
Unit-2 □ Victorian Poetry

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1.2.0 Introduction

The objective of this module is to introduce you to the poetry of the Victorian Period. It will first discuss the characteristics of the Victorian poetry, so that you can get an idea of the typical features of these poems that gave them their uniqueness and mirrored the times they were written in. You will then learn about the various types of the Victorian poetry that were most commonly perceptible. The following subunit will discuss on the major poets of the period, categorised into Early poets and Later poets. The Victorian Period witnessed the contribution from the women poets too, who will also be discussed. This unit will hence give you a general idea of Victorian poetry, its growth and development.

1.2.1 Features of Victorian Poetry

The poetry of any particular period has certain salient features that give it uniqueness and an impression of the contemporary era. That is what is called the

zeitgeist—the spirit and mood of the period to which it belongs— and Victorian poetry bears the zeitgeist. We shall now discuss the predominant features discernible in the Victorian poetry that give it the individuality.

Thomas Carlyle in ‘The Hero as a Poet’ in his phenomenal achievement *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* (included in Module 3, Unit 3 of this SLM) said that the poet must be committed to the moral commitment to convey the prophetic vision of his age. Unlike the Romantic poems which were extremely personal and expressed the poets’ private experiences, the Victorian poems expressed the **feelings of unrest and helplessness of a bewildered nation. Nostalgia for the bygone years**, when life was ruled by idyllic agrarianism and not affected by the rigorous industrialism, underscores the poetry of these times. The apparent glory and national success of the imperial power seethed with the **cries of disenchantment, bitterness and intolerance**. Arnold shows this transformation in ‘To Marguerite’: ‘we were parts of a single continent’ has now changed to ‘we mortal millions live alone.’ The collective voices of the Victorians in despair get expressed here. The **dichotomy between Religion and Science** and the fear that the Science will shake off the protective cocoon finds words in the Victorian poems, Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ is the case in point. Nature is a recurrent motif in the Victorian poetry, but Nature not in an idealized and mystified form like that of Romanticists but **Nature in its realistic shape**—‘red in tooth and claw’, ‘roots wrapt about the bones’, ‘sullen tree’. **Interest in the medieval legends, myths and fables** was also conspicuous in the Victorian times and the evidences are the poems like ‘The Lady of Shalott’, Idylls of the King, ‘Mort d’Arthur’ and ‘Locksley Hall’ and Arnold’s *Tristan and Iseult*. Simultaneously with the despair, prevailed **hope and a positive look towards life**, reflected in the optimism in Browning’s poem—‘the best is yet to be’ (Rabbi Ben Ezra) and the lurking faith in Tennyson’s poem, particularly *In Memoriam*—‘Thou wilt not leave us in the dust’. **Love for art and intense passion for architecture** was also noticed in the poems, especially in Browning like ‘Andrea del Sarto’ and ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’. The **Victorian dilemma** that ensued out of the radical competitiveness brought along by Industrial Revolution is predominant feature of the Victorian poems. It being an age where women were categorized in two binaries—‘angel’ and ‘fallen woman’, the women’s poetry reflect the feminine sentiments and their souls’ urge to identify themselves as independently thinking individuals.

1.2.3. Victorian Poetry—Types

Victorian Poetry employs every kind of verse forms in the language and exploits every form of poetic subgenres (genre means literary type, therefore subgenre is a particular narrower form of the specific genre). However, the most popular were dramatic monologue, the verse novel sonnets, Arthurian poetry, domestic poems and pastoral elegy. In the realm of Victorian poetry, one would observe numerous types that nevertheless enhanced the genre. We will be discussing the major types of Victorian Poetry.

- i. **Dramatic Monologues:** Dramatic monologue is fundamentally considered to be a definitive Victorian poetic genre. Dramatic monologue consists of a single speaker who is not the poet, and an implied auditor. The speaker utters the speech that constitutes the entire poem, in a specific situation and at a crucial moment. The readers become aware of the silent auditor's presence, every movement, clues of every physical actions from the speaker's words. Robert Browning perfected this subgenre single-handedly, with poems like 'My Last Duchess', 'Porphyria's Lover', 'Andrea del Sarto', 'Caliban Upon Setebos', 'Fra Lippo Lippi', 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb on St. Praxed's Church' and so on. In 'My Last Dutchess', the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara and the non-speaker is a painter. The active presence of the auditor is perceptible from the speaker's hints only, like 'will it please you rise? We'll meet/The Company below', 'oh sir, she smiled', 'nay, we'll go together down sir'. The reader can speculate that the auditor's movements are governed by the speaker's commands. In 'Porphyria's Lover', the presence of the interlocutor Porphyria is more distinct in her— gliding in... shutting the cold out...untying the hat...putting her arm about the lover's waist...murmuring her love until the speaker kills her. The speaker communicates to us verbally and the actions of both, as in a drama, are articulated to us. Tennyson's 'Ulysses', 'Tithonus', 'The Lotos Eaters', 'St. Simon Stylites', are also dramatic monologues. In 'Ulysses', the speaker is the Greek hero and speaking to his men. The men are silent, but their presence as auditors is felt by the speaker's words 'you and I are old', 'come, my friends...push off'. Christina Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold', Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and 'The Happiest Girl' and A.C. Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine' are minor Victorian dramatic monologues.

ii. **Elegies:**

But what—I dream! Two hundred years are flown
Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
And the grave of Glanvil did the tale inscribe
That thou art wander'd from the studious walls
To learn strange arts, and join a gipsy-tribe;
And thou from earth art gone
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—

'The Scholar Gipsy': Matthew Arnold

The element of mourning over the deceased is evident from the above lines, and that is the crux of an elegy. Nostalgia, memory, estrangement, lamentation are the basic tenets of elegy. The private experience is turned into a public meaning in elegies. Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H* is the profoundest elegy of this time. Written on the death of his Cambridge friend Arthur Henry Hallam, these series of elegiac poems also express the crisis of Faith, the marked catastrophe of the age. The bleakness that the poems illustrate the sense of despondency that comes as the result of the loss of the loved ones. Arnold's *Thyrsis*, written on the lamentation over the death of Arthur Clough perfectly manifests the elegiac note. Fundamentally, these were pastoral elegies, where a rural idyllic backdrop consisting of shepherds, bleating sheep, shepherds' lamentation is sketched.

- iii. **Sonnets:** Victorian Period gave a fresh lease of life to this subgenre of lyric poetry. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets* and *Later Life*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet cycle *The House of Life*, George Meredith's *Modern Love* and Augusta Webster's *Mother and Daughter* are the Victorian sonnet sequences. Hopkins curtailed his sonnets into ten and a half lines from fourteen, and thereby known for his curtal sonnets. Meredith invented sixteen lined sonnets in *Modern Love*. In *Sonnets from the Portuguese* Barrett Browning as a woman expresses boldly and unabashedly her undying love for the male addressee. The cycle consists of forty-four love poems. Rossetti's *Monna Innominata* is a sonnet sequence as a response to her brother's sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, both published in 1881. Whereas the former projects an ideal woman conceived on the paradigm of Dante Gabriel's wife Elizabeth Siddal, the latter criticizes the divine mistress of conventional sonnets for her 'scant of attractiveness'. Augusta Webster's

Mother and Daughter, an uncompleted sonnet sequence, as the title suggests is on the kaleidoscopic emotions in the relationship between mother and daughter. Meredith ponders on his failed love with Mary Ellen and disillusionment in *Modern Love*.

- iv. **Verse novels:** Prose fiction flourished conspicuously during this period, and lengthy narratives, almost as long as novels, in the form of verses were also produced. These verse novels were written in simple or complex stanzas. Some examples are Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Arthur Hugh Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich* and *Amors de Voyage*, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, and Edmund C. Nugent's *Anderleigh Hall: A Novel in Verse*. Linda Hughes says that *Aurora Leigh* 'melds poetic and novelistic narrative into an innovative hybrid medium.' The poem can be read from the feminist aspect, where the heroine Aurora wills to thrive as a poetess and the hero Romney counters, negating poetry as useless. In almost eleven thousand lines in nine books the poem is like an epic. Browning's *The Ring and The Book*, in twelve books and hence in conventional epic tradition, is on a murder-trial-case. The narration is in verse obviously, the first and the last books, by the poet and the rest ten by different speakers, not the poet. *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, is a lengthy narrative poem of 1732 lines. The poem is on Philip, as he departs from his Oxford companions who are studying in the Scottish Highlands, to pursue a life filled with love and adventure.
- v. **Arthurian Poetry:** The nobility, gallantry, dignity and chivalry, perceived in Medieval Arthurian Romances, appeared in some Victorian poems too. Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1888) is the most remarkable among the Arthurian poems; it consists of 'Enid', 'Vivien', 'Elaine' and 'Guinevere'. The following lines signify the medieval virtues that Tennyson adorns his knight with:

To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own words as if God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one's maiden only, cleave to her
And worship her by years of noble deeds.

These values were expected to be observed in the upper-class Victorian culture. 'Guinevere' however bears anti-feminist standpoints because Guinevere is projected as an adulteress, she is upbraided by Arthur. *Mort d'Arthur* and *The Lady of Shalott* also presents the Medieval ethos. *The Lady*



'The Lady of Shallott' painted in 1888 by Pre-Raphaelite painter John William Waterhouse. It represents a scene from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shallott'

Source : wikipedia



Famous painting 'Ophelia' (Drowned in Hamlet) by John Everett Millais of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Source : wikipedia

of Shalott presents the world of Camelot, Arthur's legendary city. The cloistered life of the lady drives home the secluded life of the Victorian women. Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* (1852) is drawn on the twelfth century French poem of the same name. Tristram was one of the beloved knights of King Arthur. The poem weaves themes of passion, temptation, adultery and regret.

vi. **Domestic and Idyllic Poems:**

"This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division."

Of Queen's Garden: John Ruskin

Victorian Period was the era that idealized homely virtues and hearth was considered to be the comfort zone pitted against the external socio-political upheavals. There was the emergence of domestic poems, praising the blisses of home, warmth of togetherness and family bonding. Felicia Hemans' *Records of Women* is a case in point. It contains a series of poems that glorify the affections of husbands and wives, parents and children, and siblings. 'Madeline: A Domestic Tale' depicts the unquestionable power of maternal love, for which the lonely daughter in exile pines. In 'The Homes of England', Hemans glorifies the peace that emanates from the 'merry homes of England', the cottages that 'are smiling over the silvery brooks and along the hamlet fanes'. In *Songs of the Affections*, another collection of domestic poems, Felicia Hemans expresses the emigrants' longing for the 'flowering orchard trees where first our children played' and the security of the soldiers on returning homes. The poem 'King of Aragon's Lament for his Brother' poignantly brings out the impossibility of getting the substitute of fraternal love: 'There are many by my throne to stand, and to march where I lead on/ There was one to love me in the world,—my brother! Thou art gone'. Anne Bronte's poem 'Home' in *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* rings with the resonance of the narrator's desire for the home, wherein mansion and halls cannot tempt as much as home, hence 'Oh give me back my home' is the earnest appeal to God. Domestic poems were also composed by Eliza Cook who expressed attachment for household objects, as they radiated the closeness and bonding of domesticity. 'The Old Armchair' is close to the poet's heart not per se, but because her mother used to sit on it.

1.2.3 Victorian Poets

In the context of the development and perfection of the Victorian Poetry, we are immediately reminded of the contribution of the three poets: Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold. They belonged to the earlier phase of the Victorian Age, although with them were some minor poets like Arthur Clough and Coventry Patmore. In the latter phase, there was another group of poets who in their thoughts and poetic nuances differed from the earlier ones, like Thomas Hardy, G.M. Hopkins and A.C Swinburne. Ample contribution was from the women poets too, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and the Brontë sisters.

1.Early Victorian Poets

i. Alfred, Lord Tennyson : The development of Victorian poetry owes immensely to Tennyson. Landscape was a pertinent motif in his works—as a symbol rather than simply a location. He adopts external landscape to express the internal state of mind, as in the poem ‘Mariana’ contained in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) where the flower pots crusted with ‘blackest moss’ symbolize the despondent heart of the heroine. Another remarkable feature of Tennyson is his profuse use of the medieval legends and myths; ‘The Lady of Shallot’, *Idylls of the King*, ‘Morte d’Arthur’ are finest examples. His ‘Ulysses’ and ‘The Lotos Eaters’, both inspired by Homer’s *Odyssey* strikingly describe two contradictory states of life. He is neither too optimistic like Browning nor too melancholic like Arnold, but oscillates in the middle and hence typifies Victorian compromise. While in ‘Ulysses’ the protagonist vigorously expresses his thirst for further adventures after returning from the war and detests to ‘rust unburnished’, ‘The Lotos Eaters’ depicts the mariners’ sloth. The crisp words in the former and long-drawn monosyllables in the latter enhance the themes. The one hundred and thirty one lyrics in *In Memoriam A.H.H* (1850) project all his faiths and doubts. Written on the death of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, *In Memoriam* ostensibly reflects the poet’s deeply personal and intimate griefs, but through him the entire human race speaks. He universalized his individual sorrows over Hallam’s death with the awareness of spiritual dilemmas of the epoch. The Prologue establishes the collective expression of Victorian minds’ dilemmas and the urge to cherish Faith in God :

Strong Son of God, Immortal Love
Whom we have not seen they face,

By faith, and faith alone embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

In spite of universalizing his grief and transcending death to a universal bereavement, often he cannot hide his intense personal ones: 'That loss is common would not make/My own less bitter, rather more'. The poems are written in iambic tetrameter, with ABBA rhyme-schemed four line stanzas. The acceptance and positive Faith is promptly externalized in the much quoted lines:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all

The Princess (1847) is a blank verse narrative feminist poem wherein the protagonist Princess Ida is a young, ambitious university student. Woman's education and her equal rights with men is thus pioneered. Although at the end, the princess becomes a wife to the fiancé who tried to reach her in every way, there is an optimistic note regarding a future equality between the sexes that the prince envisions. *Enoch Arden* is the melancholic saga of a man, who estranged from his wife and children for ten years, marooned in solitariness, returns homeland to find his wife happily married to another man. Ostensibly implying the promiscuity of women that was a scandal in Victorian world, the poem is about loss, grief and sacrifice. In 1889, *Demeter and Other Poems* were published which contains the famous short allegorical poem 'Crossing the Bar' that contemplates on death and the final sojourn to God's Abode.

Alfred Tennyson, Lord was a British poet during Queen Victoria's reign. He became the Poet Laureate in 1850.

Born: August 6, 1809, Somersby, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Died: October 6, 1892, Lurgashall, United Kingdom

ii. Robert Browning: The second of the trio, whose poems illustrate a robust optimism, quite unexpected in the age of despair and melancholy is Robert Browning. His literary virtuosity in projecting the intricate recesses of the speaker's psychology, give his works the colour and fervour of modernity. *The Ring and the Book* (1868-1869), the longest work of Browning, is a verse-epic of twenty one thousand lines consisting of twelve books. The first and the last are akin to Preface and Appendix

respectively as they are spoken by the poet. The rest ten books are in the forms of dramatic monologues, spoken by nine different narrators, twice by Count Guido. The poem is on the trial of Count Philido Hayes, who is accused of murdering his wife. *Men and Women* was published that contains fifty one dramatic monologues like ‘Evelyn Hope’, ‘A Woman’s Last Word’, ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’, ‘Two in the Campagna’, ‘The Last Ride Together’ and ‘Andrea del Sarto’. He brought dramatic monologue to perfection in this collection. A single emotion is crystallized into a choice situation, every side and feature of a drama are present from one side view, all the climax and catastrophe and denouement in a few lines and from the mouth of a single speaker—all are done with absolute perfection. ‘The Last Ride Together’ is a love poem in which the rejected lover proposes the beloved to have a ride together for the last time. His robust optimism is echoed in the lover’s expression of happiness and fulfillment that his last wish of the togetherness on horse ride has been materialized:

What if we still ride on, we two?
 With life forever old yet new,
 Changed not in kind but in degree,
 The instant made eternity—

‘Andrea del Sarto’ and ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ are both inspired by Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*. *Dramatic Lyrics* published in 1842, contains poems like ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ (a striking depiction of the macabre and the human psychology), ‘My Last Duchess’ and ‘The Pied Piper of Hamelin’. *Dramatis Personae*, published in 1864, the situations imaged are rather more suggestive than explicit. Three of the dramatic monologues here are in blank verse, others are in varied lyric measures.

Robert Browning was an English poet and playwright responsible for the blossoming of dramatic monologues. He married Elizabeth Barrett.

Born: May 7, 1812, Camberwell, United Kingdom

Died: December 12, 1889, Venice, Italy

iii. Matthew Arnold: Matthew Arnold is another representative of Victorian Poetry, whose poems reverberate the Victorian melancholy—‘the eternal note of sadness’. With the belief that, in poetry, ‘our race, as times go on, will find an even surer and surer stay’, he adopted poetry as the channel of Victorian dilemma that was the result of clash between Religious Faith and Darwinism, traditional morals and

dynamic industrialism. Arnold meticulously delineates this state in ‘The Scholar Gipsy’:

For what wears out the life of mortal men?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,

Another elegy *Thyrsis* reverberates with the nostalgia for the times spent with the poet Arthur Clough, and the lamentation on his death. The poems in *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1949) are noted for their vivid descriptive passages. Arnold’s poems are characterized by the presence of profound melancholy, strong lyrical qualities and deep contemplation. In ‘Dover Beach’ contained in *New Poems* (1867), the speaker expresses the melancholy and dejection over the crisis of Faith—that Faith which once like ‘the folds of a bright girdle furled’ has now receded. He valorizes human love as the only anchorage, that can provide stability to the unrest souls, and hence the calm, earnest appeal to the wife, instead of a passionate one: ‘Ah Love, let us be true/ To one another.’ Arnold has written quite a few dramatic poems—*Empedocles on Etna* (1852) alluding to the life of the Greek philosopher Empedocles is an instance. *Tristan and Iseult* (1852) is tragic and romantic .

Matthew Arnold was an English poet and cultural critic, who acutely brought out the Victorian zeitgeist.

Born: December 24, 1822, Laleham, United Kingdom

Died: April 15, 1888, Liverpool, United Kingdom

iv. Coventry Patmore: Famous for his *The Angel in the House* that contemplates on marital bliss and an ideal wife, Coventry Patmore was a close associate of the Pre-Raphaelites, and being associated with them he contributed the poem ‘The Seasons’ to *The Germ*. *The Angel in the House*, tracing on the courtship and marriage of fictional Felix and Honoraria, is on the poet’s wife Emily. Interspersed among his sequence *The Unknown Eros* (1877) Patmore wrote a number of poems after the death of his wife, many addressed to her. The first installment, the most commonly known part of *The Angel in the House* which was also more popular in its own time than the second part, takes the form of two sections (or “books”)— “The Betrothal” and “The Espousals.” Similarly, the second installment of *The Angel in the House*, commonly referred to by critics as *The Victories of Love*, was also written in two separate sections — “Faithful Forever” and “The Victories of Love.” These two

separate installments published at different dates and different points in Patmore's life are essentially two different poems.

Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore was a Victorian English poet and critic.

Born: July 23, 1823, Woodford, London, United Kingdom

Died: November 26, 1896, Lyminster, United Kingdom

v. **Arthur Clough**: Arthur Clough has established his identity as the author of the verse novel *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (a solemn religious apologia in casual hexameters). In 1849 Clough went to Rome and was a witness to the defence of the Roman Republic by Garibaldi and Mazzini and the result was the semi-autobiographical verse-novel *Amours de Voyage*. He stands in profound doubt which is inscribed on its title page: 'Il doutait de tout, même de l'amour'. *Dipsychus*, called a 'little Victorian Faust' was an unfinished poem written in Venice. The spirit with whom Dipsychus talks is not a Marlovian 'fallen and hateful fiend' but his own worldly common sense. In the end he submits to the standards of the world, his moral strength slackened and he regrets the departure from his ideals.

Arthur Clough was an English poet and educationalist. He was a close friend to Arnold.

Born: January 1, 1819, Liverpool, United Kingdom

Died: November 13, 1861, Florence, Italy

2. Late Victorian Poets

If early Victorian poetry was enriched in the hands of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold; the late Victorian poetry nevertheless brought out the tenets of Victorianism. The most notable among these poets were Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

i. **Thomas Hardy**: Thomas Hardy published about eight volumes of short poems. His *Wessex Poems* (1898) present the dichotomy between ancient rustic traditions and modern urban developments. With unrelenting irony, these poems question the cosmic order of things—expressing the pain and despair of trying to assert the value of human life. Set against Dorset as the backdrop, the poems project a bleak nature. His 'The Darkling Thrush', contained in *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901) begins with the typical note of Victorian despair and melancholy, perfected by a dreary landscape of 'spectre-gray' 'frost', 'winter's dregs', 'strings of

broken lyres' but ends with an optimistic note. He wrote a number of war poems, relating to the Boer Wars and anticipating the cataclysmic World War I, like 'Drummer Hodge', 'In Times of Breaking of Nations' and 'The Man He Killed'. *Time's Laughing Stocks* (1909) is another volume that exhibit Hardy's philosophy. The elegiac poems of the period 1912-1913 published in *Satires of Circumstances, Lyrics and Reveries* (1914) celebrate the memory of Hardy's first wife Emma. His Emma poems are 'the finest and the strangest celebrations of the dead in English poetry'.

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet. He brilliantly brings out Aristotelian tragedy in his novels. In spite of the destructive Immanent Will, he yet hints at the beauty of human life.

Born: June 2, 1840, Stinsford, United Kingdom

Died: January 11, 1928, Dorchester, Dorset, United Kingdom

ii. Gerard Manley Hopkins: Hopkins invented 'curtal sonnet' and 'sprung rhythm'. A brilliant instance of curtal sonnet with sprung rhythm is 'Pied Beauty'. Curtal sonnet consists of ten and a half lines. Sprung rhythm replaces a system of regular syllabic feet with a system of stresses governing irregular unstressed syllabic patterns. Being like the natural speech, sprung rhythm has a musical effect on the auditory sense of the readers. He invented 'inscape' (unified complex of characteristics which gives each object its uniqueness and distinguish it from other likely objects) and 'instress' (the unseen Force or Energy that holds the inscape together). The following lines from 'Pied Beauty' best explain the inscape and instress:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change

The multivariegated things on earth that are continually in a state of flux constitute inscape, but God Himself is Unchangeable and Eternal and hence He is instress. Hopkins' major single poem is *The Wreck of Deutschland* (1876), on the drowning of some nuns due to a disaster at sea. 'The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord', 'Caged Skylark', 'Carrion Comfort' and 'God's Grandeur' are some of the poems that express Hopkins' rejection of despair and the continuity in believing in

God's Grace. His God is One who resolves all contradictions and is the Creator who draws all the strands of Creation back to Himself.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was an English poet, Roman Catholic convert, and a Jesuit priest, whose posthumous fame established him among the leading Victorian poets.

Born: July 28, 1844, Stratford, London, United Kingdom

Died: June 8, 1889, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

iii. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909): The Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood member, A.C. Swinburne's long verse play *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) is an attack on religion, in the form of Greek tragedy and the language of the Old Testament. The rich imagery with which he adorns the description of spring is reminiscent of Romantic poetry:

‘The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre.’

Poems and Ballads (1866) and *Poems and Ballads* second series (1878) produced a sense of sensuality that is both a moral and spiritual challenge to the ethos of the period. His rebellion against the established codes is reflected in his anti-Christian stance, and that baffled many Victorians. His love poems, instead of celebrating the nature of love, rather explore the pains. *A Forsaken Garden* (1878) is a case in point, where he says, ‘in the lips that whispered, the eyes that had lightened/Love was dead’. *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), almost a continuation of his long poem ‘A Song of Italy’ is on Italian unification. One can delineate an eternal youth in Swinburne—in his pagan rebellion and his eloquence on overthrow of established governments.

A.C. Swinburne was an English poet, playwright, and critic. He was a member of the Pre Raphaelite

Born: April 5, 1837, London, United Kingdom

Died: April 10, 1909, London, United Kingdom

iv. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The pioneer of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement formed in 1848, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was rather famous for *The Blessed Damozel*, which was both a poem and a painting. In 1850 Rossetti and his Pre Raphaelite colleagues initiated a little periodical, their in-house journal *The Germ*, as a medium

for proclamation of their doctrines and a vehicle for their poems. His poetic agility is reflected in his adoption of sensuous imagery. *The Blessed Damozel* is a case in point:



The Blessed Damozel

Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even,
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

The simplicity and the spiritual quality that permeates in the portrayal of the ‘blessed damozel’ pertain to the qualities of the Pre Raphaelite ideals. His love for his wife Elizabeth Siddal, who died an early death, has also been immortalized in *The House of Life*, a collection of one hundred and sonnets. In 1881, he published *Ballads and Sonnets*, a remarkable volume of poems which contained ‘The Confession’ modeled after Browning, ‘The Ballad of Sister Helen’ founded on medieval superstition, ‘The King’s Tragedy’, a masterpiece of dramatic poem and many others.

D.G. Rossetti was an English poet painter. He founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848.

Born: May 12, 1828, London, United Kingdom

Died: April 9, 1882, Birchington-on-Sea, United Kingdom

3. Women Poets

Till now we have discussed on the male poets and their laudable contribution to the Victorian Poetry, we are now going to talk about some women poets whose contribution was nevertheless as enriching as their male counterparts. The position of women was repressive, she was expected to be an ‘angel in the house’ and nurture feminine qualities. Yet there were female poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Amy Levy whose poems gave expressions to the female identity, experience and their struggle to carve a niche of their own.

i. Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Elizabeth Barrett wrote her Homeric epic *The Battle of Marathon: a Poem* at the age of fourteen. It is because of this zeal for Greek literature that she translated Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* in 1850. Her first renowned work was *The Seraphim and Other Poems* published in 1838. Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, a novel in verse, bears conspicuously the poetess' self-inscription. The heroine Aurora is a young, ambitious poetess who confronts convincingly to the social reformer and her cousin Romney Leigh that poetry can change the world. While the patriarch Romney stands for Utilitarianism, Aurora symbolizes artistry. The poem ends in its ninth book, with a union between the hero and the heroine, symbolizing that life is a harmony of both. In *The Cry of Children* she protests against the employment of children in factories. Her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* succinctly bring out, in a compilation of forty four sonnets, the assertive, candid love of a daring woman for her beloved. The sonnets therefore are the externalization and immortalization of her passionate romance with Robert Browning. Sonnet 43 pithily brings out the fierce love of a woman's heart, quite unconventional because of the candidness:

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 Faith;

Her *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) is a combination of poetry and politics. *Poems before Congress* (1860) and *Last Poems* published posthumously were her last poems.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was an English woman poet of the Victorian era. She married the poet Robert Browning after a long courtship.
Born: March 6, 1806, Kelloe, United Kingdom
Died: June 29, 1861, Florence, Italy

ii. Brontë sisters: Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, known for their prose fiction, also wrote poems that were compiled in *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. The poems by Currer (Charlotte) are 'Pilate's Wife's Dream', 'Mementos', 'The Wife's Will', 'Frances', 'Life', 'Gilbert', 'Evening Solace', 'Stanzas', 'Apostasy' and so on. Ellis (Emily) wrote poems like 'The Lady to her Guitar', 'The Two Children', 'Last Words', 'Old Stoic', 'My Comforter', 'Encouragement' and 'Warning

and Reply'. Acton's (Anne) poems like 'Despondency', 'Confidence', 'The Narrow Way', 'Lines Written from Home', and 'Domestic Peace' are contained in this volume too. In 'Pilate's Wife's Dream', the speaker is a woman whose feminine predicament has been subtly expressed in the dichotomy between despair and hope. 'Mementos' describes the hopelessness of a woman writer, whose plethora of 'mementos of past pain and pleasure' expressed in 'relics old' are becoming antique and 'mossing over'. 'The Wife's Will' expresses the loyalty and longing of a woman to be with her lover. In 'The Lady to her Guitar' manifests the nostalgia of a broken hearted woman whose memories are replenished with the tune of her 'old Guitar'. The poems like 'Sympathy' and 'Plead for Me' dwells on a solitariness and love for that. Anne's poems also glisten with gloom and despondency, but finally a dream for distant freedom triumphs.

Charlotte, Emily and Anne were the three Brontë sisters who wrote novels and poems. Their novels bring out the position of women in the Victorian society.

Charlotte Brontë—1816-1855, Emily Brontë—1818-1848, Anne Bronte—1820-1849

iii. Amy Levy: With one of her seniors, Vernon Lee, another poetess, Amy Levy composed poems on Sapphic love, which tags her as the 'New Woman' poet discussing on unconventional themes like homoeroticism. The poem 'To Vernon Lee' brings out the affection between Levy and Lee in sensual imagery. *Xantippe and Other Verses* (1881) was however a much popular collection by Amy Levy. The nominating poem 'Xantippe' is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The speaker Xantippe is an old woman, voicing her angst that her husband rather treated her as one expected to serve 'maiden labour' instead of intellectual companionship while her 'high thoughts', her 'golden dreams' and soul 'yearned for knowledge'. Levy's other notable feminist poems include *Magdalen* (1884) and *A Ballad of Religion and Marriage* (1888). The former is a bitter dramatic monologue spoken by a 'fallen' woman who is dying in a religious penitentiary where she redeems her earlier conduct. The latter poem contests the traditional division into 'married' and 'odd' women. With the choric repetition on marriage as a way of God, there is the implicit grievance of the Victorian woman fatally trapped in incompatible marriage. *A Minor Poet and Other Verses* (1884) contains dramatic monologues and lyric poems. 'A Minor Poet' perceptibly bears Amy's self-inscription, she is a 'poet crawling between

earth and heaven', her lack of popularity is the victim of gender politics: 'Queen Luck, that rules the world befriend me now/And freely I'll forgive you many wrongs'. Tom Leigh is perhaps a fictitious male-poet, whose masculinity made his poems famous, even if he wrote 'a blot, a blur, a note'.

Amy Levy was a Victorian Jewish poet who was educated as the only Jewish woman in Newnham College, Cambridge.

Born: November 10, 1861, London, United Kingdom

Died: September 10, 1889, London, United Kingdom

iv. Christina Rossetti: Another Pre-Raphaelite poet and sister to D.G. Rossetti, Christina Rossetti is best known for her feminist poem *Goblin Market*. Being a woman, she was not included within the group Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, though she contributed to *The Germ*. *Goblin Market* paints the potential force of sisterhood, wherein a sister can risk herself to recuperate a pining sister. Gender politics in the Victorian market economy, commodification of female body, female sexuality, temptation and fall and recuperation with the love of a sister give the poem a feminist and Biblical touch. Lizzie is the emblem of the 'New Woman' who carries a silver to the market to buy fruits that would save her sister Laura. In spite of being harassed and bulldozed by the goblin men for her daring, which is but a symbol of molestation; Lizzie at the end is married and becomes a mother:

Days, weeks, months, years.

Afterwards, when both were wives,

With children of their own;...

Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet on Sonnets and Other Life* counters her brother Dante Gabriel's *The House of Life* in challenging the image of a woman that patriarchy constructs. Rossetti employs a more empowered speaker who idealizes her beloved instead of being idealized by him as traditional sonnets do. Her *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866) contains poems like 'The Prince's Progress', 'Maiden Song', 'Spring Quiet', 'A Portrait', 'The Poor Ghost', 'Dream Love', 'Songs in a Cornfield', 'Light Love' and devotional poems like 'Long Barren', 'If Only', 'Despised and Rejected', 'Weary in Well Doing' and so on. Her devotional poems speak of her Faith in God, who has born a 'crown of thorn' for her, that triumphs over the pervading pessimism. Nevertheless, her poetry has been described as "Pre-Raphaelite" in its rich and precise natural detail, its use

of symbol, its poignancy, and its deliberate medievalism. You will be reading two of her short lyrics in Module 4, Unit 3.

Christina Georgina Rossetti was an English poet who wrote a variety of romantic, devotional, and children's poems.

Born: December 5, 1830, London, United Kingdom

Died: December 29, 1894, Torrington Square, London, United Kingdom

1.2.4 Summing Up

Now, let us sum up briefly what we have discussed so that you can get a quick idea of the Victorian Poetry.

- The poetry is characterized by a sense of nostalgia, Victorian dilemma, melancholy and paradox that resulted from the radical socio-economic and cultural change that advancement in science and Industrial Revolution brought along.
- Yet there was the conspicuity of hope and optimism in many poets, especially Browning. Interest in Medievalism and the legends and myths were noticed, Arthurian poems are evidences to that.
- Some other types of poetry that were predominant were dramatic monologues, verse novels, domestic poems and pastoral elegies. Tennyson brings out the Victorian compromise, the Medievalism patterned with Victorian morals, and he subtly makes his personal grief a public sorrow.
- Browning is marked for projecting the intricate psychology and robust optimism in his dramatic monologues, while Arnold expresses Victorian melancholy.
- The latter poets like Hardy, Hopkins, Rossetti and Swinburne exhibit their philosophy, spiritual devotion and their skill of using sensory images.
- The women poets masterfully depict the female experiences, identity and situation in a patriarchal society.

1.2.5 Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 marks**

- a) Does Victorian Poetry essentially bring out the sense of zeitgeist?
- b) Do the works of the late Victorian poets anticipate the Modernism?

- c) How is the female identity manifested in the women's poetry?
- d) How do Tennyson and Browning, in diverse ways, manifest their times?

● **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

- a) Write a note on dramatic monologue as a poetic genre.
- b) Write a note on the style of Swinburne. How does he advocate Aestheticism?
- c) How is *In Memoriam* a reflection of the Victorian spirit?
- d) Write a note on the Hardy-esque thoughts as reflected in his poetry?
- e) Write a note on awakening of Medievalist ethos in the Victorian Age?

● **Short Questions-6 marks**

- a) Why is *Sonnets from the Portuguese* named so?
- b) What is the narrative technique of *The Ring and the Book*?
- c) On whose death is *Thyrsis* written? To which poetic genre does it belong?
- d) What does Hopkins mean by *instress* and *inscape*?

1.2.6 Suggested Reading

1. Baugh, A.C. *Literary History of England*. Volume IV. Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967.
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3. Chaudhuri, Sutapa. *A Study of Christina Rossetti's Poems*. Kolkata: Books Way, 2012.
4. Cronin, Richard, Alison Chapman, Anthony H. Harrison. (Eds) *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*. U.S.A: Blackwell Publishers, 2002
5. Hughes, Linda K. *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
6. Lang, Andrew. *Alfred Tennyson*. Kolkata: Books Way Publishers, 2010
7. Lucas, F.L. *Ten Victorian Poets*. Kolkata: Books Way Publishers, 2010.
8. Mukherjee, Suroopa. *Victorian Poets*. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2011
9. Richardson, Joanna. *The Pre-Eminent Victorian: A Study of Tennyson*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.
10. Symonds, Arthur. *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*. New Delhi: A.B.S Publishers and Distributors, 2006.
11. www.victorianweb.org