

ROBERT BROWNING

'CHILD ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME'

(See Edgar's song in Lear)

I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of Ms lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that nursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed : neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside ('since all is o'er', he saith,
'And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;')

VI

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the coipse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among 'The Band' — to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps - that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now — should I be fit?

VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hatefu cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its stray.

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
For flowers - as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. 'See
Or shut your eyes,' said Nature peevishly,
'It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
Tis the Last Judgement's fire must cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free'.

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, banded as to balk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pushing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there;
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
With that red gaunt and coloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
I never saw a brute I hated so;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart:
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one drought of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fifty I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards — the soldier's art:
One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour — there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
Good — but the scene shifts — faugh! What hangman hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own hands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howler or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof— to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng :
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI

Which, while I forded, — good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled hi his hair or beard!
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! It sounded like a baby' shriek.

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What penned diem there, with all the plain to choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV

And more than dial — a furlong on — why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel — mat harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? With all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a tiling and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in Mm
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep farther! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat Ms wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap — perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains — with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me, — solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when —
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress tliis way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts — you're inside the den!

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! Those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain... Dunce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps? — why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand to see the game at bay,—
'Now stab and end the creature — to the heft !'

XXXIII

Not hear? When noise was everywhere! It tolled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
Of all the lost adventures my peers,—
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew, '*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Come*'.

8.3 □ ROBERT BROWNING: TWO POEMS

8.3.1 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this part or unit you will be in a position to think and write on Browning's poetic art as evident from these two mature and representative poems of Robert Browning. And these two poems are **Andrea del Sarto** and **Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came**. Your study of these would enable you to comment on selected excerpts from these two poems.

8.3.2 INTRODUCING BROWNING'S LIFE AND WORK: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were two great and kindred spirits or souls.

Robert Browning (1812-84) was privately educated. His first poem, **Pauline**, appeared in 1833. **Paracelsus**, which attracted the friendly notice of Carlyle, Wordsworth and other men of letters, appeared in 1835. He next published **Stafford**, a tragedy, which was played at Covent Garden in 1837. **Sordello** followed in 1840. In 1842, he published **Dramatic Lyrics**. In 1845 **Dramatic Romances**, as iii and vii of the series of **Bell and Pomegranates**. In 1846, he married Elizabeth Barrett and lived with her mainly in Italy, at Pisa, Florence and Rome, until her death in 1861, after which Browning settled in London, in 1855, he published **Men and Women**, (the two poems in our discussion are part of it) — and in 1868-69, appeared the long poem, **The Ring and the Book**. His last volume of poems, **Asolando** was published on the day of his death.

When Browning was twenty, his reading of Shelley had determined his ambition — to be a poet and nothing but a poet. Throughout his life he cherished this or did not abandon the adolescent ambition to be a 'seer-poet', a *Vates*. He dedicated his life to achieve this inordinate desire- to rise to the occasion. From the early days of **Pauline**, when he praised Shelley as a 'Sun-treader'. It is by no means accidental that Andrea del Sarto, the frustrated artist, is the most sensitively and poignantly realized of all Browning's characters.

For a major part of their lives, the Brownings lived in Italy, that is outside England and their poetry seems to be partially aloof from the mainstream of Victorian poetry. To some extent, they stood apart and reacted rather nostalgically in their poems: **Home thoughts from abroad** (the Gk. word *nostos* means 'home'). Browning knew his Italy, specially the Italian Renaissance through the eyes of painting,

reading the **Lives of the Italian Artists** (by Vasari); his interest, unlike that of Mrs Browning, lay in the past. His **Andrea del Sarto** is a remarkable instance of this lively interest in men and manners. He was basically a chronicler of life. After reading these two remarkable and representative poems, you would have a workable knowledge of his mind and art. These two poems belong to **Men and Women** (1855), an anthology dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "Fifty men and women I dedicate to you", (One Word More).

8.3.3 INTRODUCING THE TEXT AND THE SOURCE OF THE TWO POEMS FROM 'MEN AND WOMEN'¹ (1855)

These two poems under discussion were first published in *Men and Women*. They were written in the early fifties of the nineteenth century. They tend to give us an idea of Browning's mature art at their best. He gives a sympathetic portrait of a second-rate artist with a lofty ideal for perfection. He did not include the great masters. *Iris* is a fascinating study of failure in the life of an aspiring artist in *Andrea del Sarto*. *Childe Roland* takes us to the world of 'dream' and 'fantasy' - of romance and perhaps fairy-tale like adventure, with enough sense of uneven surface of everyday life. *Andrea's pictures* are silver-grey and to Browning, it is no accident; he also believed that only craftsmanship is not enough. 'Out, out of me', cries the faultless painter, remembering the great works of other great masters like Rafael and Michael Angelo. He is aware of the sublime ideal. Without it he knew that he will sink into oblivion:

'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for !'

Andrea admits that a placid and apparently accomplished art may be a sign of an end too easily achieved. He asserts that beauty must have a mind behind it before it can inspire true art.

8.3.4 BACKGROUND OF THE POEM

Giorgio Vasari, the author of **The lives of Italian Architects, the Painters and Sculptors** claimed that he learnt his art from *Andrea del Sarto* after his departure from Rome. Clyde de Vane comments that here Browning makes a steady and confident use of it. We have already mentioned that Vasari was *Andrea's* pupil in painting, and his words therefore have 'double-weight'. It is suggested that Browning also consulted Filippo Baldinucci's **Notizie**. He finds that *Lucrezia del Fede*, the painter's wife, in the first edition of Vasari, is much more 'darkly painted' than in later editions.

8.3.5 ON THE TEXT: BROWNING'S VERSION IN THE POEM: ANDREA DELSARTO

Baldinucci directed and modified Browning's original conception of Andrea, he gives 'an emphasis to Andrea's story, which tempers' the idea of the Victorian poet.

Let us talk about Browning's presentation of Andrea, following the eminent critic of the poet, Clyde de Vane 1*:

Browning imagines on the evening when he (Andrea) conceived the picture of himself and his wife which hangs in the Sala di Giove of the Pitti Palace. It is indeed the autumn of Andrea's life. The account from Vasari is too detailed to be referred, but in all essentials, the facts are as Browning gives them. He was born in 1486; in time, he was apprenticed to a goldsmith, and afterwards to several painters. He first won fame and the title of "Il Pittore senza Errori" a faultless painter by his work of a hat-maker, who served as model for many of his pictures; notably for his Madonna del Sacco, his masterpiece. Yet from the day of his marriage, Andrea's fortunes were doomed. Concerning Andrea, Michael Angelo said to Rafael, 'There is a little man in Florence who if he were employed upon such great works as have been given to you, would make you sweat' 2*. In the poem there is a 'ruling comparison' of Andrea with great artists, Leonardo, Michael Angelo and Raphael.

In 1518, Andrea went by invitation to the court of Francis I, king of France, he was summoned to Fontainebleau, which he helped to decorate for his new patron. The urgent appeals of his wife, however, brought him back to Florence, entrusted with money for the purchase of works of art for the king Francis. He was persuaded by Lucrezia to spend the money upon a house for himself and on lavish hospitality. In spite of this disgrace, his 'rare accomplishments' gained for him many commissions and he continued to paint; deserted by his wife and servants during his last illness. He died of the plague on January 22, 1531.

Robert Browning in the poem **Andrea** uses the words of Michael Angelo in a slightly modified way. Vasari's delineation of Andrea's wife, Lucrezia, is drawn from his personal knowledge. Vasari says:

At that time there was a most beautiful girl in the Via di SanGallo, who was married to a cap-maker and who, though born of a poor and vicious father, carried about her as much as pride and haughtiness as beauty and fascination 3*.

About Andrea, the opening words of Vasari's life of Andrea sets the tone and temper of his character and work, (he refers to him as 'truly excellent Andrea del Sarto' in whom 'art and nature combined to show all that may be done in painting').

Had this master possessed **a somewhat bolder and more elevated mind**...he would beyond all doubt, have been without a equal. His figures are nevertheless well drawn, they are entirely free from errors and perfect in their proportions '...nay, it is truly divine' 4*.

In Browning's poem Andrea is the infatuated husband. He is the unfortunate painter who for his certain 'timidity of mind' and 'want of force' in his nature of 'spiritless temperament' is responsible for his moral and artistic failures.

As Browning represents the painter, Andrea seeks no liberation from these. The sense of pallid, fading beauty of twilight in an autumn evening in Florence, synchronizes with the 'wistful fatalistic' temperament of the man. His pictures lack the soul element (Pater's term used in **Appreciations** in the essay on 'Style'), in them. There is no hint of passionate energy or driving force, (this was also noticed by Vasari, in Ms introduction to the painter's character). His moral and artistic degradation is caused by his wife's influence and his voluntary enslavement to Lucrezia is 'uniformly disastrous' (Young). Browning is successful in working a sense of pity for the faultless painter. Vasari writes in this connection: 'but although Andrea lived in the midst of all that torment, he yet accounted it a high pleasure'.

A spiritual defence of Andrea's nature and art has been made by later critics and scholars who find in him, (with his great craftsmanship and harmonizing skill in colour), a most charming and pleasing painter. And we know for certain that Vasari supplied the raw materials from which Browning reworked his 'Andrea'. And by common consensus **Andrea del Sarto** is one of the greatest monologues Browning ever wrote. And this is no sweeping generalization unsupported by facts.

Browning's **Old Pictures in Florence** gives evidence of the poet's minute acquaintance with the galleries, his discerning eye for idiosyncrasy in technique and inspiration. His **Fra Lippo Lippi** is another study, which reveals his interest in painting and painters. **Pictor Ignotus** yet another example. In these poems, Browning entered into the artist's point of view, showing how the artist feels like and how he works with his medium and material. His painters are always second rate or rather obscure like 'Pictor Ignotus'. None has attained supreme stage of attainment. He is always tolerant and sympathetic to the artist's sense of imperfection. It is part of his creed that is voiced in Andrea's words:

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or, what's heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art — the worse!

Andrea, in this monologue, is speaking to his beautiful wife, Lucrezia. He is prepared to give all the money he earns to her. Her love for him is the greatest encouragement to produce great works of art. Both of them make a remarkable pair and he is going to paint the finest picture depicting their love. Her face has an enchanting quality which attracts everyone. This is the autumn of Ms life, but in her company and under her inspiration, he is going to produce his **magnum opus** now. Everyone, he believes, is under the control of god, though everyone seems outwardly to be free. Lucrezia is ignorant about art, Andrea is not affected or moved either by praise or blame of the people; he believes that man should strive to reach beyond his capacity, because heaven is the highest goal that one can reach:

All is as God over-rules
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self
The rest avail not.

If he is not rewarded in this world, he will be richly compensated in the world beyond. He is wedded to truth, he does not care for criticism or condemnation. He is ready to sacrifice: 'All for love of Lucrezia'; earlier great painters like Raphael, Leonardo and Agnolo were alone, but Andrea is blessed with the love of Lucrezia. Browning is true to history. Andrea's wife is his muse, and her face appears in painting after painting; it is a beautiful face and the beauty is perhaps too 'accessible' to the artist. Andrea dreams of a great picture of 'the Virgin's face'; but ironically enough, he is enmeshed and trapped in the fetters of his own world — and he has to accept his prison:

I am grown peaceful as old age tonight,
I regret little, I would change still less.

(II 244-45)

ANALYSIS

Andrea opens on a note of reconciliation. He had presumably declined to work for his wife's "friend" but now his resolve breaks down and he comes before her averted face resignedly submitting to her every whim. It is Andrea who makes the overtime to peace and the unconditional acceptance of her desires. Lucrezia is the stronger personality; she condescends to glance at him when her wishes are fulfilled. Andrea desires that they sit hand in hand by the window, but the words are phrased with altered humiliation. The tone is pleading, earnest and pathetically entreating. His love for Lucrezia emerges as nothing but a slavish and blind devotion; he loves her despite her faults, her coldness and her mercenary motives. In his imaginings Andrea envisages himself as the symbol of manliness where her feminine nature solicits protection.

Andrea realizes that Ms life is unhappy while his work is perfect, too perfect, foully faultless. Browning penetrates deep into the psychology of failure and the nature of happiness. He is fascinated by Lucrezia's beauty — "My serpentine beauty, round on rounds." Lucrezia is not only reminiscent of the serpent who led to the Fall of Man; she is also the embodiment of the moon, whom she resembles in her inconstancy :

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon .

There is irony in the very perfection of her beauty : Her 'perfect brows 'perfect eyes' and more than 'perfect mouth' are unfortunately unformed by soul. This has made him a 'perfect' but soulless painter. Andrea thinks in colour, and in lines 35 - 40 he sees his own life in the most subdued of colour:

A common greyness silvers everything,
All in a twilight, you and I alike.

The same colour characterizes Andrea's painting and symbolises its limitations ; "All is silver grey." Andrea lacks the elevation of soul that would enable him to aspire greatly. The fact that Lucrezia remains 'very dear', is due not to magnanimity but to uxoriousness. The dull shades with which his own life and art are equated are contrasted with the other painters' works. He feels that although he is the more perfect artist "there burns a fiercer light of god in them". The idea of 'soul', 'heaven' and 'light' recurs constantly. He grows wistful at the remembrance of King Francis's friendship and trust in him. He hints at Ms grievance against Lucrezia "Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul" "I might have done it for you". With remarkable frankness he confesses "And thus we half-men struggle." He remembers Ms golden days at Fontainebleau. Called home urgently by Lucrezia, Andrea returns from France. The four walls of Ms house seem to have a claustrophobic effect upon him. Later he envisages them as illuminated with Francis's gold. The poverty of Andrea's childhood has made a deep impression upon Ms mind. There is brought out in Ms constant allusions to money and payment. He begins the poem with a reference to paying Lucrezia's 'cousin' and towards the end of the poem her smiles pay for her cousin's gaming debts. The diction towards the end of the poem reveals Andrea's consciousness of Ms being a half-man. His debility is more acute now :

I am grown peaceful as old age tonight

Finally he meekly to the cousin's wretched. It seems no woman ruined his soul, he had no soul to ruin.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

A dramatic monologue is a type of poem that was perfected by Browning. In its most representative form, as represented in many poems of Browning, the dramatic monologue has the following features : i) A single person who is patently not the poet utter the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment 2) this person usually addresses and interacts with one or more people. But we know of the auditor's presence and what he says and does only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. 3) The main principle controlling the poet's choice and organization of what the speaker says is to reveal to the reader, in a way that enhances its interest, the speaker's temperament and character. A structurally perfect dramatic monologue like **My Last Duchess** or **The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St Praxed's** has all the above features.

In *Andrea del Sarto* Lucrezia's presence in the room, the turn of her head that brings her face but not her heart, the careless sweep of her gown against wet paint, her indifference to Andrea's reputation are suggested tactfully; but her interactions are not as clear as in other poems of Browning. In a sense Andrea speaks more to himself than directly to Lucrezia; and although we never forget that she is with him, we feel that she too is overhearing. The poem belongs somewhere between dramatic monologue and internal monologue. Andrea is not reasoning, he is reminiscing, justifying, excusing and accepting, lack of structural formality often creates an impression of a lyric poem rather than a dramatic poem.

8.3.6 ESSENTIAL ANNOTATION

1. But do not let us quarrel anymore — dramatically effective abrupt beginning.
2. My Lucrezia — Lucrezia de Fede, the wife of a hatmaker in Browning's poem, she is beautiful but soulless and sensual. Vasari wrote about this woman's infidelity rather indirectly.
15. Fiesole - A small town near Florence, situated on a hill-top.
26. Serpentine— In his primitive garden he finds Eve. She is at once his virgin and Eve.
30. which everybody looks on, 'which' here stands for the moon; Lucrezia is like the moon — beautiful, visible to all but she is rather cold to the individual admirer.
34. harmony — a fitting together of parts as to form a connected whole.
49. we are in God's hand — a sense of surrender to the will of God. Andrea's weak fatalism.

59. Madonna — Virgin Mary
65. The Legate's talk — praise of some dignitary of the church or state.
78. Less is more — cryptic, epigrammatic expression, typical of Browning in its faith and conviction.
79. Light of God — inspiration
82. Sudden blood — it refers to passion; temperamental overflow of feeling; enthusiastic approach to life and art. 'Of these men' refers to other painters like Davinci, Michael Angelo and Raphael.
93. Morello — a spur, seven miles distant from Florence, on the northern side. for?' 'On earth a broken arc, in heaven a perfect round'..similar ideas are to be found in *Rabbi Ben Ezra and A Grammarian's Funeral*.
136. Angelo — Michael Angelo, the great Italian painter and sculptor. Referred to more than once in the poem.
150. Fontainebleau — the scene of King Francis' Court. Great painters like Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto were employed in its decoration.
170. Grange — a large farm house and its out buildings
210. Cueowls — an Italian owl named for its cry
220. Cousin — here, it means 'a lover' Euphemism
250. Scudi — Five shilling price.
Ruff — a frill worn around the neck.

8.3.7 QUESTIONS :

1. Discuss the view that the form of the dramatic monologue is nowhere more brilliantly utilized by Browning than in **Andrea del sarto**.
2. How does Browning represent Vasari's Andrea del Sarto with his fears, hopes, aspirations and frustrations or humiliations and sense of disgrace?
3. '**Andrea del Sarto** is important for the discussion of art and all that it contains'— Discuss.
4. Browning's poem seeks to explain why Andrea, one of the gifted painters of the Renaissance, never attained the level of a Raphael or a Michael Angelo. Discuss.
5. In Brwning's study, Lucrezia is indifferent to Andrea except as a source of money. On the other hand, Andrea's work is technically perfect without an animating soul. How far is this view correct?

8. (a) Notes

1* W.T Young (ed.) *Browning's Poems* (1929), p.240

1* Clyde de Vane — *A Browning Handbook* (1955)

2* Vasari, *ed.* and translated by Blashfield and Hopkins, New York, 1896, III.p.234

3* Idem III, 251-2, quoted in C. de Vane's *A Browning Handbook*.

4* Vasari, *Lives*, p. 234.

8.(b) Recommended Reading :

1. PMLA 62 (1947) "The Dramatic Monologue" by Ina Beth Sessions

2. B. W. Fuson, **Browning and his Predecessor in the Dramatic Monologue**

3. B. Melchiorri. **The Poetry of Reticence**

4. Roma king, **The Bow and the Lyre**

5. P. Honan, **Browning's Character**

“CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME”

To some, (Ms long lyric is a vivid vision, to others this is a late legacy of the chivalric romance. The minimal source of the poem’s title is from Edgar’s song in *King Lear* (HI,iv, 193); in that sense it is a fantastic expression and expansion of the single line in the play. It is also a romance but with a difference— without any glowing ideal or a ‘fantasy’; i.e. connecting *Childe Roland* with the operations of a dream mind. Still it is strewn with many problems and psychological complexity. Browning synthesized (rather unconsciously) it collecting from different sources and psychological associations of early reading or childhood memories. Thus the fusion of diverse elements in his mind was mysterious and poetic. No amount of scholarship could dissociate these without oversimplifying the case in point. The threads of association are too intricate to be disentangled. It existed in Browning’s mind prior to the creation of the poem itself — for the link is rather subconscious— the two layers of motif and meaning interact and enrich each other, leaving little scope for the analytical critic. It is based on Browning’s ‘deepest romances’ and represent a ‘vivid dream, a fantasy that might be called a nightmare and possibly a reminiscence.]*

3. THE TEXT OF THE POEM

As suggested earlier, the minimal source of the title of the poem is from Edgar’s song in *King Lear* (III, iv, 193) consisting of thirty-four stanzas of six iambic pentameter lines each. The poem was first published in the volume called *Men and Women*. (It consisted of two sixty-six lines of blank verse). Since the first publication in 1855, a few word hi the text have been changed; accordingly there have been quite a few changes in the punctuation and the present line 96 has been added later. In 1863, the poem was also included in the **Dramatic Romances**

The stazaic form of the poem is rather unusual. It is abba ba; it begins with a pentameter line, but two lines are tagged ‘a’ matching with ‘a’ and ‘b’ rhymes. The end is curious in its effect, whereby one is impelled to turn back and then to advance. Te strange hesitancy is strictly in keeping with the meaning of the poem.

4. THE OCCASION OF THE POEM

According to the version supplied by the poet, *Childe Roland* was written on January 2, 1852. At that Browning resolved that he would write one poem a day the day before. The three poems were written consecutively — *Women and Roses* was

written the day before. *Love among the Ruins* was written the day after. These three poems, based on his deepest resources; the last one apparently seems to be a dream, a fantasy that might have been a nightmare (had it not ended successfully) a kind feminineness of experiences shared and stored in his mind in a fluid or finite state. This is also corroborated by De Vane, the writer of *A Browning Handbook* (pp. 228-229).

5. THE MEANING OF THE POEM

Browning attached no fixed meaning or suggested hardly any convincing opinion about this long lyric. He gave no clue whether it would serve any moral or allegorical pattern worth mentioning. Broadly speaking, it is apparently the result of a creative response to Edgar's designed 'irrelevancy'. From time to time, some intrepid critics imply that there might be some hidden meaning or lesson in it. Nettleship thought that the poem is an allegory of man's life. The journey to the Tower has its figurative equivalent, including the 'stiff blind horse'—an image of what he may come to 2*

Like Duffin many critics have considered *Childe Roland* a 'Lyric vision', the working's of a poet's mind ; but it has entered the poet's imagination and 'initiated a process of intense feeling', which later transformed into both thought and lyrical verse. It is as mysterious as Galahad's vision in Tennyson's poem. In a way, it may also be taken as a kind of Browning's instinctive reply to the 'Grail', but Browning's approach is different, it is something to be done, of evil to be sought out, attacked and conquered. And the poem also suggests that the Tower is evil itself. One critic also compared *Childe Roland* with Tennyson's *Vision of Sin*.

The poem *Childe* came upon Browning, as a kind of dream; Browning told Mrs. Bloomsfield that the poem was only 'a fantasy'. Now these two words 'dream' and 'fantasy' as variously suggested by the poet himself, indicate the plausibility of a meaning pattern. Another critic suggested that the meaning could be expressed in the line : .

'He that endureth to the end shall he saved' 3*

To this Browning's succinct answer was," Yes, just about that" 4*.[^] Thus some critics attempted to suggest an allegorical meaning to *Childe Roland*. This dream poet explores 'the innermost pattern of his mind'. Childe Roland moves resolutely and courageously toward an unknown goal, has the recurrent theme of many of his poems, like 'How they brought the Good News' or 'Epilogue to Asolando' or 'Tropice'. In this connection, we should also note the nightmarish, 'the macabre and the brutal imagery', which points to the other side of the poet's psyche. Childe's search and quest is to deliver mankind and to conquer the evil of the Dark Tower.

Mrs. Orr observes that Browning was reluctant to explain what the dream signified here and hence it would be unwise to accept the poet's avowed intention (viz, to read it as a poem). It is at best a record of the introspection of a mid Victorian poet in the middle of his career. The knight rides alone in the dusk on a ghastly plain of weeds and stunted grass, where nature seems to be awaiting, possibly for the fire of Judgement, he seeks to cheer himself up thinking about his old companions on this mysterious journey or quest, and remembering their disasters. He reaches another plain, even grimmer than the first, where the ground is strangely churned by the marks of the battle.

Burningly it came on me all at once
This the place!.....

Dauntless he bows, there stands his Dark Tower.

"Childe, Roland was the youngest brother of Helen. Under the guidance of Merlin he undertook to bring back his sister from the elfland, whither the faeries had carried her and he succeeded in his perilous exploit. "(**Baldade of Burd Helen**). Some readers look upon **Childe Roland** as a modern version of the medieval ballad. Others have read it as crypto-autobiography; Browning's worry over his father's affair with Mrs Von Muller contributes something to the pervasive anxiety of the poem. (Maisie Word) Another biographer Betty Miller attributes the anxiety to Browning's feeling of guilt for having failed to fully express his great poetic gifts. Others again think that Childe Roland is a truth seeker; life destroys the man who will try to understand it. Modern readers have tried to explain the poem as Browning's contribution to an evolving portrait of a spiritual wasteland which found expression in Tennyson's **Holy Grail** (1869), Thomson's **City of Dreadful Night** (1874) and Eliot's **Waste Land** (stanzas 9-14) The poem is best read as a gloomy hieroglyphic, a poem whose symbolic style is in almost complete contrast to the psychological realism of Browning's dramatic monologues.

6. BROWNING'S OPINION ABOUT THE POEM IN 1887

When Browning was asked about any allegorical intent of *Childe Roland*, by a stranger in 1887, He answered thus 5*

"Oh, no, not at all. Understand, I don't repudiate it, either, I only mean I was conscious of **no allegorical intention** in writing it. 'Twas like this; one year in Florence, I had been very lazy, I resolved that I would write something everyday. Well, the first day I wrote about some roses, suggested by a magnificent basket that someone had sent to my wife. **The next day Childe Roland came upon me as a kind of dream.** I had to write then and there, and I finished it the same day, I

believe. But it was simply that I had to do it. I did not know then what I meant beyond that, and I'm sure I don't know now. But I am very fond of it.

The story comes out naturally— out of staccato narrative method. For a knight or a childe to 'come to' a tower, he is perhaps seeking it. Thus Roland is one of a band of trained knight and sworn to find and attack a certain Dark Tower. But others before him have failed. Childe Roland sets out and enquires the way to the Tower of a crippled and sinister-looking person who directs him off the road, up the valley. He suspects, but he remembers that the Tower is indeed said to stand somewhere in this valley, he turns as directed, by the cripple guide.

The path is dreary and depressing, leading amidst mountains. He can visualize no way through, but realizes no way through is needed—for the Dark Tower is before him. He sounds his slug-horn and challenges the Tower. Thus Browning ends his poem *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*. Thus far he came, and no further. And Browning also went no further. Louis Macneice elaborated the theme of the poem into a full-fledged play in *The Dark Tower*, where he has undrelined and developed a band of devotees trained for the quest, (this being made a family affair), with a 'possessive mother' as an additional point.

7. ESSENTIAL ANNOTATION

See Edgar's song in **Lear**—the song in *King Lear* is a cue to the poem and its origin and genesis. But it only enhances the mystery of the text.

'Childe' in the title of the poem refers to youth of rank ; later it was applied to an knight, the final e is a reminder of the old form and its usage in chivalric poetry.

2. That hoary cripple—Refer to Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, (II, 710-65) 8. Askance—sidewise, archaic expression
25. As when a sick man—this idea maybe referred to Donne's *Valediction* 'As virtuous men pass mildly away'
48. Estray (Here) — a stray animal
68. The bents—the stiff-flower stalks of grasses
72. Pashing—treading violently upon watery ground
76. One stiff blind horse — 'the figure of a horse in his own drawing room', Mrs. Orr's suggestion in this connection. The tower, the painting and the image of a horse — are all woven together from the poet's earlier memories.
80. Colloped — archaic use, in its participle form, from the expression 'collops of flesh' (Wanley),

85. I shut my eyes — as in ‘The Ancient Mariner’, part IV, stanzas V and VI
13. Browning’s fascination with the morbid, the macabre or the sinister. Compare with scenes of carnage in *Sordello*.
133. Cirque — any circular arena 136. Brewage — a beverage
143. Tophet’s tool — some infernal instrument. Originally Tophet was the name of a part of the valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem.
24. The landscape becomes an abomination of desolation.
160. Apollyon’s bosom-friend— a character in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Apollyon met a ‘hideous monster’, clothed with scales like a fish.
27. Allegory of the life of a Christian
29. Roland becomes a hunted animal.
203. Slug-horn — a corruption of ‘slogan’, a war-cry. Earlier wrongly used to mean a sort of horn by Chatterton, and Browning followed this use.
34. (Three interpretations — 1) did the mountains in the blood — red sunset dissolve as the walls of Jericho fell to a similar sound? 2) could the squat tower vanish like a dream phantom? 3) was the sound of the horn the last breath of the hero? the end does not sound like spiritual failure.)

When the knight summons his courage, the nightmare ends, though, however, the nature of the ordeal or crisis is never hinted at by some vague suggestions.

The stanzaic form of the poem is rather unusual. It is abba ba; it begins with a pentameter line, but two lines are tagged ‘a’ matching with ‘a’ and ‘b’ rhymes. The end is curious in its effect, whereby one is impelled to turn back and then to advance. The strange hesitancy is strictly in keeping with the meaning of the poem.

8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The gruesome and horrifying details of the journey are fascinating, if read as incidents in a ride. It is popularly known that Browning’s forte is ‘landscape’, it is modeled on Gerasd Lairesse’s ‘Art of Painting in all its branches mainly chapter XVII of the book In Lairesse’s book mentioned earlier, one can find the horrible element in painting. Here the old cripple, the pathless field, the desperate vegetation, the spiteful little river, the killing of the water rat, the enclosing mountains — many of the details of *Childe Roland* may be discerned. Sometimes the imagery resembles to that of the water-colour of A. W. Hunt, painted later in 1866. Browning also suggested this, “My ‘marsh’ was only made out of my head — with some recollec-

tions of a strange solitary little tower I have come upon more than once in **Massa-Carrere** in the midst of low hills” 6* and the figure of the blind old horse of the poem has been suggested by a figure of a tapestry of Browning’s own in Florence (Casa Guidi).

Harold Golder’s article on Browning’s *Childe Roland* (published in 1924) suggests that “behind Browning’s ‘Childe Roland’ lies a vast contributory reservoir of chivalric romance”. The hero’s coming to the Dark Tower is ‘patently a chivalric enterprise of a familiar type’. The psychological background is very simple and lucid, representing the consensus of modern opinion. And the critics’ recognition of this aspect of the poem, makes it rather too problematic. Like **Kubla Khan**, *Childe Roland*’s dreamlike logic can accommodate a bewildering array of images drawn from Browning’s reading — from **Jack** and the **Beanstalk** to Dante, and from Dante to the brutal industrial landscape of Elizabeth Barren’s **The cry of the Children**.

9. QUESTIONS

2. Discuss the view that in ‘Childe Roland’ there is no necessity to seek for any allegorical interpretation : the poem speaks for itself.
3. Is there any available edifice of meaning in **Childe Roland**? Discuss with illustrations.

Notes :

1* C. de Vane, *A Browning Handbook*, 1955, pp.228-29

2* H. C Duffin : *The Amphibian or A Reconsideration of Browning* p. 82

3* Nettleship’s *Essays* 1908, in J.W Chadwick (Essays)

4* *The Christian Register* (Jan. 19, 1888)

5* Quoted in de Vane’s *A Browning Handbook*, p. 229

6* de Vane, *A Browning Handbook*, P229

RECOMMENDED READING :

1. Colder, H, Browning’s Childe Roland (1924)

2. Hardy, Irene, Browning’s ‘Childe Roland’ in *Poet Lore* 24.56

3. W. Shaw : *The Dialectical Temper*

4. Santayana, G, *The Poetry of Barbarism* (1900)

5. B. Melchiori : *The Poetry of Reticence*

6. P. Hoiiian : *Browning’s charactrs*

Unit -9 □ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Structure

- 9.1 Text of How do I love thee? Let me count the ways**
- 9.2 Analysis of the poem.**
 - 9.2.1 Background of the poem**
 - 9.2.2 The text of the poem**
 - 9.2.3 The occasion of the poem**
 - 9.2.4 The Meaning of the poem**
 - 9.2.5 Browning's opinion about the poem in 1887**
 - 9.2.6 Essential Annotation**
 - 9.2.7 Additional Information**
 - 9.2.8 Questions**
 - 9.2.9 Recommended Reading.**

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, — I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!— and if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death

1 □ OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this part, you will be able to have an idea of and write on E.B. Browning's poetic art as evident from her sonnet sequence (*Sonnets from the Portuguese*) with special reference to one of her best and most representative sonnets in it. As a result this would enable you to comment on select passages from the poem itself.

2 □ E.B. BROWNING (1806-61)

Robert Browning paid a glowing tribute to his beloved in his *Ring and the Books*

O lyric love, half-angel and half-bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire (II. 1390-1)

The lines were addressed to his dead wife Elizabeth. She has been variously described by critics as a spasmodic, a feminist and a reactionary with some subversive elements in her writing. She is a "committed" writer to the cause of liberty, for the cause of women or for working children. She liked George Sand, a French poetess and wrote two poems on her and also admired the great classical Greek poetess Sappho. Apart from liberty, love was the theme to which she sang her most enduring music. "*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways*", is one of the forty-three sonnets addressed to Browning, endearingly named by them (both contributed to the naming of it) as *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, for it is a convenient 'mask' or 'personae' of the writer.

Elizabeth was the oldest of eleven children born to Edward and Mary Moulton Barrett. Her father owned sugar plantations in Jamaica, though after the abolition of the slave trade in 1834, the income from them decreased dramatically and the family moved from a large country house in Herefordshire to 50, Wimpole Street in London.

Elizabeth, who was a precocious and active child, seems to have suffered from physical or emotional crisis in her teens which left her almost semi-invalid, unable to take on any domestic responsibilities. She lived till the age of forty in her father's house, writing poetry, seeing few visitors outside the family circle but keeping an eager eye on the world outside. After the death of Mrs. Barrett in 1828, Mr. Barrett had become anxious to keep the family together and forbade any children to marry including Elizabeth. She, (whose love for him was profound and complex) suffered his rule for as long as she could. (In this connection F.L. Lucas in his essay on

Browning, in *Eight Victorian Poets*, suggested the name of Freud, commenting on the father's command rather unwritten but understood "them shall not marry" (Mr. Barren was the first to encourage her writing and she dedicated her volumes to him). In 1840 she lost one of her brothers whom she loved very much, it was a case of death by drowning at Torquay and she was partly instrumental to the accident. She wrote a few moving poems after this event: *Grief, The Mask, I Lift My Heavy Heart up Solemnly (Sonnets From the Portuguese no. V)*

In 1844, Elizabeth Barren published her book of *Poems* which was to make her name in the literary world, and it would directly affect the course of her life. This attracted the attention of Robert Browning and inspired him to write a letter to its unfamiliar author, which began: "I love you with all my heart, dear Miss Barren ... and I love you too". After certain stages of denial, submission and ultimate acceptance, recorded so beautifully in their *Courtship* 'Correspondence' (edited by various authors including Kintner and D.Karlin), they agreed to marry. And according to Mrs. Browning's version, it was a very 'private marriage'. In September 1846, the couple were married and left England for Italy. They settled in Casa Guidi in Florence. It still bears her name.

The sheltered poet of Wimpole Street found a new life in Casa Guidi where she lived the rest of her life and breathed her last. (After her death, the road bears her name, a rare tribute for an English poet.) In Italy, she traveled, wrote and walked a little and became a keen supporter of the political movement for 'unification'. The Italian years were immensely fruitful. *Poems* (1850) included her *Sonnets from the Portuguese, and her* love sonnets to Browning for which she is best remembered; from 1853-56 she worked on *Aurora Leigh* a new kind of novel-poem with the making of a woman-poet's mind with 'the repressed rage and anguish' of the woman writer; thus, the writer claims:

"I will write my story for my better self (*Aurora Leigh*. Bk. I)

It also contains lengthy arguments of social questions including the 'condition of women' in England of her times. Here, she is polemic and debatable. The noble attitude and sublime presentation earned her tremendous contemporary popularity. But she has lost her early image and popularity through the modern 'feminist' school of critics 'to rehabilitate her' (Bernard Richards: *Victorian Poetry*, 1988, p.287). To them Elizabeth Barren Browning is one of the major women-poets of the nineteenth-century.

Elizabeth Barren thought about forms in *Aurora Leigh*:

“What form is best for poems’? Let me think
Of forms less, and the external. Trust the spirit.
As soveran nature does, to make the form;
For otherwise we only imprison spirit
And not embody. (*Aurora Leish*. Bk. VI, 223-7) :

In a letter to Browning, she also suggested this idea: ‘I am inclined to think that we want new forms ... as well as thoughts. The old gods are dethroned. Why should we go back to antique moulds?’² *. But curiously enough in her sonnet sequence, she followed the antique Elizabethan and Miltonic or Italian sonnet mould as a kind of legacy from the ancient writers. Patrick Crutwell ³* calls this literary ‘Ttalo-omania’ of some Victorian sonneteers.

3 □ LITERARY STYLE :

Confessional and the stress is on ‘me’ or T: This seems to be a tentative approach to her well-known *Sonnets from the Portuguese* . These sonnets are ‘self-indulgently personal’ (Margaret Reynolds (ed.) ‘Introduction’ p.61) It is a kind of poetic version of her love-letters to Robert Browning, very personal and lyrical but based formally on Elizabethan and Renaissance models. She had no defined notion of pre-existent form — the lyrical impulsion genres are overlapping in the sonnet form (i.e. lacking the massive coherence of Italian form).

Robert Browning identified Elizabeth Barren Browning with the Portuguese girl Catarina in his poem *Caterina to Camoens* the beloved of the poet Camoens ; when his wife’s sonnets were published, the Brownings chose to call them *Portuguese Sonnets*, (an ambiguous title which was disguised from the work-a-day world but full of secret meaning for the Brownings themselves).

This love-sonnet sequence along with the dramatic story of their marriage has given the sonnets something of a fascination of a ‘roman à clef; still their (the sonnets) beauty and intent are self-sufficing, independent of their personal reference.

The sonnets begin immediately upon her first acquaintance with Browning and chronicle her emotional reactions to their developing relationship. By and large each sonnet seeks to recapture a moment of reaction and response and the constant and recurrent theme is love. The sequence gradually traces the growth of their love-relation from melancholy and weeping, bereavement and remembrance of grief, through wonder in the strength of joy of love, to assurance and delight in love, for the present and for the future. Thus, Ruth Adam sums up: “ The Sonnets tell the story of spirit revived”⁴*

The *Sonnets* seems to be a literary disguise for 'the freer music of love-song'; it reveals the spontaneous impulsiveness of the mind — (according to the writer herself, her mind was elusive, erratic, adamant and energetic.) —; critics find 'the impulsive treatment of quatorzains'^{5*} with its 'grace' and 'tender dignity of style'^{6*}

4 □ STRUCTURE AND MEANING; THE BASIC THEME IN 'SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE'

The poet Robert Browning or the lover seems to be the precise subject matter of Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets*. Her tone is highly serious, prophetic and occasionally biblical. In a letter dated 15th August 1846, E.B Browning writes to Browning,

Dearest beloved, to turn away from the whole world to you .. - when I do, do I lose anything ... or rather gain all. ^{7*} Henry Jones wrote about her *Sonnets*: '*Portuguese Sonnets* reveal to us the most ecstatic feeling that changed her life and art. They are equaled only, by her life'. E..C Steadman (*Victorian Poetry* London 1892,p.137) writes:

Mrs. Browning's love-sonnets are the outpouring of a woman's tender emotions at an epoch when art was most mature and her whole nature exalted by a passion that to such a being comes out but once for all. Hence she is absorbed in rapturous utterance, radiant and triumphant with her own joy ... — 'Not death but love (theme) had seized her utterance'.

These sonnets are positively bold and demanding. A certain 'baroque wit' runs through these sonnets; for it is a kind of legacy or literary tradition, partly followed (in form mainly) and partly defied at the same time; the stereotype roles are changed and adapted to the courtly tradition. Margaret Reynolds, a feminist critic, finds in some of her sonnets, 'an energy of desire', and some, she felt to be 'positively inflammatory'. Here Elizabeth Barrett Browning is both the poet and the muse, 'the invisible lover' and 'the visible beloved'. At last she found a voice, which links her with the contemporary world. She calls Browning:

Most gracious singer of high poems
... thou must sing ... alone, aloof. (Sonnet IV)

Mrs. Browning accepts the confessional mode in the *Sonnets*, to her, it is a way of representation of reality, hence, a mimetic art. These sonnets tell of her love for him in many shapes and forms; initially Browning found her ill, almost a neurotic and invalid, but cured her almost miraculously (so, probably, she called him 'Saviour' in both the senses in her sonnets) by the power of love and tender care. And

this stage with a carious spell of over-shadowing death is chronicled in her early sonnets in the sequence.

Portuguese Sonnets is the epitome of her love—her unbounded (this is clearly suggested in the sonnet under discussion : ‘How many ways do I love thee (?)’) Love for the man, the poet, the Saviour and the beloved — all in one. The influence of their love is felt in all the forty-three sonnets, Essentially over-valued in their age for obvious sentimental reasons, they remain the most profitable part-of her large production ; she was gifted with a poet’s vision, a warm heart and moved by noble impulses; there is a luxuriant quality in her work. Here she lifts her heavy heart solemnly’ (Sonnet no. IV)

5 □ HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

As you have studied some aspects of E.B. Browning’s poetic art and her sense of form, it would be easy to grasp the sonnet under discussion; *How do I love thee? Let me count the ways*. Contrary to the traditional views of love’s elusive quality, the writer tends to suggest that love or its ways could be reckoned. Under the circumstances, the lover as much as the poet (Mrs. Browning did not approve the use of the word ‘poetess’).

The rhyming pattern of the sonnet is abba abba cd cd ce. It is an Italian or Miltonic sonnet with slight minor modification.

There is a kind of over-lapping, if not free flowing of thought from the octave (first eight lines) to the sestet (next six lines), the idea of love’s profundity being the subject of the two parts.

The words ‘I love thee’ recur like a burden or refrain that seeks to prove or represent the inexpressible. In the sestet (i.e. six lines) she reiterates her point from various angles and establishes her unique love **in more ways than one**.

But the sonnet rises to its crescendo where she transcends this ‘level of everyday V, with a fond wish ‘I shall but love thee better after death’. This penultimate sonnet specially the concluding lines reminds one of Robert Browning’s *Prospice* addressed to ‘Ba’ : it is a kind of valedictory note :

O thou soul of soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And God be the rest!

Or as in Sonnet no. XXXVIII, she writes

As who stands in dewless asphodel

Looks backward on the tedious time he has
In the upper life.

6 □ ESSENTIAL ANNOTATION

Lines:

1. How do I love thee? — The poet begins with a question.
2. I love thee to ... a kind of tentative and emotional reckoning of it.
4. The ends of Being and ideal Grace — retelling to platonic absolute in the use of terms like 'Being' and 'Grace'.
5. The level of everyday's— Mundane everyday life
9. The passion put to use — A blatant confession of strong feeling, over-sentimental and passionate in nature. E.B Browning's *Diary* records this aspect of her mind even in her salad days.
10. Old Grievs — like her dear brother 'Bro's' death by drowning; she wrote a poem on this subject entitled Grief. Some of these poems and sonnets are like Tennyson's hi memorium, lays of sorrow bom'.
14. Love thee better after death - Compare this with the last line of Browning's *Prospice*, (which means, look forward to') a valedictory poem, expressing the poet's love for his beloved even after death:

'O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again
And with God be the rest!'

7 □ CONCLUSION

To sum up, she has now the 'new vintage' of the Cliristian love to look forward to (the etymological sense of the word *Prospice*). In this sonnet E.B Browning is both mellifluous or sentimental and straight-forward and bold in her representation of her admiration and hero-worship. And to Browning, these poems came like a revelation.

E.B Browning told him (that day) to read that (*Sonnets*) and tear it, if he did not like it, and 'then she fled to her own room'. (Critical Kit-Kats: Edmund Gosse)

8 □ QUESTIONS

1. Why are the sonnets of E.B Browning called *Portuguese Sonnets*”?
2. What is the main theme of 'How do I love thee'”?

3. How does she convey her love for Browning ?
4. What is remarkable about *Sonnets from the Portuguese*’?

9 □ NOTES & REFERENCES

- 1.* Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barren, 1845-46, 2 vols., Kintner, 1969, vol. Ip.3
- 2* *Letters*, ed. Kintner, Cambridge, 1969, I, p.43
- 3* *The English Sonnet*, Longman, 1969, p.41
- 4* “*Introduction*” to the Cambridge edition of E.B Browning’s *Poetical Works*, 1974, XVII
- 5* Ruth Adams, “*Introduction*”, E.B Browning’s *Poetical Works*. XVI.
- 6* E.B Browning; ‘*Her Mud and Art*’ -E. Rliys, p.337
- 7* *Courtship Correspondence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. David Karlin, O.V.P. 1987, p. 271

10 □ RECOMMENDED READING

There is relatively little criticism on E.B Browning’s *Sonnets*. Most critics tend to focus on her long verse-novel, *Aurora-Leigh*, for it has got the status of a feminist classic.

1. Hayter, A., *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1965)
2. Hewlett, D., *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1957)
3. Karlin, D., *The Courtsh Correspondence of Rabert Browning and E.B Browning* (Oxford, 1985)
4. Mennin, Dorothy., E.B Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1981).
5. Reynolds, M and Angela Leighton (eds.) *Victorian Women Poets*, London, 1995

Unit -10 □ Emily Jane Bronte

Structure

- 10.1 Text of ‘No Coward Soul is Mine’**
- 10.2 Analysis of the poem.**
 - 10.2.1 Objectives**
 - 10.2.2 Emily Bronte : Her life and character**
 - 10.2.3 Poems of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell : A Joint Venture**
 - 10.2.4 The background of the poem**
 - 10.2.5 ‘No Coward soul’ : A Note on the text—A critical analysis**
 - 10.2.6 Bronte : Opinions about her work**
 - 10.2.7 Essential Annotation**
 - 10.2.8 Questions**
 - 10.2.9 Notes**
 - 10.2.19 Recommended Reading**

EMILY JANE BRONTE

NO COWARD SOUL IS MINE

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere,
I see Heaven’s glories shine
And faith shines equal arming me from fear

O God within my breast
Almighty ever-present Deity
Life, that in me hast rest
As I undying Life, have power in thee

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men’s hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by the infinity
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though Earth and moon were gone
And suns and universe ceased to be
And thou wert left alone
Every existence would exist in thee

There is not room for death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

EMILY JANE BRONTE (1818-48)

10.2.1 OBJECTIVES

The story of Emily Bronte ; and that of her brother and sisters with whose names that of her own is always inextricably associated, is a well-known literary legend. It should be our objective to introduce herself, her poetry and her contribution to English Literature; and for that we must have a fair knowledge about her life and personality.

10.2.2 EMILY BRONTE: HER LIFE AND CHARACTER

Emily was the fifth child in the Bronte family. The family came from Ireland. The father of Emily Bronte was Patrick Bronte (1771-1861). He changed the original family surname of Brunty or Pmnty into rather unusual Bronte. In 1812, when he was curate of Hartstead-cum-Clifton in Yorkshire, he married Maria Branwell (1783-1821). She bore Mm six children — Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Brauwel, Emily (b. 20 August, 1818) and Anne. The two eldest children died in early childhood. Char-

lotte, the only one of the Brontes, to achieve literary success in her own lifetime, had the longest span of life among the Bronte children; she died at the age of thirty-nine. Emily was two years old when they moved to Haworth and three when Tier mother died. Her mother left the infant family to the care of her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, who gave loyal domestic service to the Brontes and devoted the whole of her life to the cause of this family.

The Bronte children are supposed to have been unhappy because the place was bleak and besides, they were rather delicate. In June 1835, she went to Miss Wooler's establishment at Roe Head, where Charlotte was working as a teacher. After four months, she was ill and desperately home-sick, so that Charlotte arranged for her release. 'Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils,' Charlotte wrote — 'without it she perished. The change from her own home to school and from her noiseless, secluded but unrestrained and inartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine... was what she failed in enduring' 1*

Emily's father was a kind, sympathetic, open-minded instructor. His children loved their home-life and their rambles on the moors. There are three reliable biographies of Emily Bronte viz., i) by Laura Hinkley (1945), another rather early by ii) A.M.F. Robinson (1883) and the more recent biography of her by iii) Winfred Gerin (1972). Moreover, an exquisite picture of Emily is given by Charlotte Bronte, her sister in her novel, *Shirley*. The Bronte sisters read a lot and their father engaged Ms daughters into the habit of deep reading at an early age of ten. Charlotte and Emily Bronte went to Bmsells to study languages in a boarding school in 1842, but they left their study incomplete and returned home. Their study includes among others, Aesop, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Ossian, Scott and Byron. But according to Charlotte, their 'highest stimulus' came from their enthusiastic 'attempts at literary composition' 2*. They had very early cherished the dream of becoming authors. And this dream sustained them till death and it acquired 'strength and consistency' in their writings. Charlotte found in her work 'a deep conviction about the sincerity of purpose', not mere 'common effusions', like poetry generally written by women. T thought them condensed, terse, vigorous and genuine'. Here she wrote her remarkable comment about her sister's character and nature: 'Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone'. 'They stirred my heart like the sound of a trumpet'.

Both the sisters turned to literature because they sought a kind of refuge or release and to relieve the sense of sadness, arising out of loneliness of their own lot. For, they found their work as governess and teacher rather unendurable.

POEMS OF CURRER, ELLIS AND ACTON BELL : A JOINT VENTURE

In 1846, the three sisters produced a volume of poems under the pseudonyms mentioned above. It however did not turn out to be a literary triumph. Branwell died in September 1848. Emily caught cold at the funeral of her brother and from this she never recovered. The details of her illness were given by Charlotte, these were ‘deeply branded’ in her memory. She sank rapidly: yet, while ‘physically she perished, mentally she grew stronger than we had yet known her’.

In Charlotte’s view, Emily was a genius. And it is masculine in character; her muse is a male muse. In her writings about Emily, she stressed the unwomanly side of her character. Actually Charlotte invented or re-created a ‘hero’ out of her and she (Emily) became the object or subject of a lively myth. In the 1880’s and 1890’s, there was a revival of their (Brontes) writings and Emily Bronte became ‘the very icon of what the woman poet should be’ (Reynolds, p. 199); Charlotte Mew (1982) revealed in her edition of *Collected Poems and Prose*, the view of Emily as the stoic heroine in *Elinor*. “He said you were like a queen and should have an empire, but that your people would have killed and canonized you afterwards” 3*.

Emily Bronte’s poetry seeks to create ‘the image of her fierce independence’. Rejecting human company, she wanted to face alone life’s odds and there is a note of strong and independent but mystical belief which nourished her to the end of her life.

10.2.4 THE BACKGROUND OF THE POEM

The poem under discussion reflects and records certain aspects of the Victorian ethos as is evident from Buckley’s title *The Victorian Temper* : it was both an age of honest doubt and equally that of firm faith and conviction Whereas most Victorian poets had a tendency to pontificate, to be serious, reflective and melancholic, Emily Bronte, on the other hand, was refreshingly different from these ‘elegiac’ poets. As a contrast, Emily was ‘stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone... Liberty was the breath of Emily’s nostrils, without it she perished’. Here Charlotte Bronte was right in more ways than one. She had a ‘head for logic’ and ‘capability of argument’ rare indeed in a woman. She had a strong conviction from which emerged a new and bold kind of poetry of belief:

O God within my breast
Almighty ever present Deity

Very often her poetry seems to suggest ‘a kind of dialogue with her muse’ (Reynolds *Victorian Women Poets*, p. 197). Her boldness speaks for itself:

Riches I hold in high esteem

Or in another poem, she writes :

I will not. can not go.

There is a sense of individuality and self-sufficiency in these lines. Charlotte found the truth in her (Emily's) nature and belief: 'The spirit was inexorable to the flesh. In Emily's 'nature ... lay a secret of power and fire; her powers were unadapted to the practical business life. Her will was not very flexible. Her temper (it was not essentially Victorian) was magnanimous but warm and sudden and her spirit (as is evident from her final poems) altogether unbending'.

10.2.5 'NO COWARD SOUL' ; A NOTE ON THE TEXT — A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

As a representative poem of Emily Bronte, one can quite effortlessly talk about '*the last lines*', another title for '*No Coward Soul of Mine*'

The poem seeks to register a very simple but profound mystical perception of the writer.

The author is no coward. Amidst the storms and stress of life, she sees the radiant face of God, which fortifies her soul with faith and dispels (her) fear; to her, God is an ever-present Reality. God is undying Life, and she has hold on Him.

The writer distrusts the conventional creeds of men; the various creeds men have propounded or expostulated about God are vain; she has abiding faith in His infinity and this faith is firmly based on conviction and on her hope for immortality. The all-embracing love of God informs and sustains the whole universe. Though the whole universe be annihilated, the seeds of creation will exist in God, who alone will survive or stand the test of time. All things have their origin in God and hence, like Him they remain in Him being indestructible.

10.2.6 BRONTE : OPINIONS ABOUT HER WORK

There is relatively little criticism in Bronte's poetry, for it has been over-shadowed by *Wuthering Heights*. Today Emily Bronte is remembered for her powerful novel *Wuthering Heights* and a few very remarkable poems. Why has Bronte's poetry been neglected by critics? About her Matthew Arnold wrote, that she was one:

whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence and grief,
Daring since Byron died;

Swinburne thought her to be a 'greater genius' than her sister Charlotte. Edmund Gosse finds, 'stanzas' or

'Ofen rebuked, yet always back returning'

to be 'most characteristic utterance' and also finds that the last two stanzas of the poem contain the quintessence, the peculiar doctrine that was her mission to preach 4*.

I'll walk but not in old heroic traces
And not in paths of high morality

* * * * *

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading
It vexes me to choose another guide.

By 'high morality', the poet here means lofty stoical ideals as expressed in * Old Stoic' ('Riches I hold in high esteem'), she believed and had her trust in God ('O God, within my breast).

The images of 'withered weeds' and 'idlest froth', suggestively records the worthlessness of thousand Victorian 'casual creeds' and religious beliefs. The image of 'steadfast rock' carries conviction for it suggests the firmness other her unflinching faith in God's omnipresence. It shelters her from the fear from 'the storm-troubled spheres' of life. The apostrophe is bold and straight — forward;

Thou - thou art Being and Breath

And what thou art may never be destroyed.

(Emily Bronte will be remembered — apart from her great lyrical novel, *Wuthering Heights* for a few poems having intrinsic importance as well. Her '**Last Lines**' (the poem selected for our discussion) is the poet's or author's 'Last Testament' — the most 'profoundly moving' of them all. Thus her biographer (A.M.F Robinson) records : They found no novel, half finished or begun in the old brown desk which she used to rest on her knees sitting under the thorns. They discovered a poem written at the end of Emily's life ... the fittest monument of her heroic spirit'5*. These words are profound, sincere, vigorous and elevating, as 'befits the last one', a valedictory poem — the last words one has time to speak. She died at Haworth on December 19, 1848.

10.2.7 ESSENTIAL ANNOTATION

Lines

1. No Coward Soul — A rhetorical beginning with firm emphasis using two negative items 'no' and 'coward'.

2. No Trembler — Similar rhetorical line is used here too.
Storm-troubled — making of compound words like, Keats, suggesting conflict-ridden world.
3. Heaven's glories — the vision of a bright effulgence of heavenly light
4. Arming — guiding, protecting, shielding the writer.
5. God within my breast — an intuitive mystical vision - God dwells in her mind.
8. Undying life — firm conviction in an undying life, sustained by God.
11. Withered weeds — as useless and valueless as decayed and withered leaves, the image is reminiscent of Shelley's 'Ode to the West-Wind'.
12. Idlest froth — nautical or marine image suggesting purposelessness.
15. Anchored - fixed firmly.
16. The steadfast rock — referring to the bedrock of faith in God's immortality
18. Animates — gives life to
24. Every existence — partly Pantheistic belief.
25. Not room for death — Death is personified. He (God) is deathless and undying.

10.2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Would you call "*The Last Lines*, a devotional poem?
2. Is there any indication of the writer's attitude to God or any reaction to Victorian people's belief in diverse 'casual creeds'?
3. '*The Last Lines*' or '*No coward soul is mine*' is a valedictory poem i.e. a poem about death and parting — Justify the statement.

10.2.9 NOTES

1. Winferd Gerin : Emily Bronte : A Biography O.V.P. 1972, p.55.
2. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*
3. Charlotte Mew : *Collected Poems and Prose*, London, 1982 p. 290.
4. Quoted in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (Book Fifth) ed. L. Binyon, p. 157.

5. A.M.F. Robinson : *Emily Bronte*, 1883, p. 232

10.2.10 RECOMENDED READINGS

1. Bronte, Emily (1992) : *The Poems of Emily Bronte*, ed. Barbara Lloyd-Evans, London.
2. Chitham, Edward (1987) *A Life of Emily Bronte*, Oxford.
3. Davis Stevie (1988) *Emily Bronte, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester*.
4. Pykett, Lyn (1989) *Emily Bronte*, Basingstoke, MacMillan.

Introduction:

In this section I would like to suggest:

- i) an approach to the study of poetry
- ii) to examine the basic difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose and
- iii) to show how there might be a convergence between the language of prose and the language of poetry; that is to say can there be a meeting point, a common ground between the two ?

Let us start with poetry. Can we define poetry? To the question “What is poetry?” Robert Frost, the American poet, once said “Poetry is the kind of things poets write”. Or, let us consider this definition : “Poetry is a rhythmical composition of words expressing an attitude, designed to surprise and delight and to arouse an emotional response”. The first definition may sound vague, but, at least the speaker is trying to suggest that a poet will write according to his own individual, mental and emotional makeup. The second definition takes into account one type of poetry : “to surprise and delight”. After all a poem may not surprise and delight. It may leave one with feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger or a combination of both sadness and joy. Thus there can be no objective definition of poetry.

Poetry expresses a “truth” but this truth may be variously interpreted by different people. When a particular poet cannot communicate this truth to the reader, then the poem may be rejected by him as a bad one. We should not dismiss what we do not logically understand. When we read a poem or when we study it responses are generated. Again, my responses may be different from yours. A poem has its own logic which is different from our everyday logic or from the term as we normally understand it to be.

There is a vital difference between verse and poetry. For example “Jack and Jill / went up the hill” is verse but not poetry. Poetry may make statements but makes imaginative statements. G.M. Hopkins once said that poetry (and I quote) is “to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning”. That is to say, there may be something in a poem or some qualities which we cannot decipher, which we may like instantly. That ‘something’ may initially be difficult to precisely pin-point.

What is important in a poem is the effect it creates rather than its possessing a message or a meaning. Yet we must study a poem, at least for examination purposes; mustn't we? I will come back to this later.

Let us look at some different methods of reading a poem, especially a difficult one. On a first attempt read the poem straightaway pushing on despite all obstacles. Ignore initially the difficult words, at least until you have read the poem as a whole. On the second reading some of the knots may be untied. After that underline certain words which consider key-words, in the different stanzas. Also select words, lines and passages which are not clear to you. Look up difficult words in a dictionary, look up references to places, mythology etc. in an encyclopedia.

Now on studying a poem. A poem can be paraphrased, that is to say we explain in our own words what a stanza may mean. Thus, we can go on paraphrasing each stanza. The paraphrasing helps us to make a comparison between the language of poetry and the language of prose, or to see the distance between the two. Again from the paraphrasing we may understand the theme/themes of a poem. A poem may state something but it may imply something else. Do not take the lines of a poem too literally. You may run into difficulties because of this. In his poem *Prayer Before Birth* Louis Macneice pleads for

trees to talk to me
sky to sing to me
birds and a white light in the back of my mind to guide me

So the student who queried: "Sir how can trees talk?" had a point but he was taking the poet too literally. All that the poet asks for in these lines is some kind of a rapport with nature, in the midst of life's sordid happenings.

Have you ever asked yourself this question: why is it that a prose writing creates no problems, while those same words when used in a poem startle a reader? Take the example of the poem *ABOVE THE DOCK* by T. E. Hulme. The poem is deceptively simple and short. It is simple perhaps but it is not simple-minded. Let's read it:

Above the quiet dock in midnight
Tangled in the tall mast's corded height
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

At the purely literal level the poet describes the moon viewed from the dock of a ship. So what, you might ask. The poem is merely descriptive you may say. But if we read the poem carefully we will see that the poet is asking us to reject something, or is speaking about something which has already been rejected: "What seemed so far away / is like a child's balloon forgotten after play". Thus theme of rejection is important. This is one way in which the poem may be studied.

Let us look at the poem entitled *Furies* by the Indian poet Nissin Ezekiel:

What shall I do
with my furies?
Shall I be
driven before them....
Neither as enemies
nor as friends
do my furies
leave me alone

Here, the word “furies” is given special significance. The word as you know denotes anger but in this poem the poet attaches great importance to it. He is hounded by it, brow-beaten and bullied by it just as one is by a human being. So furies here behave like human beings, the poet treats them as such and compares them with “enemies and friends”. This is called personification; the poet personifies an abstract thing like fury.

The theme of a poem may be something, but its subject-matter may be something else. For example, the subject matter of *The Brook* is the brook, or a brook but its theme is eternity or endlessness : “.... men may come and men may go / but I go on for ever”. The poem conveys ideas of eternity, timelessness and movement:

I chatter, chatter, as I flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

I wind about, and in and out,
with here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling,

And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me as I travel
With many a silvery waterbreak
Above the golden gravel,

Similarly the subject matter of a poem by Blake is London while the themes are oppression, cruelty and injustice.

Poetry has a music of its own. G.M. Hopkins once said that all good poetry aspires towards the condition of poetry. It is called lyricism derived from the word lyric. A lyric is a short poem which concentrates on the poet's feelings and which has a special musical appeal. The best of poets are lyrical. They sing even when they are sad. A poem may be lyrical when rhymed or even unrhymed. Let us look at these examples. The first poem is *Song* by Dom Moraes the Indian poet. Regular rhymes in this poem make it lyrical:

I sowed my wild oats
Before I was twenty
Drunkards and turncoats
I knew in plenty.
Most friends betrayed me.

Each new affair
Futher delayed me.
I didn't care.

The next poem is by Lord Tennyson. It is written in what may be termed free verse, that is to say without any rhyme. Yet the poem gives the impression of rhyme through its movement and sweetness:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that no more.

There is a third type which may use rhyme irregularly and yet may be lyrical. Let us look at these lines from Keats' *Ode To Autumn*.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees;
And fill all fruits with ripeness to the core,
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells

Another way of studying poetry is by comparison. You may compare two poems by the same poet or two poems written by different persons. When reading Shelley's *To a Skylark*

you may compare it with his *Ode To The West Wind* or when you study Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* you may compare it with another poem of his called *the Great Lover*. You may contrast *The Soldier* with Siegfried Sassoon's *Dreamers*; both the poems speak of the soldier but the treatment of the subject differs radically in tone and meaning.

I said earlier that poetry makes imaginative statements. The basic difference between poetry and prose is that prose makes explicit or direct statements while poetry makes imaginative statements. It suggests. Yet sometimes prose can be poetic. This is how the two-prose and poetry-meet. Hemingway in his *The Old Man and The Sea* uses simple, commonplace words yet these words in the context of the old man's struggle with the fish are stripped of their ordinariness. The language is heightened to the language and tensions of poetry.

Unit -1 □ G. M. Hopkins

Structure

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Text of Poem : Analysis

1.0 □ Introduction

Although Gerard Manley Hopkins lived from 1844 to 1899, he is considered to be a modern, because he took massive leaps in his poetry by his ingenuity and virtuosity in technical skills. At the same time his craftsmanship as a poet is upheld by his inner vision of things which he described as ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’. He was conscious of his poetic craft and although he experimented with rhyme, his intense spirituality also helped in shaping the poet. In fact, the epithet ‘poet-priest’ has often been used to describe his poetry written- under the influence of his Jesuit priesthood. However, there are two distinct phases in his poetry : poetry which is an expression of his religious beliefs and that which is not directly so.

1.1 □ Text of Poem : Analysis

The poem prescribed for your study is The Windhover which significantly is subtitled To Christ our Lord’. But you would wonder what connection the bird has with God? The stanzas of the poem describe the swift movements of the bird, fleeting moments of ‘Brute beauty...valour...pride’, the description appeals to our senses with the kind of dash and elan which characterizes Hopkins’ poetry.

The poem begins with the line. “I caught this morning morning’s minion” which explains that he witnessed the act “of daylight’s dauphin, dapple dawn-drawn Falcon”. The poet then goes on to describe the sweep of the bird, its movements to the “achieve of the mastery of the thing”.

The bird is a mix of ‘brute’- ‘beauty’, there is an anthropomorphic touch throughout the poem as when the poet compares the windhover to a dauphin i.e. a prince or to a chevalier which is a knight. The enthralling part of the poem is the playing around with words which are common place if not outdated, communicating at the same time powerful poetry.

“No wonder of it...
Fall, gall themselves and gash gold-vermilion”

Note the internal rhyme in the verse, ‘fall/gall. The poem is also marked by a repetitive use of alliteration. Read the poem carefully to find out examples of this literary device. You will also notice that the stanzas are arranged asymmetrically that is not in proper order. Do you think this is a weakness of the poem and makes it disjointed? You may ponder over this. However, there is a rhythm in the poem, because of the alliteration perhaps and this beat likens it to that of music. This is Hopkins’ lyricism and all lyrical poetry as you must be knowing has a music of its own. The best of verse at times is typified by marked lyrical qualities.

Now we come to the point whether there is the religious or the spiritual streak in this poem as has been mentioned in the introductory paragraph. Apart from the sub-title there is no overt reference to God as there is in poems such as “Pied Beauty” or “God’s Grandeur”. Yet the poem is one of celebration capturing an ambience of action which is evocative and joyful to the witness. This celebration is a moment of triumph and the poet could well have exclaimed “Praise him”. It is because of His spirit (note the expression ‘bow-bend’) that we are able to taste a sampling of God’s gifts to our universe. The bird is an apotheosis, it is flesh and blood but it is described by its own originality and uniqueness. This Hopkins called ‘inscape’ and the power of God. God brings about a cohesion to this world of ours and though the bird is wayward at times, it is precisely these contrasting elements which resolve the antithesis into a synthesis. The shades of contrast complement each other to cohere into an organic truth.

“High there...off forth on swing”

The splendour of movement and grace is described in the poem vivified by the poet’s power of description. Yet it is not a descriptive poem merely, it is meant to catch a vision of things in fleeting moments. This the poet translates into art.

That also explains why the subtitle is “To Christ our Lord”. The poem is a celebration and the poet dedicates such triumph or celebration to God. It is also a self revelation to the poet as he marvels not only at God’s creation but also at the prowess of His creation. The irony here is that it is not human. The celebratory note of the poem is the poet’s dedication to God, perhaps.

There is ambiguity here. The poem may not be interpreted as an expression of religious beliefs. It is upto you to decide based on your reading of the poem. The ‘sprung rhythm’ of the poem as critics would call it matches the descriptive mode of the poem,

the springing, dashing Windhover as it were encompassing contrasting qualities yet coalescing them.

It is the combination of vowels, consonants and alliterative devices which make up the technical structure of the poem. Try to read up more on what sprung rhythm is in Hopkins' poetry, it is a rhythm which is irregular abetted by alliterative devices. Such an extended use of alliteration is also a point to note.

I will conclude with Hopkins' own definition of his poetry. "No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness...But as air, melody is what strikes me most of all in the music and design in painting so design pattern, or what I call inscape is what I above all aim in poetry". Hopkins' poetry thus has a strange oddity or queemess. It is also the extension of the poet's sense of reality.

Unit -2 □ W.B. Yeats : Sailing to Byzantium

Structure

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Text of Poem : Analysis

2.0 □ Introduction

Sailing To Byzantium is one of W.B. Yeats' later poems. Yeats lived from 1865 to 1939. It was written after a severe illness. He was born in Dublin but spent his childhood largely in London where he was associated with literature and politics, joining the famed Rhymers' club. His poetry is steeped in the occult and politics. His poetry is steeped in the occult and spiritualism perhaps because of his attending seances as a youth. His poems are hermetic where the symbols are not easy to unravel. There is a marked hysteria in some of his poems as in "The Second Coming". His poetry is one of prognosis rather than analysis, yet he is intellectually gifted and his poetic stamina emanates from this trait.

2.1 □ Text of Poem : Analysis

Sailing to Byzantium is taken from Yeats' collection entitled *The Tower* which was published in 1928.

The speaker is an old man who rejects his condition and the transience of life. Byzantium is an imaginary unexploited, unexplored world where the old man wishes to go. It is a wish fulfilment, hence "Sailing To Byzantium". Art here "arrests change", as a critics comments. Byzantium is the world of sensual gifts, the world of an unexplored vision where the mythic imagination captures "Monuments of unageing intellect". The Poem is a dialectic or a debate between youth and old age as the first two stanzas signify. The world of Byzantium is represented by "fish flesh or fowl", aspects of the sensual or the elemental world to which the speaker escapes or endeavours to do so-"The young in one another's arms, birds in the trees".

Such escapism however devolves dramatically to present realities.

"An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick"...

The speaker castigates his present condition and decides to travel “To the holy city of Byzantium”. The city endowed with “fish, flesh or fowl” is ironically and paradoxically holy, sanctified by ‘God’s holy fire’. We find at this stage that the poet is creating a symbol of hope typified by Byzantium, which is perhaps art’s refuge. The contrast between youth and old age in the first two stanzas vivifies morality and life. It would perhaps be simplistic to state that the poet or the speaker is a mere escapist but he creates his aesthetics of hope and permanence in the face of old age and despair. His arrival there seals the fate of ephemerality and natural cycles. “I have sailed the seas and come”.

Byzantium is thus a symbol and shows Yeats’ mythmaking capacity.

In the third stanza the speaker wishes to be unencumbered by “the artifice of eternity”. This is Byzantium, the singing master of his soul. There is thus a yearning desire to be consumed by the passion of the ascetic “sick with desire”. What is real and what is imagined is also another internal debate of the poem. The poet compels us to see his reality, mythic and bardic. He sings the song of his soul. “O sages standing in God’s holy fire” sanctifies the ideal of the temple of art represented by Byzantium. The speaker desires to be subsumed by this overwhelming truth.

“Consume my heart away”

The fourth stanza envisages his soul and body rooted in the very soil and springs of this mythicized and emotional world. Byzantium encasulates past, present and future.

“Of what is past, or passing or to come”

Yeats demythicizes human transitoriness.

“Once out of nature
I shall never take
My bodily form....”

When he will “set upon a golden bough to sing”. The poem ends on such an optimistic if not gleeful note. Byzantium also suggests a mad world where others can go mad. Such is the hocus pocus world of Yeats’ Byzantium.

“Nor is there singing school but studying” (stanza 2)

Such a paradoxical element runs throughout the finer moments of the poem where there is an inverted understanding of “God’s holy fire” where it “is no country for old men”. There is a strong intellectualism in the poem at the same time as the poet presents and typifies Byzantium with a sensuous style, which perhaps is inherited from Keats’ poetry.

To sum up, the first two stanzas contrast youth with old age and its rejection. The last two stanzas encompass the distinctive worldliness or other worldliness of Byzantium. There is ambiguity here and you may be able to detect the paradoxical elements of the poem. This generates a tension within the poem, nothing is superfluous and form and content blend harmoniously. Or do you think so? It is up to the student to decide. Perhaps we have constructed our own Byzantiums where we would like to sail away in moments of crisis or despair or even joy. Yeat's symbolism is summed up by the fish, flesh, fowl, salmon or the mackerel yet it is a symbolism of hope and creative passion.

Unit -3 □ T. S. Eliot: Waste Land

Structure

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Text of Poem : Analysis

3.0 □ Introduction

The Waste Land is considered to be written as marked departure in his style. It belongs to the 'middle phase' of Eliot's poetry : in between the individualism of *Love Song* and the rhetorical rhapsodies of poems such as *Ash Wednesday* and *A Song For Simeon*. If in *Prufrock* Eliot is trying to establish the dilemma of the individual, his doubts and uncertainties, then in *The Waste Land* the crisis of civilization is made to be evident. It was his friend, mentor and fellow-poet Ezra Pound who edited and pruned the poem leaving out parts which he thought were not necessary. While writing the poem Eliot experienced two things, a nervous breakdown and a not too successful marriage. The nervous breakdown resulted in severe physical problems which however led to remarkable creative insight. Eliot himself acknowledged the fact that forms of illness sometimes lead to inspired literary composition.

3.1 □ Text of Poem : Analysis

T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* can be considered as one long poem but the very fact that the poem is divided into sections finds the reader reading it also in fragments. Each section can then be taken to be complete in itself. The poem was published in 1922 and in 1919 Eliot wrote to his mother stating that his objective was 'to write a long poem I had on my mind for a long time...' The point of dispute then is whether *The Waste Land* is one long poem possessing as aesthetic coherence or a series of short poems. The title itself, taken from the burial service of the Church of England suggests a symbol. What or 'why' is it a *waste land*. A waste land would signify a barrenness or emptiness and if we are to take a look at Eliot's grappling with spiritual truths, then the metaphor is that of 20th century spiritual isolationism against the backdrop of the war.

The Waste Land was first published in the *Criterion* in October 1922. Pound's efforts as Eliot himself admitted were to curtail the poem, so as to make it a broad cultural statement on the condition of humanity ['sickness of a suffering soul']. Perhaps

Pound's editing gave greater strength, unity and coherence to the poem. Eliot passionately argues in favour of the long poem, because "a variety of moods can be expressed." Thus while studying the poem we have to critically examine form/content dichotomies.

Critical Analysis Section I : "The Burial of the Dead" begins with the biblical allusion to Christ's crucifixion. "April is the cruellest month..." ending with "shantih shantih shanlih" in Section V ["What The Thunder Said"]. This lends to the poem a thematic if not organic unity. "The Burial of the Dead" is filled with images of death, barrenness and infertility.

"And the dead tree gives no shelter,
...And the dry stone no sound of water"
There is the cruellest month breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, missing
Memory and desire...."

The biblical imagery of lines 19-30 may be traced to the Books of Job, Ezekiel and Isaiah in the Old Testament. In lines 43-50 Eliot satirizes social dabbling in the occult in his reference to the clairvoyant Madame Sosostris and 'her wicked pack of cards'. Incidentally, the original use of the Tarot pack was to foretell fertility to the land. Lines 60-76 express feelings of insecurity and death (reference to "that corpse") to the extent that London is the "Unreal City". The metamorphosis of London into its wraith-like appearance projects the fears of humanity :

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden
has it begun to sprout?
Will it bloom this year?"

What's vision of diaspora is found in the lines. A crowd flowed over London Bridge.

The entire section of "The Burial of the Dead" makes death a condition of life, a life in death as it were inducing the paradox : 'burial of the dead'. If we do not bury the dead they may rise and sprout again. Death echoes morbidly in this poem as a motif:

I do not find the hanged/man. Fear death by water. "The Burial of the Dead" shows an apathy towards life and living :

"... I was neither
Living nor dead..." The poem is overest by apparitions and shadows.

“And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you...”

This wraith like quality of Eliot’s observations on life is its central logic in this section. We are indeed “the hollow men” as he was to state in one of his later poems, “The Hollow Men “. The conversations in bits and pieces in Russian or German seem to be attempts at cosmopolitanism and cross-culturalism.

However, look once again at the title “The Burial of the Dead”. The dead may be resurrected not in the manner of a Christ into life but in the manner of a bewildering and stifling civilization into inanity. This marks Eliot’s extreme apathy towards life and civilization. His optimism however echoes faintly at the end of Section V of “The Waste Land”- ‘shantih shantih shantih’. Is peace a mere illusion? The Waste Land is an epitome of human civilization, socially, politically and economically : truncated by a War, especially World War I.

Conclusion : To recapitulate then, we are looking at an essential metaphor of Eliot. What who or why is there a waste land ? Why is there a tone of morbidity and fear ? Eliot’s realism is that of 20th century life and the crisis of civilization. Civilization is mired in memory, in past and present. This is the genesis of the poem as it works through the flux of the ‘stream of consciousness’ from 260 B.C. to the red rock in the Book of Isaiah to Saint Mary Woolnoth (a Church) keeping the strands in Eliot’s contemporary London.

Unit -4 □ W. H. Auden : The Unknown Citizen

Structure

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Text of Poem : Analysis

4.2 Conclusion

4.0 □ Introduction

The unknown citizen is set in the 2nd world war period that is 1939-1945 and extends to post war conditions. Auden (1907-1974) studied biology at school and that is why perhaps there is a reference to eugenics. But the question posed is man's growth biological or moral and spiritual, something which a novelist like William Golding has attempted to answer.

4.1 □ Text of Poem : Analysis

The Unknown Citizen is a satire. It is an analysis of a contemporary situation of a 'modern' man ironically 'unknown'. The irony is further heightened by the fact that not only is the citizen unknown but his identity is recollected by letters and numbers. This shows that society is afflicted with a disorder, in its rush towards aggrandizement and consumerism.

“And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigid...”

Modern man has become incognito, a cog in a machine, subsumed as it were in a materialistic ethos. There is trenchant irony in these lines as in many other lines of the poem. Such inversion of values points not only to the satirical undertones of the poem but also to the compassion of the poet. Satire without feeling or compassion can have only a retarding effect in a poem. It is such duality which makes this satire poignant and bathetic.

“Was he free? Was he happy?
The question was absurd.
Had anything been wrong, we should
certainly have heard.”

The double tone employed throughout the poem layers it with irony and ambiguity. Try to look for more such instances in the poem. The man we are told possessed everything related to the necessities of life, his job, his medical insurance which are the conditions or pre-requisites for a happy living. Or are they? This is the telling irony in the poem. You will have to discover such ironical nuances throughout the poem, remembering that irony is a technique to communicate the satirical message which is the thematic perception of the poem.

Such **contemporaneity** infuses the poem with a 'modern' sensibility where the poet is telling the story of modern man or modern civilization. It raises questions as to what a civilized society is. The word 'saint' we are told is 'old-fashioned' in the vocabulary of the modernist. So the 'unknown citizen' is a modern saint. Serving "the greater community" is not only a mission, it is a compulsion, a necessity. Attitudes towards life are reflected in a casual, conventional manner. It is standardisation which earns accolades. What then are the traits of such **traditionality** or traditional morality, supposedly high points of one's character? It is in this case conforming to a strict and codified pattern of life.

"Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers...
...he was popular with his mates
and liked a drink."

The archetypal 'good' man has been portrayed in the poem but his outward condition may not and perhaps cannot be a serious reflection of his state of mind.

"Had anything been wrong we should certainly have heard". The attempt at some kind of a psychological probing is left incomplete in the poem, an aspect of its open-endedness. "Was he free? Was he happy?" are rhetorical questions but are also layered with irony. It is "the Bureau of statistics" which unearthed the facts about this citizen. Such compliance with statistics, figures and numbers invests the poem with a mock-tone. Has man been reduced to anonymity and the status of mere figures? If so, then society is disfigured and has reached a moral and spiritual crisis. The poem then is a statement of the times. Do you think such a poem has a relevance even today transcending its mere topicality, that of say a social, political or economic crisis of those times?

Let us now analyze the poem at two or three distinct levels. It is a funny, clever and witty poem as it digs at the shortsightedness of society : happiness is measured in terms of rigid patterns, of falling into an order.

“When there was peace,
he was for peace, when there
was war he went
He was married...”

And soon, the poem goes on to speak desultorily of the ‘achievements’ of the common man. Everything about him was ‘normal’. Why prioritise such hollow certainties or certitudes in an uncertain world? The poet has no answer. This is the ethical question of the poem. Perhaps we are all ‘unknown’ citizens as opposed to the Great or the Famous.

Secondly it is a self-questioning poem because the man here is a generalized concept of men or human beings. This is the metaphorical truth underlying the poem.

Thirdly the poem is an inversion of the real into the ridiculous. This is the pathetic fallacy or introversion in the poem. The self becomes the other self, that which is becomes the other self, that which is ‘unknown’. This explains the title of the poem. “The Unknown Citizen”. He is not only the anonymous citizen, he could well be the uncared for and unloved citizen. What a travesty! Satire then is not only an effective story-telling device in this poem but it is also underlined with a streak of compassion. Such humanistic gesture gives to the poem a typical Audenesque quality, his concern for the individual. It could be caricature of sorts but it also points to the indifference or insensitivity of society, society brutalized, where feelings or hurts do not matter.

I am sure you will be able to identify with such concerns in today’s society. Can you? How? It is the dogma which the poet recapitulates where people live by a set of rules. The immeasurable is measure.

4.2 □ Conclusion

In conclusion attempt to comprehend the satirical nuances in the poem which give it a built-in complexity. The rhyme scheme is irregular yet it is this form that determines the content or ‘message’ of the poem. Also note that the poem is written in a conversational or monologic style, as if the speaker is conversing with someone. But the themes it builds up are dialogic in nature.

Unit -5 □ Dylan Thomas: This Bread I Break and Fern Hill

Structure

5.0 Introduction

5.1 This Bread I Break : Critical Analysis

5.2 Fern Hill: Critical Analysis

5.0 □ Introduction

Dylan Thomas (1914-53) is an innovative Welsh, who began his career as a reporter. His first poems were printed in the *Sunday Referee*. His first volume of poetry *Eighteen Poems* (1934) attracted critical attention. His reputation increased with *Twenty-five Poems* (1934) and the *Map of Love* (1939). His later works are *Portrait of the Artist as a young Dog* (1940), *Death and Entrances* (1946). *In Country Sleep*, (1952) -and a radio play *Under Milk Wood* were published after his death. The critic Elder Olson has called him, ‘a Keats, a Byron, a Yeats, an Eliot.

5.1 □ Text of Poem : Critical Analysis

The poem **This Bread I Break** is written in what we may call free verse. A technical understanding of Thomas’ poems is required to examine his virtuosity. Though Thomas did not entirely abandon the metrical form of English poetry, he used it with less frequency in his later poems, the category to which *This Bread I Break* belongs.

The first aspect which strikes us about this poem is its recondite nature. The poem has to be studied at the metaphoric or symbolic level. The literal composition may not make any “sense” to you. How for example do we ‘break break’? However, one notes the clarity of the poetic images : bread, blood, vine and wine; which also appear to be biblical allusions. The poem is saturated with such symbolism and the obsession is with the flesh:

“Knocked in the flesh....
Born of the sensual root”

The poem revolves round the Eucharist, the Christian sacrament commemorating the

Last Supper in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed. The tension between the soul and the flesh generates poetic tension. The recurring motifs of wine, grape, vine, fruit etc suggest a sensuality beyond redemption. The preoccupation with the flesh is a poetic obsession, the kind of obsession which stifles spiritual growth. Yet the point that I am making is that the biblical symbols and allusiveness that one can discover in this condensed poem under-score the quest of the spirit tormented by the world of flesh. The spirit / flesh dichotomy is central to the poem. The breaking of the bread signifies the Christian element of reprieve and Christ-likeness. We must bear fruit as Christ says, yield results from the vineyard. The undercurrent prevalent in the poem is also one of self - mockery if not of self - castigation.

In the manner of a John Donne, Dylan Thomas uses metaphysical conceits : bread likened to oat and wine. Finally bread is metamorphosed into “flesh” as in the Catholic mass. The poem moves from : “This bread I break” to “This flesh you break”. Such contrast between the ‘bread’ and the ‘flesh’ is the dialectic of this poem. The cadence is swift and in this short lyrical poem Dylan Thomas has blended the best of tradition with modernity. The use of a Christian metaphor by contrast also gives us the modern sense of inertia, barrenness and lack of wisdom. Though written in free verse the poem through its cadences gives the impression of rhyme. Form and content move at tandem in the poem. They are inseparable in a Dylan Thomas poem as he is conscious of style, clarity and of course thematic content. What is free verse is a question we ask in Thomas’ poetry. Is it poetry without a set pattern? Yet this freeness’ has its own metricality, investing the poems with song-like lyricism, characteristic of much of Dylan Thomas’ poetry. The influence of Hopkins has been mentioned by critics; yet it is not necessarily the ‘spung rythm’ which he uses but *rhythm*.

To read a Dylan Thomas poem is to be astonished if not subjugated by the world of dreams and reveries. From the mundane to the spiritual is the ‘poetic leap’ that he takes through unusual metaphors.

5.2 □ Fern Hill: Critical Analysis

The poem is a recollection of the poet’s childhood; it is a poem dominated by memory, episodic and lyrical. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas’s poems too aspire towards the condition of spirituality and music. Unlike *This Bread I Break* the poem is not surrealistic though there is a dream like strain, marked by a note of reverie. It is the tone that is impelling in Dylan Thomas’s poems : dream-like enmeshed in a strange world of fantasy.

However the poem is marked predominantly by a voice of pleasant remembrances when the sky was blue and the grass green metaphorically speaking.

“Now as I was young and easy
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes
And hounoured among wagons I was
Prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I loudly
had the trees and leaves
Down the rivers of the windfall light.”

It is evident then that the mood is one of pleasant if not joyful remembrance. There is no dislocation of the self as there is in *This Bread I Break*. The poem continues in this narrative mode, it is the poet’s personal story or history conveyed by the sensuous, stark and vivid imagery:

And as I was green and carefree
In the sun that is young....
Time let me play ai.d be
And green and golden I was hunstman and hearsman.”

The mood is characterized by colour and a Keatsian sensuousness. The poem is essentially romantic in nature notwithstanding Dylan Thomas’s slight mystical and precocious style. There is however, as I mentioned earlier, a clarity in this poem with the smells, sights and sounds of the natural world. The focal point is “Fern Hill”- the world of the poet’s boyhood or childhood memories. Yet there are these twists and turns so redolent of a Dylan Thomas poem:

“And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams”.

Why should streams be “holy”? You may wonder. The devices used in the poem are close to being onomatopoeic. There is of course the dream like image: ‘...the horses...

Flashing into the dark”. The language in the poem is oblique and symbolic. We had mentioned earlier that Dylan Thomas’s poetry uses similes and metaphors in the manner of metaphysical conceits similar to the poetry of John Donne:

As I rode to sleep
The owls were bearing the form away”

One wonders why the word 'tearing', has not been used, instead of bearing'.

'Rode to sleep' has an innocence and an air or simplicity about it but the expression is by no means simple.

The preceding lines are even more vague

"All the sun long it was running,
it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house,
the tunes from the chimneys...
And fire green as grass".

The obscurity of "tunes from the chimneys" and "fire green as grass" are examples of 'metaphysical conceits or comparisons which are disparate and are disconcerting because of the incongruities.

Notice also how the poet compares and contrasts the sleeping state with the waking state :

"And then to awake, and the farm, like
a wanderer white".

The poem continues in this manner with its haunting images of a riot of colours linked inextricably with a memory - sense if one might call this :

"Shining it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day...
On to the fields of praise".
You might question "why fields"?

The entire poem is a poem of movement and internal if irregular rhyme. This however makes the poem lyrical.

"And honoured among foxes and pheasants..
Under the new made clouds....
I ran my heedless ways
Before the children green and golden"

This splash of colours is a beauty of the poem; its hallmark as it were. These days we are told in the following stanza were "lamb white". The poet recapitulates beautiful memories:

“the lamb white days” replete
with “morning songs”.

The last two lines of the poem again have an element of surprise :

“Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea”

Do we “sing in chains”? Ponder over this. Nevertheless form and content blend in harmony in this episodic poem, where the internalization of ‘feelings’ is the leitmotif. You may also try reading this poem aloud to experiment its lyrical beauty and song - like utterance.

Unit -6 □ Philip Larkin : The Whitsun Weddings

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Philip Larkin
- 6.2 The Text : Englishness
- 6.3 Conclusion

6.0 □ Introduction

The poetry written in the immediate post-war years in Britain has been labelled 'Necromantic'. It was an hortatory poetry - wordly, ornamental, florid. The young poets of those years concentrated on being textually sensuous and gaudy and there are a few older poets to this day, Peter Redgrove among them, who continue this line. Most of those immediate post-war poets, alas, lapsed into a ludicrous grandeur* if not incoherence. Simply, they were not as gifted as their older models, Dylan Thomas and George Barker, nor as musical. By 1953, the year Dylan Thomas died, a violent reaction to Neoromanticism was plainly evident and a new generation of young poets began to claim attention. These poets came to be known as The Movement and eventually Robert Conquest published their work in his interesting dynamic anthology *New Lines* (1956). They favoured a poetry which nurtured rationality, that was inhospitable to myth, that avoided poetic diction, that was conversationally-pitched and in opposition to Neoromanticism. It was deliberately formal and lucid and small-gestured, regarding itself as being in the mainstream of the tactful English tradition.³ One of their number, Kingsley Amis, wrote:

Let us make at least visions that we need
Let mine be pallid, so that it cannot
Force a single glance from a single word...
Let there be a path leading out of sight
And at its other end a temperate zone:
Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot.

³ In *Acumen*, April 1988, Michael Hulse remarked, 'the poets we think of as having their place in a central English line - Cowper, Hardy, Edward Thomas, Sir John Betjeman, Philip Larkin'. Other critics would add other names - not least, surely, Wordsworth.

These poems of a temperate zone, of a slower metabolism, became popular because they reflected the attitude of a new post-war intellectual generation of writers who, sometimes nationalistically English, liked to think of themselves as tough, cynical and 'anti-wet'-a literary critical term used then and one which latterly has assumed, without difficulty, political connotations. Nationalistic or not, the Movement could count among its numbers poets genuinely talented, not least Philip Larkin. Others are Elizabeth Jennings, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, Thom Gunn and John Wain.

While the Movement poetry was ubiquitous during the 1950s other poets, less hostile to romantic modes, unashamed of rhetorical energy, were also at work, among them mavericks such as Thomas Blackburn, David Wright and Jon Silkin; and these soon after were joined by Ted Hughes, a poet also writing a differently ordered poetry from that of the Movement poets. His work, first published in 1957, received immediate acclaim. Ted Hughes', wrote Edwin Muir in the *New Statesman*, 'seems to be quite outside the currents of his time,' Kingsley Amis had called for 'woods devoid of beasts'. Ted Hughes offered beasts without woods.

Nevertheless the pitch, strategy, bias of the Movement poets has predominated, with modifications, to the present day. The majority of poets whose first books were published after 1960, various as they are, would, it seems, subscribe to the main themes of the Movement aesthetic for they have appropriated the concern for propriety in the use of language. Was Samuel Johnson right when he wrote in his Preface to Shakespeare: 'If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language as to remain settled and unaltered, this style is probably to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood.'? Be that as it may, even poets addicted to a temperate zone do, on occasions, need to speak with a greater precipitation and elegance.

6.1 □ Philip Larkin

Philip Larkin identifies himself with the crossroads of change. Time, place and space are moving and changing realities. It is the gift of Larkin's poetic voice to be authentic to his outermost and innermost feelings. He is not perhaps a cerebral poet but a poet rooted in his social and cultural realities. Such moorings give to his poetry a colour and verve,

sensuousness, the love of contemporary, English life. Larkin's poetry has often been described as melancholic, but in *The Whitsun Weddings* although there is a brooding element the poet grapples with the sensitivities of life-where the young and the old jostle with one another to taste life symbolized by a series of marriages. Such witness is the poet's witness to life in its myriad hues. The metaphor of marriage has been appositely used to synthesize inward and outward feelings, moods and thought processes. The poem encapsulates changing moods, changing landscapes and perhaps the changing times. The scenes in the city of London are going to be different.

6.2 □ The Text: Englishness

The Whitsun Weddings may be described as a narrative poem with a penchant for detail. It is a kind of reportage of the contemporary life in England. The narrative has a wry and detached tone. There is a distancing between the subject matter and the poet yet there is an eye for detail which situates the poem with what is happening around him, as he is journeying in the train :

“That Whitsun, I was late getting away :
Not till about
One - twenty on the sunlit Saturday
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense
Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
Behind the backs of houses crossed a street
Of blinding windscreens, smelt
The fish-dock .thence
The river's level drifting breath began,
Where sky and Lincolnshire
and water meet.”

The first critical aspect that strikes us about these lines is that not only is there a flair for sensuous detail, but also a vivification of realities. The speeding of the train, that life is a journey is evidenced in “We ran...crossed a street” Notice also Larkin's grasp of natural verities “Where sky ... and water meet”. This is the poet's universe when on a “Sunlit Saturday” he embarks on a journey during which he contemplates with his inner

eye. Though the focus of the poem is on externals with a verve for physical detail (see stanza two) it is the mind which shapes realities:

“And as the tightened brakes took hold,
there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.”

These last lines of the poem are in striking contrast with the earlier descriptive lull of activity, noise and perhaps merry making slows the movement.

“... The women shared
The secret like a happy funeral;
... A dozen marriages got

under way”. Read these lines repeatedly and you may notice Larkin’s contemplation of the English countryside (“Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast”).

The poem sometimes echoes the mood of the Romantics : sensuousness imbued with melancholy. But the poet is concerned with contemporary England: where laughter or joy is stifled, “children frowned/At something dull.” The series of weddings are a witness to social life but there is a grim irony as well:

“At first I didn’t notice what a noise
the weddings made
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys
The interest of what’s happening in the shade.”

As platforms hold common and vulgar weddings crowds the poet or the speaker can only read or go “on reading”. The at once detached and involved tone which the poet employs heightens his ironic perspective. He is impervious to certain sights, yet they cannot escape his notice as they belong clearly and concretely to the sights, sounds and smells of rural England. The train is speeding towards London we are told: anticipating change.

“and what it held stood ready to be loosed with all the power/That being changed can give.”

6.3 □ Conclusion

Try to comprehend the poem at such levels of meanings, but also try reading it aloud so as to understand its lyrical nuances, which do away with much of the prosiness which characterizes and at times stifles modern poetry.

Notice that a typical Larkin poem like this begins with a precise description of a scene from contemporary life and concludes with philosophical significance of what has been described. The poet adopts a colloquial or conversational style.

Unit -7 □ Ted Hughes : Hawk Roosting

Structure

7.0 Introduction

76.1 Text of Poem : Critical Analysis

7.2 Conclusion

7.0 □ Introduction

Hughes' poems are located in his Yorkshire rural background, in the place by the name of Mexborough where he studied in school. His brother was a gamekeeper and his father took part in the 1st World War. Perhaps both these facts gave poetic insights to him, hence his fascination for violence and the animal world. These two experiences determined Hughes' poetic references, his poetic mythos if one may so call it.

One of his first 'animal' poems was "The Thought Fox" where the fox symbolizes a creative spirit and energy. In Hawk Roosting, the hawk is a symbol of lustful destruction and deceit so much so that at the end of the poem one finds the speaker despicable and obnoxious. Or is this your reaction? Read the poem carefully to make your own inferences. The world of animality is communicated through violence and killing. To that extent there is a drama involved, the drama of life. In fact the poem becomes a metaphor of life albeit negatively. Such an attitudinal problem typifies his poems with a vigour or 'mainliness'. Again this is a paradox or an irony.

7.1 □ Text of poem : Critical Analysis

The poem 'Hawk Roosting' is a soliloquy. It has been described by a critic as "a dramatic monologue" Although it can be described as a monologue taking the form of soliloquizing one wonders as to its dramatic effect. However there is a brutality involved.

"Or fly up and revolve it all slowly-
I kill where I please because it is all mine
There is no sophistry in my body,
My manners are tearing, off heads"

Hughes cannot perhaps be described as an animal poet in the Laurentian sense. His animal imagery is used to highlight a philosophical or metaphorical truth.

“The allotment of death
For the one flight of my path is direct
Through the bones of the living
No arguments assert my right”

There is a kind of stubbornness here, a stoical refusal to accept any wrongdoing. The animal image here is used to describe an amoral if not immoral world.

The descriptive nature of the poem comes alive in vivid and evocative imagery. Read carefully the first three stanzas of the poem where the poet depicts himself positioned to enjoy his “hawkroosting”.

“Between my hooded head and hooked feet.
My feet are locked upon the rough bark...
It took the whole of creation...
Now I hold creation in my foot”

There is a tone of mockery, self righteousness and defiance. Who is the bird defying? Is it trying to prove something? It is a complex that the poet demonstrates, Yet, the first line of the poem begins on a cautious note and has a sobering effect.

“I sit on the top of the wood,
my eyes closed”

One would expect that in such a quiescent setting a romantic aura would prevail. But the poem cleverly and neatly inverts such a mood when the hawk triumphantly exclaims:

“The convenience of the high trees!
The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth’s face upward for my inspection”.

The tone is exciting and predatory lust dominates the poem. “I kill when I please because it is all mine”. Suffering to someone or something is a gain to the bird. Such brutality makes the poem bizarre in the thematic context. We discover that it is the bird or the beast which is soliloquizing.

Notice the language of the poem which is colloquial and conversational. It is as if the speaker is talking to someone. The hawk may be a marvel of Creation but ironically it is all set to destroy works of Creation. The natural imagery or the world of nature in the poem does evoke fine sensibilities but certainly not in any Wordsworthian sense.

7.2 □ Conclusion

In the final analysis “death” is an “allotment” (last stanza). The poem depicts waste, violence and death existing outside the purview of morality, as something that is natural and primal. In fact the speaker is fighting a battle and narrating gleefully to us his triumph in it. The metaphorical significance of the poem cannot be missed out, given especially the background of the poet’s life.