and his sighting of a harvested field in *Autumn*. As he wrote to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds in a letter on 21 September 1819,

How beautiful the season is now. How fine the air. A temperate shapness about it Really, without joking, chaste weather— Dian skies I never lik'd stubble field as much as now— Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm— in the same way that some pictures look warm— this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.

Perhaps the clear weather (“Dian skies”) and the warmth of the season (“better than the chilly green of the spring”) prompted Keats meditation, for Autumn unlike the spring and early summer odes of 1819 exudes an air of calmness. Where the earlier odes of Keats written in the same year had been full of passion and intensity, **To Autumn** is far more balanced and more objective than personal. Its core instinct is that of maturity in the sense of Edgar’s hard won wisdom in Shakespeare’s **King Lear** - “ripeness is all”. And so the ode denies neither the songs of spring, nor the plenitude of summer, nor the exhaustion of autumn, nor the bleakness of winter, but embraces them all. . .

It is conventional to characterize the three stanzas of the poem as being indicative of the three seasons of summer, winter, and autumn respectively, or as signalling the three phases of a single day morning, afternoon and evening. This temporal ordering is also intricately worked out in the organized body of the poem. Right at the beginning of the poem, for instance, we read of the “maturing” sun and later go on to read of warm days apparently never ceasing. These indications of time-in-flow are arrested in the second stanza which effectively grasps the essence of a temporal stasis in the images of Autumn “sitting careless “and” sound asleep.” In the third-stanza, time is regressed, as it were in flash back, as Keats asks “where are the songs of Spring?” But this is not all for Keats also plots out his poem in space moving from (in the first stanza) the cottage to the garden outside, to (in the second stanza) the granary, the threshing yard, and the half-reaped field of crops, to (in the third stanza) the sky above and the stubble plains below the river shallows at a distance and the hilly bank nearby. The entire effect is one of a pulsation— of an enlargement of vision from the thatched-roof to the sky and then its constriction to a foregrounded field of vision which includes the garden croft and the lower air where the swallows titter. And this special effect is evocative of the flow and ebb of the processes of life itself.

Critics of **To Autumn** have noted, too other complexities in the poem. The imagery of the first stanza is evidently synaesthetic, for instance, while that in the second is primarily visual, and mainly auditory in the third. Also, fruits and flowers figure prominently in the first stanza human forms in the second and insects, birds and animals in the third. All these details apparently enmesh the poem in a texture of naturalism and it seems that in **To Autumn** Keats looked not to mythology as he

had done for the writing of *Psyche*, nor to a work of art like a **Grecian urn**, and not even to a feeling (**Indulgence**) pure and simple, but to the reality of the English landscape he was so intimately familiar with. Yet to say only this would be to ignore the rich and complex intertextuality resident in the poem. In writing **To Autumn** Keats indeed chew upon Ms readings of Shakespeare (**King Lear** and Sonnet No. 12), Spenser's *Mutability Cantos*, Milton's *II Pensive*, Thomson's *Seasons* (especially *Autumn*) and even *Vergil's Georgics*. Evidence of Keats extensive reading surfaces in echoed words and phrases the "moss'd cottage trees" and the "thatch-eves" (for instance) recur from Coleridge's **Frost'at Midnight is** which poem Coleridge writes of the "mossy apple tree "and" the aigh thatch.....whether the eve dropsfall", (11.74-5) the reaper with his hook comes from Spenser's allegorized *Autumn* who holds "in his hand a sickle," and loading and blessing *Autumn* from Shakespeare's "teeming autumn big with rich increase/ Bearing the waston burttes of the prime" (Sonnet 97).

Of course **To Autumn** can be read and enjoyed even by a reader who has no access to the literary "sources" of the poem, but knowledge of these lead one to appreciate even more deeply the craftsmanship of Keats as a poet. The echoed words, phrases and images have a greater resonance for their having been used before by other great poets. At the same time, Keats leaves his predecessors behind in forging his own meanings and tropes out of the material of his inheritance. In *Autumn* particularly, we have a fusion of poesy and philosophy, technical skill and accomplishment embodying vision and realization to perfection. This may be seen particularly in the way in which Keats uses lexical and syntactic devices. The first stanza for example, is full of infinitives ("bend", "fill", "swell", "plump") which are never given a finite verb. This evokes a sense of ceaseless maturation of a continuing extension into the future which is also implied at the ode's end where the "lamb's loud bleat", the "hedge-cricket's sing", the "red-breast whistles" and the "gathering swallows titter," now of these living beings are acknowledged to lie within the pale of death in the *Autumn* ode. Instead Keats states explicitly that it is only the "day" and the "wind" that is subject to death and as we all know, these natural processes are undying.

A case may be made out, as indeed it has, for the thesis that Keats' odes enact a sort of development from the fear of death and dissolution to a placid and quiet acceptance of the flow of life itself. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt however that in six golden months of creativity in 1819, Keats was possessed by feelings and emotions, thoughts and instincts that moved him to create some of the most lovely and moving poetry ever written in the English language.

5.8 □ RECOMMENDED READING

Editions :

- (1) **The Poems of Johns Keats**, ed. Jack Stillinger, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1978.
- (2) **The Poems of Keats**; ed. Miriam Allott, London: Longman, 1970.
- (3) **The Letters of John Keats**, ed. Hyden E. Rollins, 2 vols, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1958.
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5.7 □ SAMPLE QUESTIONS :

● A. LONG ANSWER TYPE :

1. Can you trace any consistent pattern of development is theme and thought in the major Odes of John Keats? Answer withs textual refernces.

2. “ More philosophic than sensuous.” How appropriate is this description of Keats’ poetic accomplishment in his great Odes?
3. The Odes of Keats express an exquisite awareness of the co-existence of joy and melancholy, of beauty and mutability.” Discuss, with illustrative references:
4. Write a note on Keats craftsmanship with reference to any two of his Odes.
5. Show how Keats explores the problem of transience and permanence in his odes.

● **B. SHORT ANSWER TYPE :**

1. What are the three figures that appear before the poem in **Ode on Indolence**? Why do you think the poet rejects them?
2. “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”— that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Critically comment on these lines and bring out their significance in the context of the poems from which they have been taken.

Unit -6 □ In Memoriam ; Tennyson

Structure

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Brief note on Author and Text
- 6.4 Critical Analysis of Text
- 6.5 Structure and meaning
- 6.6 Language and Style
- 6.7 Essential Annotation
- 6.8 Conclusion
- 6.9 Questions
- 6.10 References

IN MEMORIAM

6.1 □ OBJECTIVES

The objective of this material is to familiarize the students with this important literary text and to make them appreciate its rich complexity in the following terms.

6.2 □ INTRODUCTION :

The poem was first published in March, 1850, entitled *Fragments of an Elegy*, and distributed to a few friends. Tennyson's future wife (at that stage) suggested *In Memoriam* for its title. In the last 120 years, since its publication, *In Memoriam* has evoked varied responses in the reading and critical circles. Like any long, complicated poem, it invites reading and analysis from several points of view. It is an intensely personal, if not autobiographical work of an artist. It is a "concentrated diary of a man confessing himself," as T.S.Eliot has observed, Indeed, through *In Memoriam*, Tennyson had laid himself open to the charge of making public poetic capital out of his private, subjective grief.

The subject of this elegy is Arthur Henry Hallam, the son of the historian Henry Hallam. Tennyson and Hallam had become friends when they met at Trinity College, Cambridge. They were both members of the 'Apostles', an undergraduate discussion group at Cambridge. Hallam was the central figure in the group. But Hallam's death put an end to all the promises that he was showing. He died in Vienna on September 15, 1833 while traveling with his father. A frequent visitor at the poet's house, Hallam had become engaged to the poet's sister, Emily Tennyson. So the death was in fact a double blow for Tennyson. Which is why, the personal element is greater in *In Memoriam* than it is in any other great English elegy. No wonder, widowed queen Victoria found this poem, next to the Bible, to be her 'comfort' after the death of the Prince Consort.

6.3 □ BRIEF NOTE ON AUTHOR AND TEXT :

Tennyson was born in the rectory of Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809. His boyhood surroundings left sweet impressions on his later career. He was one of the twelve children of the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, a scholarly clergyman, and his wife Elizabeth Fytche. It is interesting to note that most of the children were poetically inclined and two of them showed greater promises than did Alfred. In 1828, he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became the centre of a brilliant circle of friends, chief of whom was the young Arthur Hallam.

At the "university Tennyson soon became known for his poetical ability. He won the Chancellor's Medal for a poem called *Timbuctoo*. Soon after winning this honour Tennyson published his *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). In 1831, Tennyson left the University without taking his degree. His father died a few months later. Tennyson in these years fought hard and read a lot and cultivated his poetic faculty. The first fruit of these endeavours appeared in 1832, in a wonderful little volume of *Poems*. But the critics were unmercifully severe. That was most unfortunate. The sorrow may be read in the exquisite little poem beginning, "Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O sea!" which was the first published elegy for his friend. For nearly ten years after Hallam's death Tennyson published nothing. But though silent, he continued to write poetry, and it was in these wandering days that he began *In Memoriam*. The year 1850 was a happy one for Tennyson. The success of the poem made Tennyson a star overnight. He was appointed poet laureate, to succeed Wordsworth. He married Emily Sellwood whom he had loved for fifteen years.

For the last forty years of his life, Tennyson lived in the stillness of a great peace. He died very quietly at Aldworth, with his family about him in the moonlight, and beside him a volume of Shakespeare, open at the dirge in *Cymbeline*:

“Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor thy furious winter’s rages ;
Thou thy wordly task had done,
Home art gone and ta’en thy wages.”

The poem should be considered in the light of the poet’s own words about its nature.

“It must be remembered that this is a poem, not an actual biography. It is founded on our friendship, on the engagement of Mr. Hallam to my sister. On his sudden death at Vienna, just before the time fixed for their marriage, and on his burial at Clevedon Church. The poem concludes with the marriage of my youngest sister Cecilia. It was meant to be a kind of *Divina Commedia*, ending with happiness”.

One of the most remarkable things about *In Memoriam* was its popularity with Tennyson’s contemporaries. It seemed to be such a satisfactory answer to the problems of existence, especially those raised by the struggle between religion and science, the erosion of faith in God, degeneration in both spiritual and emotional grounds and so on and so forth. One of the reasons for the poem’s overwhelming success was its spiritual basis that was not at all circumscribed to any specific creed. It is a religious poem, but not specifically Christian. “It is not religious because of the quality of its faith” as T.S.Eliot saw, “but because of the quality of its doubt... (for) its doubt is a very intense experience”.

6.4 □ CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TEXT ;

The social atmosphere was pervaded with the spirit of science and knowledge. Thoughts on the process of ‘evolution’ were very much in the air. Tennyson himself was much engrossed in studying the various branches of science and also the anticipated evolutionary process. Being well-read in the field, he could not altogether dispense with the essentials of the laws of nature, the geological changes of the earth, in favour of Biblical facts accounting for the creation of earth in six days. Thus the poet says.

“In tracts of fluens-heat began,
And grew to seeming-random forms,
And seeming prey of cyclic storms,
Till at the last arose the man; “

But what aggravates the problem is the discrepancy between the empirical fact of the mortality of life and the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul.

Moreover, Tennyson found that certain scientific facts directly challenged and almost invalidated the Christian God. Being at the same time a fine intellectual and a staunch traditionalist, Tennyson could do away with neither of them— science or religion. Despite his unfailing fidelity to religion he could not help being doubtful,

“An inner trouble I behold,
A spectral doubt which makes me cold,”

Doubt gives way to despair— an acute psychological problem with most of the great poets. Tennyson was in a great emotional turmoil, being extremely vulnerable at the death of his intimate friend Hallam. At this stage the poet has to undergo a traumatic experience, losing friend and faith, the two events being of course directly related. Faith in the Christian concept of immortality could only be provided Mm with the necessary solace at his friend’s death,

“Thrice blest whose loves are faithful prayers,”

Realizing how indispensable the existence of God was to Ms life, Tennyson started reviving and strengthening Ms faith in Him. It is here that Tennyson deviates from his predecessors who sought God in nature. Knowing the physical laws that guide nature he says,

“I found Him not in world or sun.
Or eagle’s wing, or insect’s eye;”

His way of begetting faith was through love of God,

“Strong son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove.

Proceeding beyond the spiritual ground the theme of love seems to concentrate more on the personal sphere. Hence the approach becomes much more emotional than spiritual. The personal note is carried to the extent of Ms associating, almost blasphemously, Hallam with CMist. It is through the idealized figure of Hallam that Tennyson believes he could feel the immense love that would reassure Ms faith,

“O loved the most, when most I feel
There is a lower and higher;

ii

Known and unknown, human, divine:
Sweet human hand and lips and eye:
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die.”

That the poet prioritizes emotion and feeling over reason and thought, is apparent when he says,

iii

“If e’er when faith had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice ‘believe no more’
And heard an event breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep:

iv

Warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason’s colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered, ‘I hope felt.’”

This also shows the poet’s ultimate negation of the Victorian sense of pessimism resting in atheism and affirming his conviction in the altruistic nature of God.

“Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill”

Of course, this is only a reluctant affirmation. More than spiritual *In Memoriam* seems to become a dispute regarding the issue of the prioritization of one of the two essentials of life—emotion and reason.

Being an educationist, Tennyson could not afford to leave the dispute unresolved. He sought to strike a balance between them. In fact Tennyson, by harmonizing emotion with reason, wanted to synchronize science with religion. Thus he says,

“That mind and soul according well
May make one music...”

Tennyson evolves a philosophical idea by associating evolution of the body with the immortality of the soul, according to him,

“A soul shall draw from out the vast
And strike his being into bounds.
And moved through life of lower phase
Result in man, he born and think.”

Tennyson’s philosophy seems to be a modification of the metaphysical concept of the dichotomy of body and soul. But his originality lies in presuming a race superior to mankind as a result of evolution.

“Betwixt us and the crowning race
For all we thought and loved and did,
And hoped, and suffered is but seed
Of what in them is flower and fruit.”

In Memoriam could be considered as an autobiography tracing the spiritual journey of the poet - perhaps this is how the poet wanted it to be referred to. We cannot deny its autobiographical elements consisting of Hallam's death, their change of house and his sister's marriage. But it is difficult for us to consent to the fact that *In Memoriam* is no more than a 'spiritual' autobiography. Spirituality is the end, not the means of the poem, where the means are loaded with significance other than spiritual.

From surface analysis the poem consists of the poet's spiritual transformation from doubt and despair to hope and faith. This transformation fully appertains to the Christian concept of the regeneration of the spirit. But what becomes more important than the spiritual factor is the philosophical, emotional, and psychological upheaval through which he had to pass before giving himself up to this over-indulgence of spirituality. One remembers the famous words of T.S.Eliot where he described the 'faith' in *In Memoriam* is 'a poor tiling' whereas its 'doubt' is very 'powerful' indeed.

In no way could Tennyson's *In Memorium* be bounded within the single field of spirituality. It encompasses a whole range of the essentials of life— emotions, reasons, feelings, thoughts, loss and renewal. The poem could be approached from the psychological and religious angles. It, therefore, has a universal appeal. No doubt, *In Memoriam* is the fruit of Tennyson's seventeen years of diligence and patience, which furnishes us with a living picture of the Victorian dilemma.

2.1 □ STRUCTURE AND MEANING :

The most obvious sign of definite structure in *In Memoriam* consists in the internal chronology, and it will be well to begin “by making this clear.

Tennyson himself tells us that, the division of the made by the Christmas-tide sections (28, 78, 104,). That the first of these refers to the first Christmas after the death of his friend, Hallam, in autumn is clear in stanza 30,

We sung, tho' every eye was dim,
A merry song we sing with him
Last year:

Thus we understand the other Christmas poems that the second refers to the Christmas of the next year, and the third to that of the next again. Thus, when we have reached section 104, we are distant from the death of the friend about two years and a quarter, and there is nothing in the sections after 104, to make us think that they are supposed to cover any length of time. Accordingly, the time imagined to elapse in the poem might be set down as rather less than three years.

These results are confirmed by other facts. Between the Christmas-poems there come occasional sections indicating the progress of time by reference to the seasons and to the anniversaries of the death of the friend; and between two Christmas poems we never find a hint that more than one spring or one summer has passed, or that more than one anniversary has come round. After the third Christmas we have a spring poem (115), but after this no sign of summer or of the return of the anniversary of the friend's death.

The unmistakable uniqueness of the internal chronology can be traced in its structure. The sections start with a reference to early autumn (Sec-11). It continues up to Sec. 15. Sec. 15 corresponds to late autumn. The theme of Christmas-tide comes in the sections 28-30, 78, 104-5. Understandably it is one of the chief features of this poem. The poem repeats the death anniversary of Ms friend hi Sec.72, and in Sec. 99. Apart from that the seasonal circle dominates the poem's internal chronology. Sec. 38-9, 86-7 and 115-6 correspond to spring, whereas Sec. 89, 95, and 98 to summer and 107 to winter.

Composed under such circumstances, it is a wonder that *In Memoriam* has any unity. Like *Maud* (1855), it is really a series of poems, with each poem expressing a nuance in the changing grief of the poet. The form must have been influenced by sonnet sequences, which are more flexible metrically, but which Tennyson compensates for by having varying numbers of stanzas in the sections. It is written in a single metre, lines of iambic tetrameter rhyming abba. Tennyson's use of this stanza form in this poem has caused it to be known as the "*In Memoriam stanza*"

The exultant proclamation of progress towards the earthly paradise, as prescribed in the poem, results in a nearly complete fusion of Hallam with Christ, the new Hallam-Christ brand serving as the example which aspiring man is to follow and als the symbol by which and through the poet asserts his confident faith. For Christ is the symbol of God's love for mankind; Hallam is identifiable with Christ and thus is himself an embodiment of ideal love, which is immortal. Hallam, as seen, now belongs to everything and to all, he is everywhere— in air, water, sun, star, and flower. And because the poet is now fully cognized of his friend's union with the

divine, he loses forever the sorrow born on grief and doubt. Now one can see that the apotheosis of Hallam in the poem stems from the poet's desire to prove that God is that Christianity, in spite of certain doubts which it must inevitably present to the mind of the thinking man, is the best faith to hold onto. *In Memoriam* is thus a refusal to say farewell to what one knows he/she has lost. No wonder for some critics *In Memoriam* is not 'a poem', but 'an essay on Man'.

6.6 □ LANGUAGE AND STYLE :

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is a web of complexity and subtlety. Interestingly, the language, used here, is loud and clear. There is no doubt whatsoever as far as the diction of the poem is concerned. Tennyson lived in a complex age. New things were coming to the surface. Old prejudices were still visible. Amidst all this, a new voice was heard—sweet, lyrical and faithful. That way, Tennyson can justly be placed in the same category to which most of the modern poets belong. "The Twentieth-century poet is always conscious" as Alan Sinfield has observed, "that any opinion may be his alone; he may well use abrupt contrasts to express his alarm, his frustration, or his sense of fragmentation in society; and he is liable to reject self-conscious artifice." Thus rhetorical devices like metre, syntactical inversions and poetic diction are all questioned or abandoned. One remembers Yeats' "Why should not old men be mad? /Some have known a likely lad..." where rhyme, though not always fully, has vestige of a metre, but its diction is completely colloquial and syntax is by and large straightforward. Unusual juxtapositions convey poet's disappointment of the old aristocratic ideals. In Auden's *Musee des Beaux Arts* the same irony is placed in that casual manner. The diction and syntax are yet again those of ordinary language—almost to the point of bravado. Tennyson was the first among others who captured the subject with an unmistakable authority:

"What hope is here for modern rhyme
To him who turns a musing eye
On songs, and deeds, and lives, that lie
Foreshorten'd in the tract of time?"

These aspects of Tennyson's approach are not rejected, but are taken up with even greater enthusiasm by the Symbolist and Imagist movements of the later Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. Frank Karmode and Marshall McLuhan have already argued impressively for this continuity.

6.7 □ ESSENTIAL ANNOTATION

All words and expressions in the extracts are self-explanatory.

6.8 □ CONCLUSION :

We do not mean to say that the poet is vitally concerned with the public issues of another day than ours. *In Memoriam* necessarily becomes for the modern reader merely a historical piece, a literary artifact which tells us much about the concerns of the Victorian age but little about our own. But some readers still seem surprised to discover that Tennyson's journey through the 19th century wasteland is neither unfamiliar nor as remote from the 20th century experience as they might have supposed. The poem is neither local nor ephemeral, this is universal to the best sensitive and meditative minds of any age.

6.9 □ QUESTIONS :

A Long Question:

(1) How far is *In Memoriam* a rhetorical construct?

[Hint: All poems are rhetorical constructs and those arising out of intense personal emotion no less so. Consider the various rhetorical devices - including structural ones— in the poem.]

B Short Question:

(1) Consider the importance of the Christmas sections.

[Hint: Christmas celebrates birth and regeneration. Also the Christmas sections effect structural discussion.]

C Objective Question:

(1) Which work on geology published in the early 1830s influenced Tennyson?

6.10 □ REFERENCES :

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Unit -7 □ The Scholar Gipsy : Arnold

Structure

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Brief notes on author and text
- 7.4 Critical analysis
- 7.5 Structure and meaning
- 7.6 Language / Style
- 7.7 Annotation
- 7.8 Conclusion
- 7.9 Questions
- 7.10 References

7.1 □ OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize the student with the important literary text that is Arnold's poem 'The Scholar Gipsy' and to make the student appreciate both its permanent and its contemporary relevance.

7.2 □ INTRODUCTION

'The Scholar Gipsy' is generally believed to be the finest and the most characteristic poem of Matthew Arnold, reflecting his disappointment at the loss of simple faith, his craving for a spiritual calm and his fondness for the quiet beauties of nature. It was in Joseph Glanville's **The Vanity of Dogmatising** (1661) that Arnold discovered the story of the young Oxford scholar who forsook Ms studies 'to joyn himself to a company of Vagabond Gypsies' and who hoped in time to learn from them the secret of their hypnotic powers. Arnold obtained a copy of this work in 1844. But he did not bother to read it till at last the autumn of the following year. Between 1845 and 1849; Arnold decided to write a poem on the scholar gipsy.

7.3 □ BRIEF NOTES ON AUTHOR AND TEXT

Matthew Arnold was born to Dr. Thomas Arnold and Mary Arnold on 24 December 1822, at Laleham, on the Thames. Dr. Thomas Arnold was famous as Headmaster of Rugby School for his strict moral uprightness and liberal mindset. Matthew Arnold, his eldest son, inherited both the profound respect for the idea of the State and Board Church liberalism from him. Matthew's taste for travelling and his love of the countryside, particularly the streams and mountains, were also inherited from his father to a large extent as well. In spite of all this, however, the tones and personalities of the two men varied significantly.

Educated at Rugby and Oxford, Matthew Arnold was a Balliol scholar. He was opposed to the high Church Movement led by Cardinal Newman, though he respected the man. In 1843, his poem 'Cromwell' won him the Newdigate prize. Although Arnold passed from Oxford with a second class in the Classics, he was elected to a fellowship at Oriel.

Matthew Arnold's personality was remarkable in the Victorian Age. His father was warm, genial, optimistic, extrovert, and a little rough, in short, wholly English. About Matthew Arnold in adulthood, however, there was always something distinctly un-English. Matthew was dandyish, refined, impudent, deeply reserved, cool and unenthusiastic. He luxuriated in Parisianism, ever since his great admiration for the French actress Rachel. Under cover of this dandyism, Matthew Arnold whetted his creative and artistic skills through poetry and prose works.

Matthew Arnold was at first a teacher at Rugby and later on private secretary to Lord Landsowne, President of the Council. In 1850, he acquired the post of Inspector of Schools and gradually rose to the position of Chief Inspector. He did not take very much to the job of inspectorship, however, though he made positive contributions to it. In 1857, he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

Arnold's chief works included **The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems** (1879), **Empedocles on Etna and other poems** (1852), **Poems by M. Arnold** (1853) which contained 'Sohrab and Rustum', 'The Scholar - Gipsy', 'Requiescat', 'Memorial Verses'; **Poems of Matthew Arnold. Second Series** (1855); 'Merope' (1858), 'Thyrsis' (1866); **New Poems** (1867) containing 'Dover Beach', 'Rugby Chapel', 'Obermami Once More'.

In the list he made of the thirteen poems to be composed during 1849, the twelfth item was 'The first mesmerist'. Two years later, in another list, Arnold changed the name to 'the wandering Mesmerist'. The difference between the two

titles points out the direction in which the poem was developing. When the poem was published in 1853, there was 'little in it about mesmerism. Instead, the hero was conspicuously a wanderer.

Arnold's prose works include **Essays in Criticism. Culture and Anarchy Friendship's Garland,. Mixed Essays, and Literature and Dogma.**

Arnold was opposed to the view, promoted by the examples of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson and 'those damned Elizabethan poets generally' that the object of poetry was to produce 'exquisite bits and images'. In 1852, Arnold said that 'modern poetry can only subsist by its contents'. As a poet, Arnold felt the spiritual loss and the collapse of traditional faith caused by the assault of Science, 'higher criticism' of the Bible, and utilitarianism. Moreover, Industrialization had dealt a death blow to the older social system. Arnold, in his poetry exhibits Classical balance and pose, despite his obviously romantic temperament.

7.4 □ CRITICAL ANALYSIS

4.0 The legend of the Oxford undergraduate clearly captured the poet's fancy in the age of change and spiritual upheaval in which he lived. 'Arnold's poem', says Wilson Knight, 'confronts our western tradition with suggestions of a wisdom, lore, or magic of oriental affinities or origins'. He seems to suggest that Arnold wished to glorify Oriental wisdom and to lament the Victorian way of life. That is unlikely, however, when one considers that the poet here is also the author of **Literature and Dogma** and **God and the Bible**. Arnold's stoic acceptance of reality is generally recognized. In **God and the Bible** Arnold does not hesitate to analogise the gospel miracles to the tale of Cinderella. He says in the work that however painful it may be to let go of certain beliefs; one cannot go on believing hi them merely for emotional comfort, if they are not *true*.

4.1 Perhaps it would be more fitting to say the 'The Scholar Gipsy' considers the joyful illusions of an earlier age from the point of view of the melancholy realism of the nineteenth century, and that it is in this transtemporal viewing that the chief charm of the poem is to be found.

4.2 As an offshoot of the realist in Arnold, we find in him an antithetical coexistence between disbelief in Christianity and a refusal to depend entirely on scientific empiricism. Even while regretting the loss of elements of beauty and joy of the earlier culture, he is a realist. The attitude of the poet towards the gipsy is that of an adult towards a child. The adult may envy the child's state of innocence, but knows it is foolish to wish to regain mat state because time and experience are

irreversible in real life. The earlier age did maintain a certain serene and joyful state in man, but only at the cost of intellectual awareness, the loss of which was unacceptable to the Victorian society. The legend of the scholar-gipsy is, therefore, beautiful to dream of, but impracticable in the truth of present circumstances.

4.3 Arnold wished to fuse the 'sweetness and light' of Hellenism, or knowing, with the wonderful strength of Hebraism, or doing. The figure of the scholar-gipsy is too passive and lethargic for his whole-hearted approval. The scholar-gipsy is an arresting presence everywhere he goes and in the minds of all who have seen him or think of him but ultimately he is unsubstantial. The gipsy is seen 'treating in the cool stream' his fingers, 'hanging on a gate', in "lone alehouses'. He not only does not fit into Oxford society, he does not blend in very well even amongst the inhabitants of the woods. The contrast between energy and lethargy is evident in (stanza 9) of the poem. Even the children are collecting cresses. But the scholar-gipsy turns to watch through the snow the 'line of festal light in Christ Church hall' and retreats into the mountains to find shelter in 'some 'sequestered grange'. The status of the scholar-gipsy is equated with the silent and enduring mountains and the isolated grange. The scholar-gipsy is immortal because he has '*one* ami, *one* business, *one* desire'. But that immortality is equated with non-existence as far as reality is concerned. The only reality of the gipsy's life is death.

4.4 In stanza 9, there is a sharp contrast between the vitality of the scythes reflecting the sun, the swallows flying over the 'glittering Thames', the 'wide fields of breezy grass' and all the immediacy of hay time on the one hand and 'the river bank o 'ergrown' where the scholar-gipsy sits alone on the other hand.

4.5 The scholar-gipsy then stands for the optimistic but illusory hopes of an earlier age. He waits for the spark from Heaven to 'fall'. But that never happens, as the nineteenth century well knows. Arnold refers to the 'strange disease of modern life' as the inevitable feature of his age. Phrases like 'divided aims', 'sick fatigue', languid doubt show that Arnold was just as much aware of the difficulties of his own age as of the earlier age. Being the realist that he is, however, Arnold must realize the greater truth of the present against the nullity of such a past as the scholar-gipsy's. When writing the poem, therefore, the poet is not merely criticizing his own age, but also exploring the spiritual and emotional losses of his age, and the readjustment that these losses call for.

4.6 The scholar-gipsy, having committed himself to the ancient art of the gipsies, is outside the bounds of Oxford. When he looks down upon the lighted city, he does so as a ghostly presence, not an omniscient power. His exclusion from

Oxford frames a question mark on the peace of mind to be found at Oxford, but it is an even stronger argument against the acceptability of the gipsy at least to the Victorian mind.

4.7 In *Culture and Anarchy*, many years after the composition of 'The Scholar-Gipsy', Arnold writes : "Religion says : *The Kingdom of God is within you*, and culture, in like manner, places, human perfection in an internal conditional." Then again, later on in the same piece he says. "Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated." The two statements, taken together, seem to suggest that there is a framework of perfection; contemplation cannot be wholly dissociated from action, as the scholar-gipsy tries to do. Contemplation without action is not enough, in short. That Arnold himself was not very satisfied with the poem is clear from this extract from a letter to his friend A. H. Clough :

I am glad you like 'The Scholar-Gipsy'— but what does it do for you? Homer *animates* — Shakespeare *animates*— in its own poor way I think 'Sohrab and Rustum' *animates* - 'The Scholar-Gipsy' at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

Therefore Arnold allows'the gipsy to seek cover :

"Fly hence, our contact fear!
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!"

and fancies him later on still 'hanging on a gate'. Unflinchingly, Arnold proceeds to the epic simile introducing the new hero, the Tyrian trader. The similarity of the Tyrian trader to the scholar gipsy is superficial. The 'Tyrian trader' 'snatched his rudder, and shook out more sail, / And day and night held on, indignantly ... corded bales'. These are images of vigorous, even violent action, of anger. It is not through weakness and frustration but in disgust and contempt arising from knowledge and understanding that he sets sail. His angry desertion of the land of his ancestors implies an involvement with, not a relinquishing of, the problems of his time. The 'merry Grecian coaster' is certainly attractive with its 'amber grapes', 'Chian wine', 'green, bursting fig', and 'tunnies steeped in brine', but also stands for a certain over-indulgence which is also the weakness of the scholar-gipsy, even if the indulgences are of different kinds. It is the Grecian coaster which is more akin to the scholar-gipsy in that they are both Hellenistic. The Tyrian trader may be seen one kind of fusion of the Hellenistic and the Hebraistic. He had both the powerful drive for struggle and action which is the mark of Hebraism as well as the solitariness indicative of contemplation which is a mark of Hellenism. The 'dark Iberians' may be interpreted as the gypsies.

4.8 Arnold sees the past in all its tempting beauty and innocent hopefulness but knows also that it is a fragile dream which would not be able to withstand the harsh glare of reality as perceived by himself and his age.

4.9 Arnold is, in essence, a Victorian. Like the scholar-gipsy, the poet too seeks an escape in retreating to a bower at the beginning of the poem, but the escape is in the manner of a temporary diversion. Arnold, though not as well acknowledged a poet during his lifetime as Browning and Tennyson, reflected the troubled mind of the Victorian era more effectively than them.

7.5 □ STRUCTURE AND MEANING

5.0 The structure of the poem is quite unified. Stanzas 1-3 are addressed to an Oxfordshire shepherd (probably his friend Clough) to join him in his quest for the scholar-gipsy who is pictured as an eternally silent waiting recluse for knowledge and intuition. Stanzas 15-23 contrast the simple faith and single-minded course of the scholar-gipsy with the tortured doubts and 'divided aims' of mid-nineteenth century. The poem ends with the epicsimile in stanzas 24-25 where Arnold interprets the true path for modern intellectuals. Just as the ancient Phoenicians let the intruding Greeks seize commercial power in the Eastern Mediterranean and voyaged on to the West, the modern intelligent man should eschew the confusion of social and business triviality and discover new grounds in thought and creativity in peace of mind. Though it is valid as an interpretation, it does not work as an epicsimile, apart from adding a certain grandeur to the poem. This is not the only poem of Arnold to end with such a coda. The device was a favourite with him. 'Tristram and Iseult,' 'Sohrab and Rustum' and stanzas from the 'Grande Chartreuse' all end in this fashion. His intention was evidently to round off the longer poems with a digression that would draw the mind off the melancholy main theme and simultaneously redirect the attention to the main theme by presenting a symbolic equivalent of it.

5.1 The iambic metrical structure is reminiscent of Keats' great odes. The poem has a dreamlike quality in the direct tradition of Keats' odes. The influence of Keats is not surprising since he presided over the nineteenth century dreamworld. The landscape descriptions are Keatsian as well.

7.6 □ LANGUAGE / STYLE

6.0 The poem is generally termed as 'pastoral elegy'. But how far it is justified to call it an elegy is a matter of contention. Arnold is not really lamenting the death of a poet or a shepherd who was known to him. The figure of the scholar-gipsy is

pretty ancient. Secondly, the poet is not lamenting the death of the scholar. He knows the scholar-gipsy would melt away as it were, at the icy touch of Victorian realism.

6.1 As a pastoral, it follows the conventions of the classical pastoral poems of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus. G.C. Macaulay has remarked - "To those who object to the artificiality of pastoral poetry it *may* be replied that in 'The Scholar Gipsy' there is little or nothing of this fault." Throughout its history, the pastoral setting has been a transparent allegory for the life and characters contemporary to the poet. The scenes, described in this poem, however, are real scenes graphically described without much idealization. The purpose of the poem is not celebration of the shepherd's life. It seems that Arnold chose this form because it gave him a suitable framework for the depiction of scenery close to his heart. Moreover, the poem departs from convention by introducing the theme of the problems of Victorian Age, The style hasa classical dignity, gracefulness and polish. As a pastoral, therefore, the poem is original and refreshing.

7.7 □ ANNOTATION

7.0 "Preferment's door" (stanza 3, line 35) : When Arnold talks of the scholar being 'tired of knocking at preferment's door', he is of course strongly echoing the famous Hues from Dr. Samuel Johnson's poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* :

'Unnumbered suppliants crowd preferment's gate
A thirst for fame and burning to be great.
Delusive fortune hears th'incessant call,
They rise, they shine, evaporate and fall.'

7.8 □ CONCLUSION

8.0 R. H. Hutton, in a Victorian review on Matthew Arnold's themes, has remarked that 'in all his poetical success, it is easy to distinguish two strands : first, the clear recognition (with Goethe) of our spiritual unrest, and the manful effort to control it; next, the clear recognition (with Wordsworth) of the balm to be found in sincere commission with Nature.' This observation is relevant, especially in the context of 'The Scholar-Gipsy'. Stanza 19 is evidence of this double awareness. The urgency of the present and the immediacy of its problems is recognized in 'this strange disease of modern life'. Simultaneously, there is a wistfulness about 'days when wits were fresh and clear'. At the same time, however, there is undesirability in 'sick hurry', 'divided anus' and unreality and escapism in the 'bowering wood' where the gipsy is bidden *to* seek shelter. What is obviously desired is a judicious

measure of both - the fusion of Hellenism and Hebraism that has been talked of earlier.

8.1 We may conclude with A.E. Dyson who feels “The gipsy, like child, is the embodiment of a good lost, not of a good temporarily or Partly mislaid.” The predominant impact is of an exploration of the spiritual and emotional losses and an adjustment with his existence in an age which has

“... neither joy, nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.”

Thus The Scholar Gipsy’ elucidates the Arnoldian dictum ‘Poetry, at bottom, is the criticism of life.’

7.9 □ QUESTIONS

9.0. A : Long Question:

(1) How far would it be appropriate to call “The Scholar Gipsy’ a poem of retreat or escape?

(Hint: Consider Arnold’s philosophy in public and personal life as asserted in prose works like Culture and Anarchy, together with Arnold’s understanding of the shortcomings of the Victorian Age as apparent from the latter part of the poem. Consider also the symbolism of the figure of the Tyrian trader).

B : Short Question :

(1) How effective is the figure of the Tyrian trader as an epicsimile?

(Hint: Consider the juxtaposition of aggression and seclusion in the figure and its relationship to the scholar-gipsy).

C : Objective Question :

(1) What source is the myth of the poem based on ?

7.10 □ REFERENCES:

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Unit -8 □ Text of Andrea Del Sarto : Robert Browning

Structure

- 8.1 Text of ‘Andrea Del Sarto’**
- 8.2 Text of ‘Child Roland’**
 - 8.3.0 Objectives**
 - 8.3.1 Introducing Browning’s Life and Work : A brief overview**
 - 8.3.2 Introducing the text and the Source**
 - 8.3.3 Background of the Poem**
 - 8.3.4 On the text : Browning’s Version in the poem : Andrea del Sarto**
 - 8.3.5 Andrea del Sarto and the form of dramatic monologue**
 - 8.3.6 Essential Annotation.**
 - 8.3.7 Questions**
 - 8.3.8(a) Notes**
 - 8.3.8(b) Recommended Reading.**

ROBERT BROWNING

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED ‘THE FAULTLESS PAINTER’)

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I’ll work then for your friend’s friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,

Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
 Oh, I'll content him, — but to-morrow. Love! I
 often am much wearier than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if— forgive now — should you let me sit
 Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
 Don't count the time lost, neither: you must serve
 For each of the five pictures we require:
 It saves a model. So! Keep looking so —
 My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
 — How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
 Even to put a pearl there! oh, so sweet —
 My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
 Which everybody looks on and calls his,
 And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
 While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less.
 You smile? why, there's my picture readymade,
 There's what we painters call our harmony!
 A common greyness silvers everything,—
 All hi a twilight, you and I alike
 —You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know), — but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.

There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
 The length of convent-wall across the way
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;

The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
 The autumn grows, autumn in everything.
 Eh, the whole seems to fall into a shape
 As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was bora to he and do,
 A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
 I feel he lay the fetter: let it lie!
 This chamber for example — turn your head —
 All that's behind us! You don't understand
 Nor care to understand about my art,
 But you can hear at least when people speak:
 And that cartoon, die second from the door
 —It is the thing, Love! So such things should be—
 Behold Madonna! -I am bold to say.
 I can do with my pencil what I know,
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep -
 Do easily, too - when I say, perfectly,
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
 And just as much they used to say in France.
 At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
 I do what many dream of, all their lives,
 —Dream? Strive to do, and agonize to do,
 And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
 Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
 To paint a little tiling like that you smeared
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
 Yet do much less, so much less. Someone says,
 (I know his name, no matter)-so much less!
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
 There bums a truer light of God in them,
 In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt

This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of
 mine.
 Their works drop ground-ward, but themselves, I
 know,
 Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
 Enter and take their place there soon enough,
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
 The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
 I, painting from myself and to myself,
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
 Rightly traced and well-ordered; what of that'?
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
 Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
 Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
 I know both what I want and what might gain,
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
 'Had I been two, another and myself,
 Our head would have o'erlooked the world!' No
 doubt.
 Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
 The Urbinate who died five years ago.
 ('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
 Above and through his art—for it gives way;
 That arm is wrongly put — and there again—
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
 Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
 He means right — that, a child may understand.
 Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch—

Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
 Had you enjoyed them on me, given me soul,
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.
 But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
 God and the glory! never care for gain.
 The present by the future, what is that?
 Live for fame, side by side with Angelo!
 Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!
 I might have done it for you. So it seems:
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
 What wife has Rafael, or has Angelo?
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
 Yet the will's somewhat — somewhat, too, the
 power—
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
 that I am something underrated here,
 poor tills long while, despised, to speak the truth.
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
 The best is when they pass and look aside;
 But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
 Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
 In that humane great monarch's golden look,—

One finger in his beard or twisted curl
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those heart's,—
 And, best of all, this, this face beyond,
 This in the background, waiting on my work,
 To crown the issue with a last reward
 A good tune, was it not, my kingly days?
 And had you not grown restless ... but I know—
 'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end in any other way?
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.
 The triumph was — to reach and stay there; since
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
 Let my hand's frame your face in your hair's gold,
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
 'Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
 The Roman's is the better when you pray,
 But still the other's Virgin was his wife—'
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
 Said one day Angelo, his very self,
 To Rafael ... I have known it all these years ...
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in heart because of it
 'Friend, there's a certain sony little scrub
 Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
 Who, were he set to plan and execute

As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!
 To Rafael's! — And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare ... yet, only you to see,
 Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should
 go!
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 What he? why, who but Michel Angelo?
 (Do you forget already words like those?)
 If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
 Is, whether you're, — not grateful — but more
 pleased.
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
 To Rafael's! — And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare ... yet, only you to see,
 Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go!
 Ay, but the soul! He's Rafael! Rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 What he? why, who but Michel Angelo?
 (Do you forget already words like those?)
 If really there was such a chance, so lost, —
 Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased.
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
 If you would sit thus by me every night
 I should work better, do you comprehend?
 I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
 See, it is settled dusk now: there's a star;
 Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
 The cue-owl's speak the name we call them by.
 Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,
 Inside the melancholy little house
 We built to be so gay with. God is just.
 King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick

Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? those loans?
More gaining debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit.