COURSE GUIDE

ENG372 **ENGLISH POETRY**

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ENG372: ENGLISH POETRY

INTRODUCTION

The term “English poetry” is an ambiguous one. It can mean poetry written by the English people or poetry written in the English language. Nevertheless, this course is meant to acquaint you with poetry written by the English poets and others from Scotland, Wales,and Ireland, from the earliest days of Anglo-Saxon to the modern period of English. The history of English poetry extends from the middle of the 7th century to the present day. Over this period, a lot of poems have been written in Western culture. By this, the English language and its poetry have travelled all over the globe.

The earliest surviving poetry was likely transmitted orally and then written down in versions that do not now survive; Caedman is believed to have written some religious verses. The earliest surviving poetry was written in Anglo-Saxon and may have been composed as early as the 7th century. This writing is generally accepted as the beginning of Anglo-Saxon poetry, while *Beowulf* is one of the earliest surviving epic poems. The earliest known English poem is a hymn on the creation.

Course Aims

The main aim of this course is to acquaint students with the background to the various traditions of English poetry embedded in this course, the different movements and their representative poets. Students will also be introduced to the

major themes and literary techniques of the selected poems. This may therefore be realized by:

i. examining the earliest English poetry,
ii. discussing the major works of the period and their representative poets,
iii. providing information on the themes of selected poems,
iv. explaining the nature of the Anglo-Norman period and the Later Middle Ages,
v. explicating the Renaissance in England and its features,
vi. discussing the Restoration and the 18th century movement and their representative poets,
vii. highlighting the preoccupation of the Romantic Movement,
viii. examining the Victorian poetry and its features,
ix. discussing 20th century poetry and its characteristic features, and
x. elucidating the nature of new or contemporary English poetry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this course is to equip students with detailed information on the nature and advancement of English poetry from the earliest period of Anglo-Saxon to the present age of modern English. It is hoped therefore that at the end of the course, the students should be able to:

(i) discuss the concept of the earliest English poetry;

(ii) explain the themes and features of Anglo-Norman and the Middle Age Poetry;

(iii) explain the term Renaissance and its major representative poets and the concept of their works;

(iv) highlight the concept of Romantic poetry;

(v) examine the influence of William Wordsworth on the English Romantic Poetry;

(vi) discuss the major achievements of the Victorian poets

(vii) discuss extensively the 20th century poetry, especially modernist poetry.

Working through the Course

Students are advised to commence the study by reading the course guide, which gives a quick overview of the course. The units must be read carefully starting from Unit One. Always make sure that before a particular unit is read its objectives have been understood as this will provide the overall picture of the unit. Try and read the recommended textbooks and other related materials in order to deepen your understanding of the course. Each unit has a self-assessment question, which you are expected to use in assessing your knowledge of the course. Note down the areas that seem unclear and need more clarification.

Course Materials

i. Course guide

ii. Study units

iii. Textbooks

iv. Assignment file

v. Presentation schedule

Study Units

This course is a three-credit unit course comprising five modules. Each module is made up of different study units depending on the contents and scope of the study. On the whole, the course has twenty study units of varying lengths. The modules and their units are as follows:

Module 1 The Earliest English Poetry and the Anglo-Norman Period

Unit 1 Background to the Earliest English Poetry

Unit 2 *Beowulf* and the Earliest English Epic

Unit 3 The Battle of Maldon

Unit 4 Chaucer's Poetry

Module 2 The Renaissance Poetry

Unit 1 What is Renaissance?

Unit 2 Elizabethan Poetry

Unit 3 Shakespearean Sonnets

Unit 4 Metaphysical Poetry

Module 3 English Poetry in the Restoration and 18th Century

Unit 1 Satire in the 18th Century

Unit 2 18th Century Classicism

Unit 3 John Dryden's Poetry

Unit 4 Alexander Pope's Poetry

Module 4 English Poetry and the Romantic Movement

Unit 1 Background to Romantic Movement

Unit 2 William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement

Unit 3 John Keats' Poetry

Unit 4 William Blake's Poetry

Module 5: The Victorian Poetry and the 20th Century English Poetry

Unit 1 Background to the Victorian Poetry

Unit 2 Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold: The Examples of Victorian Poets

Unit 3 20th Century English Poetry

Unit 4 T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th century Poets

Each module is preceded by a miniature table of contents, including introduction, unit objective, the main content, Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE), as well as one Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA) which you are required to answer and submit for grading.

Textbooks for further Reading

At the end of every unit, you will find a list of books and other such materials that will enable you have a firm grasp of the course. The books are to aid your understanding of this course. You are, therefore, expected to consult as many materials as possible. This will enable you to grasp the course deeply.

Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. Remember that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

Assignment File

The file contains the details of all the assignments you must do and submit to your tutor for marking. The mark you obtain from these assignments will form part of the final mark you will obtain in this course.

Assessment

The course has two types of exercises or questions you are expected to tackle. The first is the Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) which you are expected to solve but not submit at the end of the study. The second is the Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMAs) which you must solve and submit in an assignment file in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the successful completion of the course. The TMA accounts for 30% of your total score for the course.

Every unit has a Tutor-Marked Assignment, which is a compulsory question that must be answered and submitted at the end of the course. You will minimize your chance of doing well in the course if you fail to submit answers to all the Tutor-Marked Assignments as required.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for this course has a duration of three hours. The examination itself will carry 70%. It will be made up of questions that reflect the self-testing exercises as well as the tutor-marked assignments. You are expected to spend quality time to read the contents of the units and all the SAEs and TMAs for the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

The table below shows how actual course marking scheme is broken down.

Assessments	**Marks**
Assignment 1-4	Assignments of which the best three marks of the four count as 30% of course marks.
Final examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme.

Course overview

The table below brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them and the assignments that follow them.

Units	Title of work	Week's activity	Assessment(s) (End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
	Module 1		
1	Background to the Earliest English Poetry	1	Assignment 1
2	*Beowulf* and the earliest English Epic.	2	Assignment 2
3	The Battle of Maldon	3	Assignment 3
4	Chaucer's Poetry	4	Assignment 4
	Module 2		
1	What is Renaissance?	5	Assignment 1
2	Elizabethan Poetry	6	Assignment 2
3	Shakespearean Sonnets	7	Assignment 3
4	The Metaphysical Poetry	8	Assignment 4
	Module 3		
1	Satire in the 18th Century	9	Assignment 1
2	18th Century Classicism	10	Assignment 2

3	John Dryden's Poetry	11	Assignment 3
4	Alexander Pope's Poetry	12	Assignment 4
	Module 4		
1	Background to the Romantic Movement	13	Assignment 1
2	William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement	14	Assignment 2
3	John Keats' Poetry	15	Assignment 3
4	William Blake's Poetry	16	Assignment 4
	Module 5		
1	Background to the Victorian Poetry	17	Assignment 1
2	Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold: The examples of Victorian Poetry	18	Assignment 2
3	20th Century English Poetry	19	Assignment 3
4	T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th Century English Poets	20	Assignment 4
	Revision	21	
	Examination	22	

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

Fifteen tutorial hours are provided for in this course to enable the students and their tutors meet and examine the contents of the course at intervals. You will be informed of the dates, time and venue for these tutorials, along with the name and particulars of your tutor as soon as one is assigned to your group. Your tutor will grade and comment on your assignments, monitor your progress and provide answers to your questions during tutorials. You must submit your assignments in good time to enable your tutor to read them well and to make appropriate comments. Do not play with your tutorials or hesitate to consult your tutor when the need arises. Tutorials afford you opportunity to meet and discuss with your tutor face to face and they help you to get immediate answers to troubling questions. Apart from tutorials, you may consult your tutor when:

- You do not understand any part of the study units;
- You have difficulty understanding Self-Assessment Exercises or Tutor-Marked Assignment:
- When you have problems with the tutor's comments on your assignments or their grading. To gain maximally from the tutorials, you ought to prepare a list of questions before attending them and you must endeavor to participate actively in discussions during tutorials.

Summary

This course is historical, theoretical, as well as analytical in dimension. It will enable you to understand how the English tastes, characters and sensibilities are captured in poetry over time, as well as help you to know those who influenced English poetry and the trend of their thought. This course examines the English poetry from its beginning to the 20th century. It explains the factors that helped to nurture the different kinds of poetic traditions inherent in English world, the works of selected poets and the various themes espoused in them and the nature of the English audience.

The course guide is, therefore, designed to make the course enjoyable and rewarding experience. However, what you get depends on how much time you dedicate to studying the various course units.

Good luck!

MODULE 1

THE EARLIEST (ANGLO-SAXON) ENGLISH POETRY AND THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD

This module examines the earliest English poetry. The study traces the English poetry to the Anglo-Saxon period when poetry writing was mainly based on epic qualities. The earliest period of English poetry arguably laid the foundation for Anglo-Norman poetry.

The module which comprises four units will elucidate the features of earliest English poetry with various examples. The first unit will crystallize the background to the earliest English Poetry. In this first unit, we shall see the various factors that characterized and shaped the Anglo-Saxon period.

The second unit will discuss *Beowulf* as an example of the earliest English epic. We shall analyze the poem and examine the qualities of the work with the view of connecting the work with the culture of the earliest English people.

The third unit will discuss *The Battle of Maldon.* In this unit, we shall analyze the features of *The Battle of Maldon.*

The fourth unit will examine and discuss Chaucer's poetry. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* will be studied. The unit will examine how Anglo-Saxon poetry gave way to Anglo-Norman poetry. We shall closely look into the differences between the Anglo-Saxon poetry and the Middle Ages Poetry.

Unit 1: Background to the Earliest English Poetry
Unit 2: *Beowulf* and the Earliest English Epic
Unit 3: *The Battle of Maldon*
Unit 4: Chaucer's Poetry

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE EARLIEST ENGLISH POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The end of Roman rule in Britain enabled the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, which is often regarded as the origin of England and the English people (Wikipedia). The Anglo-Saxons were of Germanic origin who established several kingdoms that became the primary powers in what is now England and parts of Southern Scotland. They introduced the Old English language which displaced the previous British language. The Anglo-Saxons warred with British states in Wales, Cornwall and the Brythonic speaking parts of northern England and southern Scotland. The Vikings and Norsemen raided England about 800AD, took control and introduced Norse language into large parts of what is now England. During this period, several rulers attempted to unite the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and this effort led to the emergence of the kingdom of England by the 10th century.

Meanwhile, of several poems dealing with English history and preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* the most notable is "The Battle of Brunanburb," a panegyric on the occasion of King Athelstan's victory over a coalition of Norsemen and Scots in the year 937. *The Battle of Maldon,* is another heroic poetry dealing with English history. The poem describes the defeat of Aldorman Byrhtnoth at the hands of Viking invaders in 991.

Anglo–Saxon poetry is categorized by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices of the late 10th and early 11th centuries known as the Caedmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the Beowulf manuscript. *Beowulf* is the only heroic epic to have survived in its entirely but fragments of others such as *Waldere* and the *funnesburg Fragment* are also available. Other genres include much religious verses, from devotional works to biblical paraphrase such as "The Wanderer", "The Seafairer" and "The Ruin".

Anglo-Saxon depends on alterative verse for its structure. The poetry is formulaic, drawing on a common set of stock phrases and phrase patterns, applying standard epithets to various classes of characters, and depicting scenery with such recurring images as the eagle and wolf, which wait during battles to feast on carrion, and the ice and snow, which appear in the landscape to signal sorrow. Several wars took place which shaped the history and language of England. This unit is important for this course as it opens up various factors that led to the emergence of England and its poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the factors that led to the emergence of England;
- account for the earliest English period;
- discuss the earliest English poetry and its style;
- explain the significance of wars in the earliest English period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Earliest English Period

Both the Vikings and the Norse men inhabited England and changed its history and language consequently. By 1066, the Normans invaded and conquered England. The Norman Dynasty established by William the Conqueror ruled England for over half a century before the period of succession crisis known as the Anarchy. Following the Anarchy, England came to be ruled by the House of Plantagenet, a dynasty which also had claims to the kingdom of France. Many wars were fought before there could be a stable kingdom in England.

3.2 The Earliest English Poetry

The history of English poetry begins from the middle of the 7th century. The earliest surviving manuscripts are dated from the 10th century. Much of the poetry was written in Latin, Brythonic and Anglo-Saxon languages. Probably, much of this old English poetry was intended to be chanted, with harp accompaniment, by the Anglo-Saxon bard. Old English poetry was bold and strong, but also mournful and elegiac in spirit. This poetry emphasizes the sorrow and ultimate futility of life and the helplessness of humans before the power of fate. Almost all this poetry is composed without rhyme, in which a line or verse of four stressed syllables alternate with an indeterminate number of unstressed syllables. Another unfamiliar feature in the formal character of Old English poetry is structural alliteration or the use of syllables beginning with similar sounds in two or three of the stresses in each line. All these features of form and spirit are exemplified in the epic poem *Beowulf*.

Nevertheless, the earliest known English poem is a hymn on creation. A humble man of the late 7th century who was described by the historian and theologian Saint Bede the Venerable may have written the "Hymn on Creation". His name was Caedmon. Part of the challenges of the earliest English poetry was dating. For instance, Beowulf's dating ranges from 608AD to 1000 AD. There has been no consensus ever since (Wikipedia). Many other poems such as "The Battle of Brunanburh" (957) and the "Battle of Maldon" (991) may have been composed to document various was that took place in English history.

Anglo-Saxon poetry is categorized by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices or bound ancient manuscripts of the late 10th and early 11th centuries known as the Caedmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscripts.

3.3 The Style of Earliest English Poetry

Most of the Earliest English poems have similar qualities. According to Albert Tolman (1887), Anglo-Saxon poetry has various qualities which are:

i. conciseness and vigour;
ii. repetition of thought with variation of expression;
iii. disconnectedness;
iv. freedom from the sensual and idealization of the common;
v. seriousness and
vi. tenderness.

Conciseness and Vigour

The extreme emphasis resulting from accent and alliteration combined in the same syllables naturally goes with a highly intense, vigorous style. Anglo-Saxon poetry is always more than lively, it is intense. The Anglo-Saxon verse demands strong nouns, adjectives, and verbs; and these, of necessity, state the thought with brevity and power.

Repetition of Thought with Variation of Expression

The Anglo-Saxon poet repeats his ideas in every possible way, but not his words. The repetition of the main idea is made enjoyable by the constant variation of the language. Each repetition must emphasize some new phase or characteristic by the use of new terms. This repetition with variation takes many forms. A noun may have three to four appositional phrases scattered through all parts of the sentence, or there may be complete parallelism of successive sentences, which is a favourite form of expression. But parallelism is evidently not a principle with the Anglo-Saxon poet. The principle is as it has been stated. This is an illustration from *Beowulf:*

The round the mound the battle-brave rode,
Sons of athelings, twelve in all,
Wished to tell their sorrow, bewail the king,
Wreak their words, and speak of the man.
(Beowulf 3131*).*

Disconnectedness

Ideas are usually expressed in disconnected manner in Anglo-Saxon poetry, though it is hard to generalize. Here and there, especially in the later poetry, passages can be found in which the rhetoric is really elaborate and the connections of thought are very fully indicated. This is true of the part of "Genesis". There is an instance of disconnectedness made expressive:

Alas! Had I control of my hands,
And could I for a time get loose,
Be free for one winter-hour, then I with this troop –
But about me lie iron-bonds,
The rope of fetters rides me.
(Genesis 368*)*

Freedom from the Sensual and Idealization of the Commonplace

Anglo-Saxon poetry is devoid of sensuality and idealization of the commonplace. There are no Anglo-Saxon love poems. The entire absence of the relation of lover and maid from this poetry, and the scanty references to that of husband and wife, are very striking. A woman appears but rarely, and then as the noble, honoured spouse, chaste and dignified. She is her husband's best and dearest friend. The relation, who is dearest of all to Anglo-Saxon poetry, is that of lord and follower. The true Lord loves his subjects dearly. He is the kind friend and guardian of all. Beowulf and Hrothgar grieve over the sufferings of their harassed people. It reminds one of the Christian conceptions of Christ's followers; that they constitute his very body. "The Wanderer", one of the most touching poems of the Anglo-Saxons, is the lament of a poor solitary follower over his dear, dead lord-friend.

The idealization of all that is commonplace permeates Anglo-Saxon life and poetry. Etiquette is a prime consideration with the Anglo-Saxon**;** and no good warrior fails in the definite ceremonials which are evidently considered of very great importance. The poem *Beowulf* is full of interesting details of court and warrior life. This life is all idealized, and nothing gross appears. Every person and object is exalted almost to a state of perfection, or is dismissed from sight and mentioned as completely bad.

Seriousness

There was an ethical sternness and a grand earnestness in the Anglo-Saxons, which was mirrored in an all-pervading seriousness of style. A great fondness for moralizing appears everywhere. The shortness and uncertainty of life are constantly called up. A remarkable instance of moralizing is offered in "Beowulf", when the hero has just killed Grendel's mother and so exterminated the hated race. The tone was always serious compared to some of the poems written during the renaissance.

Tenderness

The Anglo-Saxons were as tender and thoughtful as they were brave. The vast problems of life and death oppress the hearts which do not quake before the enemy. Elegiac pathos, tender mournfulness, is then, an important feature of Anglo-Saxon style. "Beowulf" is full of it. "The Wanderer" has lost his dear lord and is friendless in the world.

Often the fugitive findeth mercy,
The mildness of God. Moody and weary,
Wandering ever over the water-way,
Hath he with hands of toil, homeless and sad,
Stirred the sea, rime-cold. Rigorous fate
(The Wanderer).

Behind every joy and at every banquet, to the mind of the Anglo-Saxon, wait disappointment and sorrow.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The unit examines the background to the earliest English Poetry and its impact on the poetry of the period. The unit looks into various qualities of the Anglo-Saxon poetry such as conciseness and vigour, repetition of thought with variation of expression, disconnectedness, freedom from the sensual and idealization of the common seriousness and tenderness.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this course, we have been able to see the background of Anglo Saxon poetry. We also highlighted various features of Anglo Saxon poetry. We hope to take this topic further by discussing *Beowulf* in detail in the next unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss at least five features of Anglo-Saxon Poetry.

6.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2: BEOWULF AND THE EARLIEST ENGLISH EPIC

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic consisting of 3182 alliterative long lines, set in Scandinavia. It is arguably the first Anglo-Saxon epic as it is the earliest surviving epic of Anglo-Saxon literature. "Beowulf" is an important Anglo-Saxon poem to be studied in this course. The long narrative epic depicts the conquests, history and culture of the Danes.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss *Beowulf* as a literary product of the Anglo-Saxon period,
- identify and discuss specific epic qualities in *Beowulf* and
- discuss the literary style of *Beowulf.*

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is an Epic?

An epic is a long narrative poem on a serious subject representing characters of heroic stature in adventures of great historical, legendary, or religious significance. The following are characteristics of an epic.

- The setting of the work is vast in scope, covering a whole nation, the world, or even the universe.
- The actions described in the work are deeds of great valor, often requiring super human strength, intelligence, or endurance.
- Supernatural forces (gods, angels, demons) take interest in the action and intervene from time to time.
- An elevated style and diction, deliberately distanced from everyday speech, is used throughout the poem.

In most epic poems, the poet begins the work by stating his topic and by calling upon the Muse of Epic Poetry for help in rising to the task. This convention is known as the invocation to the Muse, a part of which is the epic statement of theme. The poet opens his narrative in *medias res* (Latin expression for 'middle of the action'). The preceding history is then supplied at various points throughout the remainder of the work by means of retrospection, similar to the flashback of the modern novel. This is exemplified in the story of another Beowulf who has lived before the great Beowulf. There is also a retelling of the story of a good king who "throve under heaven in power and pride/till alien peoples beyond the ocean/Paid toll and tribute. A good king he!" (Lines 7-10). It is a form introduction to the heritage of greatness into which Hrothgar has grown as a Danish king. Another good example could be found in Lines 993- 1050, which is supposed to give the background of a praise song performed in honour of Beowulf after the slaying of Grendel. It tells of a story a Danish king, Hnaef who was killed while on a visit to his sister and her spouse, Finn the king of the Jutes in Finnsburg. His people, led by Hengest, came back on a reprisal attack and killed the Jutes for this treachery but only stopped the destruction of the Jutes after a truce was reached- that king Finn would continually give gifts to the Danes to appease the death of their king and that if any Frisian attempted to refer to the unfortunate incidence, the jutes should avenge. Meanwhile, Hengest and some Danish warriors remained with the Jutes but Hengest was ever thinking about avenging the death of his king. Thus, the opportunity came after winter and he murdered Finn, the king of the Jutes and returned to Danes land with the queen if the Jutes, thereby breaking the truce. Apart from using this to honour Beowulf and his men, it also performs another function which is explained in the next paragraph.

This story gives a hint of some of the cultural practices of the Anglo-Saxons such as revenge, burial rites which include pyre burning and the singing of dirge. Pyre burning refers to the burning of the dead with their belongings and treasures. This is the same way Beowulf is buried at the end of the poem. The story is therefore a prospective narrative as well, which tells the audience what is to happen later in the work or after the work.

The poet may also include many elaborate enumerations of subjects and items such as ships, warriors, armies, gifts etc; this kind of list is called an epic catalogue. In *Beowulf*, after the defeat of Grendel, king Hrothgar rewards Beowulf with gifts and they are described in elegant terms:

> Hrothgar bestowed a standard of gold,
> A banner embroidered, a bryny and a helm.
> In sight of many, a costly sword…
> To others on ale-bench, richer rewards,

Four such treasures fretted with gold!
Eight horses also with plated headstalls
The lord of heroes bade lead into hall;
On one was saddle skillfully fashioned
And set with jewels, the battle-seat…
And the prince of Ingwines gave all these gifts
To the hand of Beowulf, horses and armor;
Bade him enjoy them! With generous heart
The noble leader, the lord of heroes,
Rewarded the struggle with steeds and with treasure,
So that none can belittle, and none can blame,
Who tells the tale as it truly happened (lines 946 -975)

Gift-giving as part of the Anglo-Saxon culture is giving prominence in the poem. Many lords like Hrothgar are portrayed as generous leaders who do not allow the efforts and loyalty of their warriors to go unrewarded. The gifts are elaborately described in order to show both the generosity of the giver and the greatness of the acts of the hero.

The poet also uses extended and elaborate formal speeches or monologues by the main characters. These speeches are also called epic boast if they are delivered before a war takes place of whenever a great person introduces himself. Beowulf introduces himself to king Hrothgar in Lines 400-411 with an epic boast, recounting the great and heroic deeds he has performed before embarking on the quest to exterminate Grendel:

The best of my people, prudent and brave,
Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
They had in remembrance my courage and might,
Many had seen me come safe from conflict,
Bloody from battle; five foes I bound
Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.etc

The boast is expected to encourage the speaker, his hearers and followers, especially the king that he has come to help. Since this is their first meeting, Beowulf takes his audience through the many feats he has performed so that they might be reassured that they have the right person for the job. Beowulf's last boast in the poem is found just before he goes to kill the dragon, which incidentally is his last act:

I came in safety through many conflicts
In the days of my youth; and now even yet,
Old as I am, I will fight this feud,
Do manful deeds, if the dire destroyer
Will come from his cavern to meet my sword' (Lines 2369-2373)

The poet also gives a detailed family background, epic genealogy, for many of the heroes. Importance is attached to paternal lineage. The poet refers to a hero by his patronymic, which means a form of the father's name with an ending meaning "son of". Heorogar, hrothgar's brother is describes as "the son of Healfdene" (Line 450), Unferth is referred to as "Ecglaf's son" in Line 481 and Beowulf himself as "the son of Ecgtheow". All these are great men begotten by heroes.

The poet also uses long, extended comparisons which are known as epic similes that make the unfamiliar familiar by stressing its similarity to observable, common phenomena and objects. The poet also uses many epithets, adjectives or adjectival phrases used to point out a characteristic quality of a person, a god, or less frequently, an animal or an object. Beowulf calls Hrothgar "Prince of the Danes, protector of Syldings,/Lord of nations, and leader of men, (lines 412-413). He describes his breastplate as "the best of corselets that covers my breast/heirloom of Hrethel, and Wayland's work, /Finest of byrnies." (Lines 437-438). This implies that the armor is not an ordinary one but a potent one crafted by a skillful magical smith. Also, the rest of Beowulf's weapons like his helmet and sword are elaborately described in Lines 1327-11349.

The poet may also rely on the use of kennings which mean metaphoric expressions employed to render vivid narrations. Examples: Grendel's mother is tagged "battle-flasher" (Line 1407), the sun is named the "world-candle" in Line 1839 and Beowulf is called the "shoulder-companion" of Hygelac in Line1846. They are epithets deployed to intimate the audience with the qualities of these subjects.

The use of foreshadowing, which means warning about something bad that is about to happen, is also common in epic poetry. Likewise, the use of rhetorical and poetic devices such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole and irony are also common features of epic poetry.

3.2 A Summary of *Beowulf*

Beowulf, a warrior and hero of the Geats in Scandinavia, comes to assist Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, whose Mead Hall in Heorot has been terrorized several times by a monster known as Grendel. He is the central figure in the poem and his actions or heroic deeds qualify the poem to be called an epic. These actions are discussed below. Beowulf confronts Grendel and slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and she is being defeated by Beowulf also. Beowulf goes home to

Geatland in Sweden and later becomes king of the Geats. Fifty years after Grendel's mother was defeated, Beowulf also defeats a dragon, but is fatally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants bury him in a tumulus, a burial mound, in Geatland.

According to Jane Chance in her article "The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The problem of Grendel's Mother", Beowulf has a two-part structure which is divided into the battle with Grendel and with the dragon and the battle with Grendel's mother. The poem opens with the story of king Hrothgar, who built a very large hall named Heorot for his people. In it, he, his wife Weathpeow, and his warriors spend their time singing and celebrating, until Grendel, a troll-like monster who is disturbed by the noise of their merriment, attacks the hall and devours many of Hrothgar's warriors while they sleep. But Grendel does not touch the throne of Hrothgar, for it is described as protected by a powerful god. Hrothgar and his people in their helplessness vacate Heorot.

Beowulf, a brave warrior from Geatland hears of Hrothgar's troubles and with his king's permission leaves his home land to help Hrothgar. Beowulf and his men spend the night in Heorot. Beowulf carries no arm because he wants to be like the beast that bears no arm. After they have slept, Grendel enters the hall and attacks, devouring one of Beowulf's men. Beowulf, who has been pretending to sleep, leaps up to clench Grendel's hand. The two fight to a standstill. Beowulf's men arise to help but their swords cannot penetrate Grendel's body. Eventually, Beowulf tears Grendel's arm from his body while Grendel shouts and runs home to die.

The following night, after celebrating Grendel's defeat, Hrothgar and his men sleep in Heorot. Grendel's mother, angered by the punishment of her son, appears and attacks the hall. She kills Hrothgar's most trusted warrior, Aeschere, in revenge for Grendel's defeat.

Hrothgar, Beowulf and their men track Grendel's mother to her home under a lake. Beowulf prepares himself for battle; he is presented with a sword by Unferth, a warrior who had doubted him and wishes to make amends. Having stipulated a number of conditions to Hrothgar in case of his death, Beowulf enters into the lake. He is quickly detected and attacked by Grendel's mother. Nevertheless, she is unable to harm Beowulf through his armour and drags him to the bottom of the lake where Grendel's mother and Beowulf engage in fierce combat.

Grendel's mother seems to prevail initially, and Beowulf sensing that his sword cannot harm his foe discards it in fury. Beowulf grabs a magical sword from Grendel's mother's treasure, and with it beheads her. The blade of the magic sword melts like ice when it touches her toxic blood, until only the hilt is left. This

hilt is the only treasure that Beowulf carries out of the cave, which he presents to Hrothgar upon his return to Heorot. Beowulf then returns to the surface and to his men at the "ninth hour". Beowulf is greatly rewarded by Hrothgar in accordance with the culture of the Anglo-Saxons.

Beowulf returns home to become king of his own people. Fifty years after Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, a slave steals a golden cup from the lair of an unnamed dragon at Earnaness, when the dragon sees that the cup has been stolen, it leaves its cave in a rage, burning everything in sight. Beowulf and his warriors embattle the dragon. Later, Beowulf fights the dragon alone while his men wait. Beowulf fights with the dragon supported by Wiglaf and they both kill the dragon. Beowulf sustains a mortal injury during the fight with the dragon. Beowulf is buried in Geatland on a cliff overlooking the sea.

3.3 The Style of *Beowulf* and Other Epic Features in *Beowulf*

Beowulf is different from modern poetry. The original manuscript was written in old English and what we have now are translations of the original text. Though all translators claim to have rendered translations that are very close to the original text, there are some features that have most likely been introduced by them. For instance, whereas most translations are in verse, the translations by Thomas Arnold (1876) and J.M. Kemble (1833) are in prose, raising questions about the "poetic" quality of *Beowulf*. Being an oral poetry before it being converted into writing, the poem has many tales and legends about other warriors apart from Beowulf. In the first three lines of the poem,

> Lo! the Spear-Danes' glory through splendid achievements
> The folk-kings' former fame we have heard of,
> How princes displayed then their prowess in battle (1-3).

The speaker talks about the things they have "heard of" which they now retell:

> Great-minded Healfdane; the Danes in his lifetime
> He graciously governed, grim-mooded, aged.
> Four brains of his body born in succession
> Woke in the world, war-troopers' leader
> Heorogar, hrothgar, and Halga the good;
> Heard I that Elan was Ongentheow's consort,
> The well-beloved bedmate of the war-Scylfing leader (59-66).

Names and deeds of these great men are included in the epic to show the culture of heroism that was prevalent at the time among Anglo-Saxons.

Anglo-Saxon poets typically used alliterative verse, a form of verse that uses alliteration as the principal structuring device to unify lines of poetry, as opposed to other devices such as rhyme, a tool which is used rather infrequently. This is a technique in which the first half of the line (the a-verse) is linked to the second half (the b-verse) through similarity in initial sound. In addition, the two halves are divided by a caesura: “Oft Scyld Scefing \\ sceapena preatum” (Old English1-4). This is a form of accentual verse, as opposed to our accentual-syllabic verse. There are four beats in every line – and two in every half-line.

The poet also has a choice of epithets to use in order to fulfill the alliteration, The letter “h”, for example, is always pronounced (Hroðgar: HROTH-gar) and the digraph “cg” is pronounced like “dj”, as in the word “edge”. Both “f” and “s” vary in pronunciation depending on their phonetic environment. Between vowels or voiced consonants, they are voiced, sounding like modern “v” and “z”, respectively.

In addition to the fact that the poem narratives the great deeds of heroic figures, it also contains passages that are sometimes didactic and meditative geared towards teaching a moral or imparting some cultural values to the audience. Let us examine lines 19-25:

> So must a young man strive for good
> With gracious gifts from his father’s store,
> That in later seasons, if war shall scourge,
> A willing people may serve him well.
> Tis by honour a man may rise
> In every state. Then his hour struck,
> And Scyld passed on to the peace of God

Here, the main story being told by the poet is that of the great Danish king named Scyld who had lived before Beowulf and is also shown to have been an accomplished leader. But in between the beginning of this story and the end is infused a word of advice to young people which we find in lines 19-24. This is a unique style of Beowulf as an Anglo-saxon poetry because apart from its didactic function, it shows the culture of the Anglo-Saxons that - giving gifts was a way of winning the hearts of one’s subjects as we find in this example. Again, in lines 626-628 are these words “Be mindful of glory, show forth your strength,/Keep watch against foe! No wish of your heart/Shall go unfulfilled if you lived through the fight”. Though they are the words of Hrothgar to the warriors before he left the hall for Beowulf and his men to face Grendel, they also apply to other listeners. Other meditative passages could be found in lines 928-933 and 984-987.

Another feature in the poem which makes it an epic is the narration of epic/historic tournaments and games some of which are described in lines 301-709. In these lines, some of the contests or games in which the hero, Beowulf has participated in and won are vividly described.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Beowulf is a tragedy. The tragedy of the hero becomes explicit in Part II; in his own death and in the destruction of his nation made inevitable by his death. The epic hero may defy augury, but his defiance is at the same time a resignation, recognition that man can achieve so much and that no man lives forever. Epic touches on the brevity of human life and on the wonder of man's achievements. Epic also arouses poignancy and awe.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit examines "Beowulf" as an epic poem during the Anglo-Saxon period. Beowulf is considered as a tragic hero in the poem. We are able to see various expeditions embarked upon by Beowulf. All these expeditions make him a result most especially as he dies for his country home.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the epic qualities in *Beowulf.*

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UNIT 3: *THE BATTLE OF MALDON*

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Battle of Maldon is an Anglo-Saxon war poem. Heroic battles were common in the Anglo-Saxon era because powerful kings were always seeking to expand their kingdoms, which invariably led to general instability. Military campaigns or battles were the foremost means of conquest and each conquest produced heroes who must have shown loyalty to their kings by fighting their foes to finish even at the expense of their own lives. To be honourable would mean to be willing to defend ones land, its people and the king. In this text, we shall see how Anglo-Saxon warriors engaged in warfare. The poem is about an old man named Bryhtnoth and his retainers, petty noblemen of Essex, fighting and dying in a local battle which may be called a scuffle of no great importance. We shall look at the poem and its heroic style.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define what a heroic poem is
- discuss *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem
- analyse the heroic style in *The Battle of Maldon*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Heroic Poetry?

Heroic poetry is a long narrative verse that is elevated in mood and uses a dignified, dramatic, and formal style to describe the deeds of aristocratic warriors and rulers, it is usually composed without the aid of writing and is chanted or recited to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It is transmitted orally from bard to bard over generations.

Heroic poetry ranges from ancient to modern works produced over a widespread geographic area. It includes what are probably the earliest forms of this verse, panegyrics praising a hero's lineage and deeds, funeral arrangements or lines composed on a hero's death. Homer relates that when Hector's body was brought home "they laid it upon the bed and seated minstrels round it to lead the dirge".

Another type of heroic poetry is the short, dramatic lay devoted to a single event, such as the Old English "Battle of Maldon" (c. 991), describing a Viking raid on Essex, or the Old High German "Hildebrandslied" (c. 800), dealing with a duel between father and son. The mature form of heroic poetry is the full-scale epic.

The heroic age varies in different native literatures. The heroic poetry of the German, Scandinavian, and English peoples deals chiefly with a period from the 4th to the 6th century AD, the time of the great migrations of the Germanic people. Though some of the heroes portrayed are historical personages, their actions are often combined and related for artistic purposes with no regard for actual historical chronology.

Nevertheless, a heroic tale is assumed by the poet and his listeners to be somehow true. Its style is impersonal and objective, and the graphic realism of its details gives it an air of probability that outweighs the occasional intrusion of marvelous elements. None of the mundane details of the hero's acts and none of the amenities connected with them are slighted. The listener is told how the hero looks, what he wears, what he eats, and how he sleeps.

3.2 *The Battle of Maldon*: A Heroic Poem

The battle of Maldon actually took place between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons. In August AD 991, a large fleet of Viking ships, led by the Norwegian Olaf Trygvasson, came to the River Blackwater, near Maldon in Essex, to be met by a smaller force of Englishmen. The poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, tells how the Vikings crossed the causeway over the river, and in the ensuing fight, the leader of the English Earldoman Byrhtnoth, was killed, and the English force defeated. The English defeat is not difficult to explain. They were outnumbered, Byrhtnot allowed the Vikings to cross the causeway, and many of the English forces fled when Byrthnoth was killed.

According to www.ringnett.com, depending on how big the ships were, the Vikings would have had a force of between 1,800 and 3,700 warriors. In a note, J. Campbell suggests that if Byrhtnoth's host was recruited from Essex on the five hide system, then there would have been about 600-700 men (Cooper, 1993: 90). This contrast in force of numbers must have contributed to the defeat of Earldoman Byrhtonoth and his men. Analysis of the poem matched with archaeology reveals that most of the fighting was around the mouth of the

causeway over the River Pante between the mainland and Northey Island in the Blackwater estuary. The Vikings had landed and disembarked on Northey Island. This indicates that most of the fighting would have been in a relatively small area, and this would have been a disadvantage for the defending English.

The main factor that cost the English the battle was that Byrhtnoth invited the Vikings to cross the ford, a seemingly reckless thing to do. The poem states that it was 'foolhardy pride' that made him invite the enemy onto firm ground (line 89). However, it has been suggested that because of the shallow draughts of the Viking ships, Byrhtnoth may have thought that in the dark they would be able to go further upriver and put in there, and so get around him and his troops (see "Battle of Maldon" in www.ringnett.com). Scraggy agrees with this. He says that Byrhtnoth's forces in their original position had stalemated the Vikings. He could keep them on the Island, but could not force them to engage nor prevent them from evacuating by ship. Withdrawing and letting the Vikings over the causeway was the only way to bring them to battle, thus to a certain extent securing the safety of the town of Maldon (Scragg, 1991:148). R. Elliot suggests that it may have "Byrhtnoth's very English belief in fair play, that it wasn't cricket to let the other side just sit there that made him take this fatal step". Had Byrhtnoth not invited the enemy onto the battle ground and waited until the tide had gone out before starting the battle, reinforcements may have had time to arrive, helping to balance the forces. Nevertheless, for whatever reason he did it, inviting the Vikings onto the mainland sacrificed a very good position, and gave up what small advantage that the English had.

The Battle of Maldon contains qualities that most heroic poems contain. Almost always, heroic poems narrate the deeds of dead warriors or achievers who may have died struggling. We can see how the bard or the poet narrates the deeds of Byrhtnoth in battle. The poet uses both dramatic and formal styles. The dramatic style makes the words of Byrhtnoth sound and clear. It gives the opportunity for Byrhtnoth to make his speech. This style will enable the poem to be easily adapted into drama. The poet's narrative technique is also formal. He seems not too familiar with the hero. He recounts his strengths and weaknesses objectively. His journalistic documentation of the poem makes it different from a full-fledged epic poem. The next sub-topic will elucidate more on the nature of heroic poetry as exemplified in *The Battle of Maldon*.

3.3 The Heroic Style in *The Battle of Maldon*

All heroic poems have some relationship with history, either genuine history or what is believed to be genuine history; but only in "Maldon" is the history so recent as to make the account of the battle almost a news story. Research shows that English chroniclers and Scandinavian skalds often produced occasional verse

in celebration of particular events, but such verse is likely to be a collection of the facile phrases of official court eulogy or of patriotic propaganda.
The structure of the poem falls into two parts: the first part deals with the beginning of the battle and the death of Byrhtnoth; the second part describes the individual speeches and actions of the surviving retainers. These two parts are noticeably different in style and tone.

The focus in the first part is mainly on Byrhtnoth and his activities as a leader. He orders his retainers into formation, gives elementary instruction to the crowd of untrained peasants who make up the army, and serves spokesman for his people. He, at first, orders the ford to be held and then allows the Vikings access to the mainland.

In a general way, the poem is dominated by what we might call simply the realistic style – plain, concrete, sometimes almost like prose, and with very few of the noun-compounds so common in most Old English verse. The following passage points to this:

> When they (the Vikings) understood and saw clearly that they were meeting fierce defenders of the bridge, the hateful strangers began to use trickery and asked to have access (to the shore), to go over the ford and bring their troops.

In itself this style is rather remarkable, for it could not have been easy to use the Old English poetic style, with its unfortunate tendency to dissolve frequently into echoing and eddying variations, to tell a plain tale with such economy. The poet may have intentionally used the broken style to signify the fall of the Anglo-Saxon. Nevertheless the starting of the poem seems the poem may have been abridged as it begins with ellipsis before we are being introduced to the main action of the warriors on the field.

	…. Was broken.
He bade a warrior	abandon his horse
And hurry forward	to join the fighters,
	(Lines 1-3)

That the poem makes use of prosaic diction in some places does not lessen its weight of being categorized as a heroic poem. This is because as the poem progresses the prosaic style becomes elevated most especially in the way Byrhtnoth Viking messenger:

Byrhtnoth addressed him,	brandished his shield
Shook pliant ash-spear,	speaking with words

Enraged and resolute, gave him answer:
'Hear you, sea-rover, what my people say?
The tribute they'll send you is tribute of spears,
Ancient sword-edge and poisoned point,
Weapons availing you little in war!
Pirate messenger, publish this answer,
Proclaim to your people tidings more grim;
Here stands no ignoble eorl with his army
Guarding my lord aEthelred's country and coast
His land and his folk. The heathen shall fall
In the clash of battle. Too shameful it seems
That you with your tribute should take your ships
Unfought when thus far you have invaded our land.
You shall not so easily take our treasure,
But sword edge and spear-point first shall decide,
The grim play of battle, ere tribute is granted.'
(Lines 42-59)

There is a marked tendency in Maldon" for these two styles to alternate, an alternation which usually coincides with shifts from action to summarizing reflection, or from personal encounters in battle to mass "tactical" movements, or from concrete details to generalizations. Epic diction become noticeably more frequent as the poem goes on, not only in set-pieces like the passage quoted but also in the language of the speeches and particularly in the highly stylized way of describing the fighting. This increasing use of epic diction is very much related to the meaning of the poem. A real historical event is being raised to a higher level of significance; the actions thus become increasingly symbolic; the ordinary identifiable men of Essex approach and enter the world of heroes, the world of legend.

The pattern of the poem from line 40 may be described as an elevation of style, if we may extend style to mean a way of acting as well as a way of speaking. It is the heroic style itself which is embodied in the figure of Byrhtnoth, both in the way he speaks and in the way he acts. He is the pattern and formula for the rest. He acts and talks like a hero. Ho encourages his soldiers and sthrenghten them. When he is dying, his courage never ceases. He speaks boldly for the repose of his soul if he dies.
Like Beowulf when he encounters Unferth at King Hrothgar's court, Byrhtnoth is faced with a verbal challenge. The Viking messenger's speech (29-41) is a master-piece of insult, deliberately infuriating in its arrogance and its tone of contemptuous wheedling. The heroic verbal response is unquestionably demanded.

Like Beowulf, Byrhtnoth meets his challenge perfectly. He can match irony with even greater irony. Like the spear which Wulfmaer later draws from Byrhtnoth's body and sends back to kill a Viking, the barbed words of the Viking's challenge are deftly caught, ironically accepted, and sent back in a notable display of heroic wit.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Just like *Beowulf, The Battle of Maldon* is another Anglo-Saxon war poem which ends tragically. The poem's simplicity and directness point to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon poet has created a heroic poem out of brute fact. He has been able to forego the great resources of the epic poets- the romantic glamour of antiquity and strange beings, or the plot and characters already long cherished by the audience.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see what heroic poetry is all about. We also discussed *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem. We were able to also trace the history of England to the period of several battles between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxon.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem.

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UNIT 4: CHAUCER'S POETRY

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Geoffrey Chaucer is regarded as the father of English literature. This is so because it is sometimes argued that the greatest contribution that his work made to English literature was in popularizing the literary use of the vernacular, English, rather than French or Latin. English had, however, been used as a literary language for centuries before Chaucer's life, and several of Chaucer's contemporaries such as John Gower, William Langland, and the Pearl Poet also wrote major literary works in English. This unit therefore, examines Chaucer's major poem, *The Canterbury Tales*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- relate Chaucer's biography;
- discuss the nature of Chaucer's poetry;
- assess the style of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales;*
- examine the themes of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.*

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Chaucer's Biography

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London sometime around 1343, though the precise date and location of his birth remain unknown. His father and grandfather were both London vintners, several previous generations had been merchants in Ipswich. (His family name derives from the French "Chausseur" meaning "Shoemaker"). In 1324 John Chaucer, Geoffrey's father, was kidnapped by an aunt in the hope of marrying the twelve-year-old boy to her daughter so that she could keep the property in Ipswich. The aunt was imprisoned and the £250 fine levied suggests that the family was financially secure – bourgeois, if not elite.

John Chaucer married Agnes Copton, who, in 1349, inherited properties including 24 shops in London from her uncle, Hamo de Copton, who is described in a will, dated 3 April 1354 and listed in the city Hustings Roll as "Moneyer"; he was said to be moneyer at the Tower of London. In the City Hustings Roll 110, 5, Ric II, dated June 1380.

Geoffrey Chaucer worked for Elizabeth de Burgh, the countess of Ulster as a courtier. He also worked as a diplomat and a civil servant. In 1359, in the early stages of the Hundred Years' War, Edward III invaded France and Chaucer travelled with Lionel of Antwerp, 1st Duke of Clarence, Elizabeth's husband, as part of the English army. In 1360, he was captured during the siege of Rheims. Edward paid £16 for his ransom, a considerable sum, and Chaucer was released. Around 1366, Chaucer married Phllipa (de) Roet. She was lady-in-waiting to Edward III's queen, Philippa of Hainaubt.

Chaucer probably studied law in the Inner Temple in London. He became a member of the Royal court of Edward III as a variet de Chambre on 20 June, 1367, a position which could entail a wide variety of tasks. He travelled abroad many times, at least some of them in his role as a varlet. Chaucer travelled to Picardy as part of a military expedition, and visited Genoa and Florence in 1373. Numerous scholars such as Skeat, Boitani, and Rowland suggested that, on this Italian trip, he came into contact with Petrarch or Boccaccio. They introduced him to medieval Italian poetry, the forms and stories of which he would use later.

A widespread knowledge of Chaucer's works is attested to by the many poets who imitated or responded to his writing. John Lydgate was one of the earliest poets to write continuations of Chaucer's unfinished Tales while Robert Henryson's Testament of Cressied completed the story of Cressida left unfinished in his "Troilus and Criseyde". Many of the manuscripts of Chaucer's works contain material from these poets and later appreciations by the romantic era poets were shaped by their failure to distinguish the later "additions" from original Chaucer. Seventeenth and eighteenth century writers such as John Dryden admired Chaucer for his stories, but not for his rhythm and rhyme, as few critics could then read Middle English and the text had been butchered by printers. It was not until the late 19th century that the official Chaucerian canon, accepted today, was decided upon, largely as a result of Walter William Skeat's work.

Roughly seventy-five years after Chaucer's death, the *Canterbury Tales* was selected by William Caxton to be one of the first books to be printed in England.

3.2 Chaucer's Poetry

Chaucer's poetry is different from the Anglo-Saxon poetry. Chaucer wrote in continental accentual-syllabic meter, a style which had developed around the twelfth century as an alternative to the alliterative Anglo-Saxon metre. Chaucer is known for his metrical innovation, inventing the rhyme royal, and being one of the first English poets to use the five-stress line, decasyllabic, in his work; only a few anonymous short works used it before him.

The arrangement of these five-stress lines into rhyming couplets, first seen in his "The Legend of Good Women", was used in much of his later work and became one of the standard poetic forms in English. His early influence as a satirist is also important, with the common humorous device, the funny accent of a regional dialect, apparently making its first appearance in "The Reeve's Tale". Chaucer's poetry along with other writers of the era, is credited with helping to standardize the London dialect of the Middle English language from a combination of the Kentish and Midlands dialects. This is probably overstated; the influence of the court, chancery and bureaucracy of which Chaucer was a part remains a more probable influence on the development of Standard English. Modern English is somewhat distanced from the language of Chaucer's poems owing to the effect of the Great Vowel Shift some time after his death. This change in the pronunciation of English, still not fully understood, makes the reading of Chaucer difficult for the audience. The status of the final "-e" in Chaucer's verse is uncertain: it seems likely that during the period of Chaucer's writing the final "-e" was dropping out of colloquial English and that its use was somewhat irregular. Chaucer's versification suggests that the final "-e" is sometimes to be vocalized, and sometimes to be silent; however, this remains a point on which there is disagreement. When it is vocalized, most scholars pronounce it as a schwa. Apart from the irregular spelling, much of the vocabulary is recognizable to the modern reader.

3.3 *The Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century. The tales are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.

The innovation of spring with which the General Prologue begins is lengthy and formal compared to the language of the rest of the prologue.

> When April the sweet showers fall
> And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all

The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tander shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep sway the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long tto go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick
(The Canterbury Tales)

The first lines situate the story in a particular time and place, but the speaker does this in cosmic and cyclical terms, celebrating the vitality and richness of spring. This approach gives the opening lines a dreamy, timeless, unspecified locality, and it is therefore surprising when the narrator reveals that he is going to describe a pilgrimage that he himself took rather than telling a love story. A pilgrimage is a religious journey undertaken for penance and grace. As pilgrimages went, Canterbury was not a very difficult destination for an English person to reach. It was, therefore, very popular in fourteenth–century England, as the narrator mentions. Pilgrims travelled to visit the remains of Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170 by Knights of King Henry II. Soon after his death, he became the most popular saint in England. The pilgrimage in *The Canterbury Tales* should not be thought of as an entirely solemn occasion, because it also offered the pilgrims an opportunity to abandon work and take a vacation.

In line 20, the narrator abandons his unspecified, all-knowing point of view, identifying himself as an actual person for the first time by inserting the first person "I" as he relates how he met the group of pilgrims while staying at the Tabard Inn. He emphasizes that this group, which he encountered by accident, was itself formed quite by chance (25-26). He then shifts into the first-person plural, referring to the pilgrims as "we" beginning in line 29, asserting his status as a member of the group.

The narrator ends the introductory portion of his prologue by noting that he has "tyme and space" to tell his narrative. His comments underscore the fact that he is

writing some time after the events of his story, and that he is describing the characters from memory. He has spoken and met with these people, but he has waited a certain length of time before sitting down and describing them. He seeks to describe each pilgrim as he or she seemed to him is also important, for it emphasizes that his descriptions are not only subject to his memory but are also shaped by his individual perceptions and opinions regarding each of the characters. He positions himself as a mediator between two groups: the group of pilgrims, of which he was a member, and us, the audience, whom the narrator explicitly addresses as "you" in lines 34 and 38.

On the other hand, the narrator's declaration that he will tell us about the "condition", "degree" and "array" (dress) of each of the pilgrims suggests that his portraits will be based on observed facts as well as his own opinions. He spends considerable time characterizing the group member according to their social positions. The pilgrims represent a diverse cross section of fourteenth – century English society. Medieval social theory divided society into three broad classes, called "estates": the military, the clergy, and the laity. In the portraits that are seen in the rest of the "General Prologue", the knight and squire represent the military estate. The clergy is represented by the prioress (and her nun and three priests), the Monk, the Frair, and the Parson. The other characters, from the wealthy Frankling to the poor Polyman, are the members of the laity. These lay characters can be further subdivided into landowners (the Franklin), professionals (the Clerk, the Man of the Law, the Guildsmen, the physician, and the shipman). Labourers (the cook and the Polyman), stewards (the Miller, the Manciple, and the Reeve), and church offers (the Summoner and the Pardoner). Chaucer's descriptions of the various characters and their social roles reveal the influence of the medieval genre of estates satire.

3.4 Chaucer's Style

The variety of Chaucer's tales shows the breadth of his skill and his familiarity with countless rhetorical forms and linguistic styles. Medieval schools of rhetoric at the time encouraged such diversity, dividing literature into high, middle, and low styles as measured by the density of rhetorical forms and vocabulary. Another popular method of division came from St. Augustine, who focused more on audience response and less on subject matter. Augustine divided literature into "majestic persuades", "temperature pleases", and "subdued teaches". Writers were encouraged to write in a way that kept in mind the speaker, subject, audience, purpose, manner, and occasion. Chaucer moves freely between all of these styles. He not only considers the readers of his work as an audience but the other pilgrims within the story as well, creating a multi-layered rhetorical puzzle of ambiguities. Chaucer's rises above medieval theories of style and rhetoric.

It can be said that Chaucer avoids targeting any specific audience or social class of readers, focusing instead on the characters of the story and writing their tales with

a skill proportional to their social status and learning. However, even the lowest characters, such as the Miller, show surprising rhetorical ability, although their subject matter is more lowbrow. Vocabulary also plays an important part, as those of the higher classes refer to a woman as a "lady", while the lower classes use the word "wenche", with no exceptions. At times the same word will mean entirely different things between classes. The word "pitee", for example, is a noble concept to the upper classes, while in the "Merchant's Tales" it refers to sexual intercourse. Again, however, tales such as the Nun's Priest's Tale show surprising skill with words among the lower classes of the group, while the "Knight's Tale" is at times extremely simple.

Chaucer uses the same meter throughout in most of the tales, with the exception of "Sir Thomas" and his prose tales. It is a *decasyllable* line, probably borrowed from French and Italian forms, with *riding rhyme* and, occasionally, with a Caesura in the middle of a line. His meter would later develop into the heroic meter of the 15th and 16th centuries and is an ancestor of iambic pentameter.

3.5 Themes of *the Canterbury Tales*

There are various themes in the work. The major themes are discussed below.

Religion

The Tales reflect various views of the church in Chaucer's England. After the Black Death, many Europeans began to question the authority of the established church. Some turned to "lollardy", while others chose less extreme paths, starting new monastic orders or smaller movements exposing church corruption in the behaviour of the clergy, false church relics or abuse of indulgences. Many of the characters in the tales are religious figures, and the very setting of the pilgrimage to Canterbury is religious making religion a significant theme of the work. Two characters, the pardoner and the summoner, whose roles apply the church's secular power, are both portrayed as deeply corrupt, greedy, and abusive. A pardoner in Chaucer's days was a person from whom one bought Church "indulgences" for forgiveness of sins, but pardoners were often thought guilty of abusing their office for their own gain. Chaucer's pardoner openly admits the corruption of his practice while hawking his wares. The summoner is a church officer who brought sinners to the church court for possible excommunication and other penalties. Corrupt summoners would write false citations and frighten people into bribing them in order to protect their interests. Chaucer's summoner is portrayed as guilty of the very kinds of sins he is threatening to bring others to court for, and is hinted as having a corruption relationship with the pardoner.

Social Class and Convention

The upper class or nobility, represented chiefly by the knight and his squire, was in Chaucer's time steeped in a culture of chivalry and courtliness. Nobles were

expected to be powerful warriors who could be ruthless on the battlefield, yet mannerly in the King's court and Christian in their actions. Knights were expected to form a strong social bond with the men who fought alongside them, but an even stronger bond with a woman whom they idealized in order to strengthen their fighting ability. Though the aim of chivalry was to noble action, often its conflicting values degenerated into violence. Church leaders often tried to place restrictions on jousts and tournaments, which at times ended in the death of the loser. "The Knight's Tale" shows how the brotherly love of two fellow knights turns into a deadly feud at the sight of a woman whom both idealize, with both knights willing to fight the other to death in order to win her. Chivalry was in Chaucer's day on the decline, and it is possible that "The Knight's Tale" was intended to show its flaws, although this is disputed. Chaucer himself had fought in the Hundred Year's War under Edward III, who heavily emphasized chivalry during his reign.

Relativism versus Realism

Chaucer's characters each express different views of reality, creating an atmosphere of relativism. As Helen Cooper says:

> Different genres give different readings of the world:
> The fabliau scarcely notices the operations of God, the saint's
> life focuses on those at the expense of physical reality, tracts and
> sermons insist on prudential or orthodox morality, romances
> privilege human emotion.

The sheer number of varying persons and stories renders the *Tales* as a set unable to arrive at any definite truth or reality.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Geoffrey Chaucer has been recognized as the father of English literature. His works influenced the rest of other literary works which were written after him. He popularized the local English language and his works became accessible to many English people. This unit examines Chaucer and his poetry.

5.0 SUMMARY

The unit examines briefly the biography of Geoffrey Chaucer and the nature of his poetry. Attempt is made to discuss the *Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer's Style as well. The unit also looks into the themes of *Canterbury Tales*.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

i. Discuss Chaucer's style in *The Canterbury Tales.*
ii. Discuss the themes of *The Canterbury Tales.*

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MODULE 2: THE RENAISSANCE POETRY

INTRODUCTION

Module 2 discusses Renaissance as a literary movement in England. The whole module will specifically discuss what Renaissance is; some Elizabethan Poems, Shakespearean sonnets and some of the metaphysical poets.

Unit 1: What is Renaissance?
Unit 2: Elizabethan Poetry
Unit 3: Shakespearean Sonnets
Unit 4: Metaphysical Poetry

UNIT 1 WHAT IS RENAISSANCE?

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Renaissance came immediately after the Middle Ages. Renaissance cut across the whole of Europe beginning from Italy. Till today, most poets still pattern their works after Renaissance poetry. This unit simply examines what Renaissance is and its features.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. explain what Renaissance is;
2. discuss the features of Renaissance;
3. describe the nature of English Renaissance.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Renaissance?

The Renaissance was a cultural movement that profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period. The Renaissance began from Italy and spread to the rest of Europe by the 16th century. Its influence was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, religion, and other aspects of intellectual inquiry. Renaissance scholars employed the humanist method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art (*Wikipedia*).

There remains a long debate about what exactly constituted the Renaissance. Essentially, it was a cultural and intellectual movement, intimately tied to society and politics of the late fourteenth to early seventeenth centuries, although it is commonly restricted to just the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In a way, some

scholars claimed that it must have been stimulated by Petrarch, who had a passion for rediscovering lost manuscripts and a fierce belief in the civilizing power of ancient thought, and in part by conditions in Florence. The Renaissance was a movement dedicated to the rediscovery and use of classical learning. By classical learning we mean knowledge and attitudes from the Ancient Greek and Roman periods.

Literarily, Renaissance means "rebirth", and Renaissance thinkers believed the period between themselves and the fall of Rome, which they labeled the Middle Ages, had seen a decline in cultural achievement compared with the earlier eras. Participants intended, through the study of classical texts, textual criticism and classical techniques, to both reintroduce the heights of those ancient days and improve the situation of their contemporaries.

3.2 Features of Renaissance

The main features of Renaissance include the following:

- Realism and expressionism – Realism is the general attempt to depict things accurately, from either a visual, social or emotional perspective.
- Humanism is another feature of Renaissance. Humanism is devoted to the study of mankind, instead of the theological devotion of the Middle Age. The Renaissance scholars were known as "humourists" and their subjects of study came to be called the "humanities". In other words, they emphasized reason, a questioning attitude, experimentation, and free inquiry.
- It glorified the individual and approved worldly pleasures, viewing life as worthwhile for its own sake, not chiefly as a preparation for the life to come.
- It focused attention upon secular society rather than the medieval preoccupation with the church and religious affairs.
- It featured great achievements in literature, art, and science.

3.3 The English Renaissance

As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, English students were frequenting the Italian universities. Soon the study of Greek was introduced into England, also, first at Oxford; and it was cultivated with such good results that when, early in the sixteenth century, the great Dutch student and reformer, Erasmus, unable through poverty to reach Italy, came to Oxford instead, he found there a group of accomplished scholars and gentlemen whose instruction and hospitable companionship aroused his unbounded delight. One member of this group was John Colet, Later Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, who was to bring new life into the secondary education of English boys by the establishment of St. Paul's

Grammar School, based on the principle of kindness in place of the merciless severity of the traditional English system.

The established literary culture influenced Renaissance in England. While Greek was spoken so powerfully by the cultivated class, other forces were contributing to revolutionize life as a whole and all men's outlook upon it. The invention of printing, multiplying books in unlimited quantities where before there had been only a few manuscripts laboriously copied page by page, absolutely transformed all the processes of knowledge and almost of thought. Not much later began the vast expansion of the physical world through geographical exploration. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, the new worlds were discovered. The discovery of the new worlds further helped in the expansion of Renaissance.

The whole of England was profoundly stirred by the Renaissance to a new and most energetic life, but not least was this true of the Court, where for a time literature was very largely centred. Since the old nobility had mostly perished in the wars, both Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor line, and his son, Henry VIII, adopted the policy of replacing the nobility with able and wealthy men of the middle class, who would be strongly devoted to themselves. The court therefore became a brilliant and crowded circle of unscrupulous but unusually adroit statesmen, and a centre of lavish entertainments and display. Under this new aristocracy the rigidity of the feudal system was relaxed, and life became somewhat easier for all the dependent classes. Modern comforts were largely introduced, and with them the Italian arts; Tudor architecture, in particular, exhibited the originality and splendor of an energetic and self-confident age. William Shakespeare and Thomas Wyatt were royal poets. Wyatt himself was popular with his courtly poems.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Discuss at least five features of renaissance poetry.

4.0 CONCLUSION

English Renaissance had a strong tradition of literature in the English vernacular and it gradually increased as the use of the printing press became common by the mid-16th century. The royal court really helped in popularizing arts and many English people had access to reading since the Anglican Church had adopted the use of English to communicate. Renaissance humanism became popular, even Queen Elizabeth herself was a product of Renaissance humanism. English people eventually dropped the medieval concern with faith, authority and tradition. Reason became glorified as more and more people began to read.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the Renaissance in England to you. We also gave you the peculiar features of Renaissance and where it probably started from. In the next unit therefore, you will be introduced to Elizabethan poetry. Here, you will be able to see how Renaissance features appear in most of these poems.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by Renaissance?
2. How did it affect the English people?

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UNIT 2 ELIZABETHAN POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Elizabethan period (1558 to 1603) in poetry is characterized by a number of frequently overlapping developments. The introduction and adaptation of themes, models and verse forms from other European traditions and classical literature, the Elizabethan song tradition, the emergence of a courtly poetry often centred around the figure of the monarch and the growth of a verse-based drama are among the most important of these developments.

Moreover, a large number of Elizabethan poets wrote songs, including Nicholas Grimald, Thomas Nashe and Robert Southwell. There are also a certain number of extant anonymous songs from the period. Arguably, the greatest of all the songwriters was Thomas Campion. Campion is notable because of his experiments with metres based on counting syllables rather than stresses. These quantitative metres were based on classical models and should be viewed as part of the wider Elizabethan revival of Greek and Roman artistic methods. The songs were printed either in miscellanies or anthologies such as Richard Tottel's 1557 songs and sonnets printed to be performed. These performances formed an integral part of both public and private entertainments. By the end of the 16th century, a new generation of composers, including John Dowland, William Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons emerged. Thomas Morley was instrumental to promoting the art of Elizabethan song to an extremely high musical level.

3.2 HUMFREY GIFFORD: A MAJOR ELIZABETHAN POET

Most writers of the history of the poetry and literature of the Elizabethan age have not so much mentioned the name of Humfrey Gifford. George Ellis gives three short pieces of Giffords in his "Specimens of the Early English Poets" (1845), and Edward Farr reprinted seven of the religious poems in his "Select Poetry, Chiefly Devotional, of the Reign of Elizabethan" (1845), and the Rev. Alexander B. Grosart reprinted the poems of Gifford in 1870 in an edition of one hundred and six copies, and again in 1875 in one of forty-five copies, both impressions being for private circulation.

There is but one copy of the original edition of Gifford's collection of poems and prose translations called "A Posie of Gilloflowers". This according to L.W. Payne ((1903) is catalogued in the British Museum. The most important and trustworthy evidence one could find concerning Gifford is found in the Epistles-Dedicatory prefixed to the "Posie" and in certain occasional and personal references in the poems themselves. The first of the Epistles begins with" "To the worshipful, his very good Master, Edward Cope of Edon". The second Epistle – Dedicatory is addressed to "the worshipful John Stafford of bletherwicke, Esquire", to whom the author acknowledges himself deeply indebted for professed courtesies and good opinion.

Gifford's poetry could be classified into love poems, humorous pieces, religious and allegorical poems and occasional poems. As to the general features of style, it may be noted that the use of alliteration is quite frequent and often rather rough and inharmonious in effect. This was, however, a prominent feature of the poetry of his time, and should not be condemned too severely. Here are a few examples: *Rash Rancour's rage procures fond furious fightes; peace makes men swim in seas of sweet delights.*

(A commendation of peace p. 58).

Who wisely waies false fortune's fickle change.

(Of the Instability of Fortuen, p. 70).

The juxtaposition of extremes, commonly known as Petrarchism, is of frequent occurrence. The following example illustrates also the extreme pressure on alliteration:

In mirth they moane, yet smile amidst their woe:
In fire they freese, in frost they fry straightway:
Swift legges to runne, yet are not able goe:
Such is the state in which poore lovers stay.

(Of the Uncontented Estate of Lovers, p. 18).

Another quotation showing the combination of internal rhyme with alliteration has a pleasing effect:

Her smiles are wyles, to cause men hope for hap,
Her traynes breed paynes, thought pleasant be the show,
Him whom she now doth dandle in her lap,
Straightway sustains a wretched overthrow.
(On the Instability of Fortune, p. 71).

It seems the metrical structure is almost mechanical in its regularity, yet, as has been indicated, it flows naturally and spontaneously.

The love poems seem to center around one Gentlewoman. One could easily imagine that every poem records some phase of an actual passion. In the poem, "A Renouncing of Love", the poet argues from the absolutely foolish antics of lovers that there is no reason in love:

They frye and freese in myldest weather.
They weepe and laugh, even both together…
Since reason rules not Venus' sport,
No reason bids me scale that forte.

In another, "For his Friende", he bewails the torments of Cupid's bondage which he must endure, and prays his mistress to have pity on him:

As late abrode I cast my lookes,
In Fancie's lune I fast was cought,
And beauty with her bayted hookes,
Hath me alas in bondage brought;
I love, but lacke the thing I crave:
I live, but want my chiefest good,
I hope, but hap I cannot have,
I serve, but starve for want of foode…
Deare dame, in humble sort I sew,
Since mine estate to you is known
Voutsafe my dolefull case to rew.
And save his life who is your owne.

Humfrey Gifford's verses are fine Renaissance verses. Most of his verses are written in couplets and quatrains. They are not too different from Shakespearean sonnets and other Elizabethan poems.

3.3 The Style of Elizabethan Poetry

Elizabethan poems were often written in iambic meters, based on a metrical foot of two syllables, one unstressed and one stressed. However, much metrical experimentation took place during the period, and many of the songs, in particular departed widely from the iambic norm. Moreover, most of the poems were courtly poems usually written in couplets and quatrains. While some of the Elizabethan

poets dwelt so much on the use of wit and conceit. For instance, Shakespeare's sonnets contain much units and conceits.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Drawing examples from two of Humfrey Gifford's poems studied in this unit, discuss the style of Elizabethan poetry.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Elizabethan poetry was important in the phase of English poetry. The Elizabethan period brought a lot of changes to modern English poetry. Hitherto, many of the new English poets still follow the Elizabethan pattern of poetry writing. Hence, it can be deduced that the Elizabethan period was as important in the history of English poetry just like any other periods.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the Elizabethan poetry and its place during the Renaissance in England. We have discussed the important trends of Elizabethan period and most importantly, we also introduced Humfrey Gifford to you as an example of Elizabethan poet. In the next unit, we shall discuss the sonnets of Shakespeare and Shakespearean style.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the significance of Elizabethan poetry in renaissance England.

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UNIT 3 SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Shakespearean sonnets arguably set a template for most of the sonnets written during the Renaissance in England and even after. It would be easy for any student of literature to identify William Shakespeare as one of the architects of Renaissance in England. Many English and non-English poets have continued to pattern their works after the Shakespearean style. In this unit, we shall examine the life of Shakespeare briefly and some of his beautiful sonnets.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. summarize the biography of William Shakespeare;
2. discuss some sonnets of Shakespeare;
3. explain the Shakespearean style of sonnets.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-on-Avon. The son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, he was probably educated at the King Edward IV Grammar school in Stratford, where he learned Latin and some Greek and read the Roman dramatists. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years older than him. Together they raised two daughters: Susana, who was born in 1583 and Judith (whose twin brother died in boyhood), born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's activities between 1585 and 1592. Shakespeare may have taught at school during this period, but it seems more probably that shortly after 1585 he went to London to begin his apprenticeship as an actor. Due to the plague, the London theatres were often closed between June 1592 and April 1594. During that period, Shakespeare probably had some income from his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his first two poems, "Venus and Adonis" (1593) and "the Rape of Lucrece" (1594). The former was a long narrative depicting the rejection of Venus by Adonis, his death, and the consequent disappearance of beauty from the world. Despite conservative objections to the poem's glorification of sensuality, it was immensely popular and was reprinted six times during the nine years following its publication.

In 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamber Lain's company of actors, the most popular of the companies acting at court. In 1599, Shakespeare joined a group of Chamber Lain's Men that would form a syndicate to build and operate a new playhouse: the Globe, which became the most famous theatre of its time. With his share of the income from the Globe, Shakespeare was able to purchase New Place, his home in Stratford.

Though Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not plays, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. The edition, The sonnets of Shakespeare, consists of 154 sonnets, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean. The sonnets fall into two groups: sonnets 1 – 126, addressed to a beloved friend, a handsome and noble young man, and sonnets 127-152, to a malignant but fascinating "Dark Lady" whom the poet loves in spite of himself.

Shakespeare is known to have invented thousands of words, often combining or contorting Latin, French and native roots. His impressive expansion of the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, includes such words as: arch-villain, birthplace, bloodsucking, courtship, dewdrop, downstairs, fanged, heartsore, hunchbacked, leapfrog, misquote, pageantry, radiance, schoolboy, stillborn, watchdog, and zary.

3.2 The Sonnets of Shakespeare

Nearly all of Shakespeare's sonnets examine the inevitable decay of time and the immortalization of beauty and love in poetry. Shakespeare's sonnets are a collection of 154 sonnets. Majority of the sonnets (1 – 126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. The poet spends the first seventeen sonnets trying to convince the young man to marry and have beautiful children that will look like their father, ensuring his immortality. Many of the remaining sonnets focus on the power of poetry and pure love to defeat death and "all oblivious enmity" (55.9). Here, the second sonnet is analyzed:

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,
Will be a tattered weed of small worth held:
Where all the treasure of the lusty days;
To say within thine own deep sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer "This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse'
Proving his beauty by succession of thine.
This were to be new made when thou art old.
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

In this sonnet, the speaker warns the addressee about old age. According to him, in forty years more, that is, forty more years added to the recipient's age, the addressee will no longer be a youth. All his strength must have gone by this time. The speaker now advises this young man to replicate his beauty by having a son who will stand for him after he must have gone.

The final sonnets (127 – 154) are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman known to modern readers as the dark lady. Both the poet and his young man have become obsessed with the raven-haired temptress in these sonnets, and the poet's whole being is at odds with his insatiable "sickly appetite" (147.4). The tone is distressing with language of sensual feasting, uncontrollable urges, and sinful consumption. Here, sonnet 130 is analyzed:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red, than her lips red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head:
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight,

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know.
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet by heaven I think my love as rare,
As any she belied with false compare.

The speaker in this sonnet compares the beauty of his mistress with the sun. To him, his mistress' eyes glow like the sun. The speaker keeps on praising his mistress' beauty negatively comparing parts of her body with some elements of nature like roses, the sun, snow, perfumes. He condemns her eyes, hair, cheeks, breath, speech and walk. The language is sarcastic and highly ironical.

3.3 The Style of Shakespearean Sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnets are written predominantly in a meter called iambic pentameter, a rhyme scheme in which each sonnet line consists of ten syllables. The syllables are divided into five pairs called iambs or iambic feet. An iamb is a metrical unit made up of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. A line of iambic pentameter flows thus:

do REE / do REE / do REE / do REE / do REE

These examples are taken from the sonnets:

When I / do COUNT / the CLOCK / that TELLS / the TIME (Sonnets 12)
When IN / dis GRACE / with FOR / tune AND / men's EYES
I ALL / a LONe / be WEEP / my OUT / Cast STATE (Sonnet 29)
Shall I / com PARE / thee TO / a SUM / ser's DAY?
Thou ART / more LOVE / ly AND / more TEM / per ATE (sonnets 18)

There are fourteen lines in a sonnet. In the case of a Shakespearean sonnet, the first twelve lines are divided into three quatrains with four lines each. In the three quatrains, the poet establishes a theme or problem and then resolves it in the final two lines, called the couplet. The rhyme scheme of the quatrain is abab cdcd efef. The couplet has the rhyme scheme gg. This sonnet structure is commonly called the English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet, to distinguish it from the Italian Petrarchan Sonnet form which has two parts: a rhyming octave (abbaabba) and a rhyming sestet (cdcdcd). The Petrarchan sonnet style was extremely popular with Elizabethan sonneteers; much to Shakespeare disdain he mocks the conventional and excessive Petrarchan style in sonnet 130.

Whereas sonnets are usually made up of fourteen lines, three of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets do not conform to this structure. Sonnet 99 has 15 lines; sonnet 126 has 12 lines; and sonnet 145 which is written in iambic tetrameter.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Assess the aesthetics of two sonnets by Shakespeare

4.0 CONCLUSION

Shakespearean sonnets are very important in the phase of English poetry. In his sonnets, Shakespeare coined a lot of new words and also consolidated his style as the English style for sonnet writing instead of the Petrarchan style. A lot of modern poets have patterned their works after Shakespeare's sonnets. Wendy Cope's poetry is parodied after Shakespearean sonnets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the sonnets of William Shakespeare to you. We have told you that the first 17 sonnets are addressed to a Youngman while the ones from 127-154 are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman. The whole 154 sonnets are rich in English tradition.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a two-page essay on the sonnets of Shakespeare, paying close attention to the poet's thematic concerns and style of delivery.

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UNIT 4 METAPHYSICAL POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The metaphysical poets came after the Elizabethan poets and their poetry seems to be very popular in England alone. These metaphysical poets may have been so popular in the first half of the seventeenth century. This unit shall examine who these poets were, their style of writing and how they took over English poetry during their time.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. explain who are the metaphysical poets;
2. discuss the poetry of John Donne as being metaphysical;
3. examine the works of Andrew Marvell as metaphysical poetry

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Who are the Metaphysical Poets?

It is customary to refer to one group of poets in the first half of the seventeenth century as Metaphysical. The term "Metaphysical Poets" was coined by the poet and critic Samuel Johnson to describe a loose group of British lyric poets of the 17th century, whose work was characterized by the inventive use of conceits and their poetry revolved round love and religion. These poets were not really connected together; in fact, most of them did not even know or read each other.

Samuel Johnson referred to the beginning of the seventeenth century in the chapter on Abraham Cowley in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poet* as a

“race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets”. This does not really imply that he intended metaphysical to be used in its true sense, in that he was probably referring to a witticism of John Dryden who said of John Donne that, “he affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love”. Probably, the only writer before Dryden to speak of a certain metaphysical school or group of metaphysical poets is Drummond of Hawthornden (1585 – 1649), who in one of his letters speaks of “metaphysical ideas and Scholastical Quiddities”.

There is no scholarly consensus regarding which seventeenth century English poets or poems may be regarded as in the “metaphysical” genre. Colin Burrow, writing for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, describes John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Crashaw as the “central figures” of metaphysical poetry. In 1921, Herbert Grieson published *metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, which collected poems by Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell and Carew.

3.2 The Background of John Donne

John Donne was born in 1572 in London, England. He is known as the founder of the Metaphysical Poets, a term created by Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth-century English essayist, poet, and philosopher. The loosely associated group also includes George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and John Cleveland. The Metaphysical poets are known for their ability to startle the reader and coax new perspective through paradoxical images, subtle argument, inventive syntax, and imagery from art, philosophy, and religion using an extended metaphor known as a conceit. Donne reached beyond the rational and hierarchical structures of the seventeenth century with his exacting and ingenuous conceits, advancing the exploratory spirit of his time.

Donne entered the world during a period of theological and political unrest for both England and France; a protestant massacre occurred on Saint Bartholomew’s day in France; while in England, the Catholics were the persecuted minority. Being born into a Roman Catholic family, Donne’s personal relationship with religion was tumultuous and passionate, and at the centre of much of his poetry. He studied at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities in his early teen years. He did not take a degree at either school, because to do so would have meant subscribing to the thirty-nine Articles, the doctrine that defined Anglicanism. At age twenty he studied law at Lincoln’s Inn. Two years later he succumbed to

religious pressure and joined the Anglican Church after his younger brother, convicted for his Catholic loyalties, died in prison. Donne wrote most of his love lyrics, erotic verse, and some sacred poems in the 1590s, creating two major volumes of work: Satires, and Songs and Sonnets.

In 1598, after returning from a two-year naval expedition against Spain, Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton. Donne secretly married Anne More, the sixteen-year-old niece of Lady Egerton. Donne's father-in-law disapproved of the marriage. As punishment, he did not provide a dowry for the couple and had Donne briefly imprisoned.

Donne started writing the Divine poems in 1607. In Pseudo-Martyr published in 1610, Donne displayed his extensive knowledge of the laws of the church and state, arguing that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their faith. In 1615, James I pressured him to enter the Anglican Ministry by declaring that Donne could not be employed out of the church. He was appointed Royal Chaplain later that year. His wife died in 1617 aged thirty-three shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child. The holy sonnets are also attributed to this phase of his life.

In 1621, he became dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral. In his later years, Donne's writing reflected his fear of his inevitable death. He wrote his private prayers, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, during a period of severe illness and published them in 1624. He was best known for his vivacious, compelling style and thorough examination of mortal paradox. John Donne later died in London in 1631.

3.3 John Donne's Poetry

John Donne wrote several poems, and his poetry is full of wits and conceits. Most of his poems express love, religion and fear of death. The first of Donne's poems we shall examine is the fifth of the Elegies, "His Picture" probably written in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

ELEGIE V – HIS PICTURE

Here, take my picture; though I bid farewell,
Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When weather-beaten I come backe; my hand,
Perhaps with rude oares torne, or sun beams tann'd.
My face and brest of hairecloth, and my head

With cares rash sodaine stormes, being o'rsopread,
My body' a sack of bones, broke within,
And powders blew staines scatter'd on my skinne;
If rival fooles taxe thee to 'have lov'd a man,
So foule, and course, as Oh, I may seeme than,
This shall say what I was: and thou shalt say,
Does his hurts reach mee? doth my worth decay?
Or doe they reach his judging minde, that hee
Should now love lesse, what hee did love to see?
That which in him was faire and delicate,
Was but the milke, which in loves childish state
Did nurse it: who now is grown strong enough
To feed on that, which to discus'd tasts seemes tough.

Note, to begin with, the 'real-life' situation. The poet is going away, perhaps, to join the cadiz expedition of 1596-1697, an overseas posting, we might say, and he gives his beloved a picture to remember him by. Nevertheless, this is not a simple poem, but one which holds and balances many conflicting emotions and attitudes. It begins abruptly thus:

Here, take my Picture…

The poet's feelings burst forth; he cannot stay for formality, or even for common politeness. In both the literary and the social sense this is an "unconventional" poem. Then the poet implies that though the lady needs a picture to remind her to her lover, he doesn't need a picture of her, because her image is engraved in his heart "where his soul dwells", and his love is not dependent on anything physical. Next is a wry and harsh allusion to death, to the fact that he may not return. The picture resembles him. It is a good "likeness'; yet is not reality, but a 'shadow'; therefore, if he is dead, and becomes a 'shade' it will resemble him still more. Then he compares what he may be when he returns with what the picture represents him to be now. The grammar of the next sentence is:

'*When… I come back'* – the worse for wear, and other girls ask what you can see in me – 'this' – the picture - 'shall say what I was'. The vivid evocation of perils and suffering – note that the energy of "*My body's a sack of bones, broken within/And powders blew staines scatter'd on my skinne:"* is horrifyingly real, but we also feel that the poet is ironically asking for sympathy, and we are pulled up short by the "rival fooles". They are his sweetheart's girlfriends, imagined tittering at the strange, battered bearded figure that he "may be then", and wondering what she finds attractive in him. He tells her what to say in reply. She can point to the picture and prove by its means that she fell in love with "as proper a man as ever went on neat's leather".

Next is one of the sixteen Holy Sonnets.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so;
For, those, whom thou thinkst, thou dost over throw,
Die not, poore Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy picture bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's deliverie.
Thou'rt slave to Fate, Chance, Kings and Desperate men,
And dost with poison, warre, and siciknesse dwell,
And popppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shall die.

The theme is simple. The language is plain, the tone assured and full of energy. This is a lively poem about death, and a simple, calm denial "for thou art not so" establishes its feeling. Here we meet again the theme of death and sleep, of the picture and reality. As sleep refreshes us, and delivers us from life, so does death. Death has no power in himself; we die when it is our fate to do so, or by accident, or through the exercise of arbitrary power, or we are murdered. Death, so to speak, 'lives' in bad and miserable company. Donne believes that death will no longer live in the mortal bodies of humans. "One short sleep past, we wake eternally". These clauses bring hope in the reader that one day, human race shall be alive eternally.

3.4 The Life of Andrew Marvell

Due to the inconsistencies of ambiguities within his work and the scarcity of information about his personal life, Andrew Marvell has been a source of fascination for scholars and readers since his work found recognition in the early decades of the twentieth century. Born in 1621, Marvell grew up in the Yorkshire town of Hull where his father, Rev. Andrew Marvell, was a lecturer at Holy Trinity Church and Master of the Chaterhouse. At age twelve Marvell began his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge. Four years later two of Marvell's poems, one in Latin and one in Greek, were published in an anthology of Cambridge poets. After receiving his B.A. in 1639, Marvell stayed on at Trinity, apparently to complete an M.A. degree. In 1641, however, his father drowned and Marvell abandoned his studies. During the 1640's, Marvell travelled extensively on the continent, adding Dutch, French, Spanish, and Italian, to His Latin and Greek.

Marvell spent most of the 1650's working as a tutor first for Mary Fairfax, daughter of a retired Cromwellian general, then for one of Cromewll's wards. Scholars believe that Marvell's greatest lyrics were written during this time. In

1657, Marvell was appointed Milton's Latin secretary, a post Marvell held until his election to parliament in 1660.

Marvell used his political status to free Milton, who was jailed during the Restoration, and quite possibly saved the elder poet's life. In 1678, after 18 years in parliament, Marvell died rather suddenly of a fever. Gossip of the time had it that the Jesuits (a target of Marvell's satire) may have poisoned him. After his death he was remembered as a fierce and loyal patriot.

3.5 The Poetry of Andrew Marvell

In the poems of Marvell, metaphysical wit is dominant. Let us examine "*The Fair Singer"*, one of his best poems. "The Fair Singer" is a slight and charming love lyric in which the metaphysical conceit is used with playful ingenuity; indeed it was in the skill with which the game was played, the convention exploited, that the seventeenth-century reader of verse such as this found much of pleasure. The Lady's beauty is dazzling, her voice enchanting: she has made a conquest of the poet who is her prisoner. The war-captivity conceit is resolved in the last stanza, where the lady's beauty and voice become the wind and sun, natural powers against which the poet is helpless, as a ship might be against an enemy bearing down with the sun behind him.

To make a final conquest of all me,
Love did compose so sweet an Enemy,
In whom both Beauties to my death agree,
Joining themselves in fatall harmony;
That while she with her Eyes my Heart does bind,
She with her Voice might captivate my Mind.

Our last poem is the famous "To His Coy Mistress". The poem is a metaphysical poem written during or before the interregnum. The poem is considered one of Marvell's finest and is possibly the best recognized carpe diem poem in English. Although the date of its composition is not known, it may have been written in the early 1650s'. At that time, Marvell was serving as a tutor to the daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax.

The speaker of the poem addresses a woman who has been slow to respond to his sexual advances. In the first stanza, he describes how he would love her if he were to be unencumbered by the constraints of a normal lifespan. He could spend centuries admiring each part of her body and her resistance to his advances (i.e., coyness) would not discourage him.

I would
Love you ten years before the flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow.
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should to go praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead Gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.

In the second stanza, he laments how short human life is. One life is over, the speaker contends, the opportunity to enjoy one another is gone, as no one embraces in death. In the last stanza, the speaker urges the woman to requite his efforts, and argues that in loving one another with passion, they will both make the most of the brief time they have to live.

Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
Through the Iron gates of Life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter and rhymes in couplets. The first verse paragraph "Had we…" is ten couplets long, the second "But at my back…" Six, and the third "Now, therefore,…" seven. The logical form of the poem runs thus:

If….
but ….
Therefore ….

3.6 The Metaphysical Style

The Metaphysical style was characterized by wit and metaphysical conceits. The metaphysical conceits are unusual similes or metaphors such as in Andrew Marvell's comparison of the soul with a drop of dew; in an expanded epigram format, with the use of simple verse forms, octosyllabic couplets, quatrains or stanzas in which length of line and rhyme scheme enforce the sense. The specific definition of wit which Johnson applied to the school was: "a kind of Discordia Concors' a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike". Their poetry diverged from the style of their times, containing neither images of nature nor allusions to classical mythology as were common. Several metaphysical poets especially John Donne were influenced by Neo-Platonism. One of the primary Platonic concepts found in metaphysical poetry is the idea that the perfection of beauty in the beloved acted as a remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm. Their work relies on images

and references to the contemporary scientific or geographical discoveries. These were used to examine religious and moral questions, often employing an element of casuistry (i.e. theoretical reasoning used to resolve moral problems, often evasive or arcane) to define their understanding or personal relationship with God.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Examine the craft of one metaphysical poet.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Metaphysical poets, though not many, really changed the phase of English poetry. These poets with their wit and conceits held my poetry lovers spell bound during the Renaissance. Nevertheless, critical opinion of the school has been varied. Some believed they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. No matter what, the group may have influenced T.S. Eliot's poetry who praised them in his essay *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921).

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the metaphysical poets to you. We have discussed how they influenced English Poetry with their wit and conceits which were peculiar to their style of writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Who are the Metaphysical poets? Discuss any of the poems of any of them, bringing out their metaphysical qualities.

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MODULE 3 ENGLISH POETRY IN THE RESTORATION PERIOD AND THE 18TH CENTURY

This module examines the Restoration and the 18th century period. The study looks into turbulent days of England most especially the Civil War that broke out in England. The restoration period is an important period in the history of poetry in England. The module consists of four units altogether.

The first unit will discuss Satire. Satire is important to be discussed in this module because it was a tool employed during the Restoration by many poets to critique the English society.

The second unit will examine the 18th century classicism as related to the Restoration. We shall look into the style of writing poetry during this time and the major features of 18th century classical poems will be examined.

The third unit will discuss the poetry of John Dryden. Here, we shall analyse the major poems of Dryden.

The fourth unit will examine the work of Alexander Pope. We shall analyse his major poems and look at his style of writing poetry.

Unit 1: Satire in the 18th century
Unit 2: 18th Century Classicism
Unit 3: John Dryden's Poetry
Unit 4: Alexander Pope's Poetry

Unit 1 SATIRE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the Restoration and the eighteenth century, satire became a tool of writing poetry, drama and even prose. Satire is an artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or short comings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Discuss what satire is;
2. Explain the nature of satire;
3. Discuss the nature of satire in the 18th century England.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Satire?

Satire is a genre of literature, and sometimes graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement (Wikipedia). The great English lexicographer Samuel Johnson defined satire as “a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured”, and more elaborate definitions are rarely more satisfactory. In literary works, satire can be direct or indirect. With direct satire, the narrator speaks directly to the reader. With indirect satire, the author’s intent is realized within the narrative and its story. As funny as satire is, the purpose of satire is usually meant to be funny; its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit as a weapon.

3.2 The Nature of Satire

A common feature of satire is strong irony or sarcasm, but parody, burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, analogy are all frequently used in satirical writing.

This irony or sarcasm often professes to approve of the very things the satirist wishes to attack.

The word satire comes from the Latin word 'Satur' and the subsequent phrase 'lanxsatura'. Satur meant 'full', but the juxtaposition with lanx shifted the meaning to 'miscellany or medley': the expression lanx satura literally means "a full dish of various kinds of fruits".

For its nature and social role, satire has enjoyed in many societies a special freedom license to mock prominent individuals and institutions. The satiric impulse, and its ritualized expressions, carries out the function or resolving social tension. Institutions like the ritual clowns represent a safety value which reestablishes equilibrium and health in the collective imaginary which are jeopardized by the repressive aspects of society.

3.3 Satire in the 18th Century England

The 18th century was one in which exaltation of wit and reason came to the forefront of literature in the form of both Horatian and Juvenalian satires, which, through keen observation and sharp nimbleness of thought, exposed the superficial follies and moral corruption of society during the neoclassical period in Britain. Underneath the enlightenment ideals of rationality, order and knowledge, society embraced a pervasive obsession with "decorum", a façade of established traditions and vanities, as well as an innate sense of moral and political supremacy. Satires during this period aimed to point out the shortcomings of society through ridiculing unaccepted standards of thought, exposing Britain's flaws and chastising the hypocrisy of the time. Enlightenment writers Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift used different mediums of satire, different types of logic, and different targets of ridicule in order to shine a light on separate aspects of British society, providing much needed criticism of the profuse moral corruption of a society that sometimes seemed to forget the true ideals of its age.

Pope and Swift, well known for their sharply perceptive works, both looked to rhetorical masters of the rational, classical past and their separate satirical archetypes for inspiration. Pope, in his "The Rape of the Lock", is Horatian in tone, delicately chiding society in a sly but polished voice by holding up a mirror to the follies and vanities of the upper class. Pope does not actively attack the self-important pomp of the British aristocracy, but rather presents it in such a way that gives the reader a new perspective from which to easily view the actions in the story as foolish and ridiculous. A gentle mockery of the upper class, more delicate and lyrical than his brutal counterpart, Pope nonetheless is able to effectively illuminate the moral degradation of society to the public. Swift's "A Modest Proposal" however, is a quintessential Juvenalian satire, shockingly revealing an often-overlooked dimension of British colonialism with regards to the Irish

through savage ridicule and disdainful contempt. A bitter attack, Swift's morbid tale delineates an immoral and perverse solution to Ireland's economic woes using bizarre yet brilliantly clear logic and a detached tone in order to attack indifference to the poor. Swift's satirical tone, relying on realism and harshness to carry its message, is much more ascorbic than his counterpart, perfectly displaying Juvenalian satire's ability to shock and ridicule.

These two works of satire express their authors' profound dissatisfaction with their society. Literature that pushes for reform of any kind, social or political, acts along with entrenched tradition itself, as a dialectic force: it is the synthesis of that which is and that which is wanted that nudges society to a certain direction. Both Pope and Swift used their considerable literary talents to illuminate contemporary society, forcing them to acknowledge the shortcomings of the Neoclassical period and to move forward into a new era of true enlightenment with regards to social and political morality.

Self Assessment Exercise
What are the attributes of satire?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Most of the Neoclassical works most especially poetry was based on satire. Nevertheless, the poetry of the Neoclassical period was also based on reason and wit. Satire then became an important tool during the Neoclassical period when the upper class had set itself pompously on the affairs of England, poets used satire to deflate the pomposity.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see the meaning of satire, its nature and how it was being used in the 18th century England.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss satire in relation with 18th century England.

7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 18TH CENTURY CLASSICISM IN ENGLAND

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Neoclassical movement coincided with the 18th Century Age of Enlightenment and continued into the early 19th century almost clashing with Romanticism. Neoclassicism is a revival of the styles and spirit of classic antiquity inspired directly from the classical period, which coincided and reflected the developments in philosophy and other areas of the Age of Enlightenment, and was at the beginning a reaction against the excesses of the preceding style.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Discuss Neoclassicism as an art movement in England;
2. Identify the features of Neoclassicism; and
3. Explain the nature of poetry during the Neoclassical period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Neoclassicism?

Neoclassicism like we have pointed out in the introduction of this unit has to do with the revival of the styles of classical period. This period coincided with the developments in philosophy and other areas of the Age of Enlightenment. The movement is often described as opposed to Romanticism. The revival can then be traced to the establishment of formal archaeology. The writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann were important in shaping this movement in both architecture and the virtual arts. His books, thoughts on the Imitation of Greek works in Painting and Sculpture were the first to distinguish sharply between Ancient Greek and Roman art, and define periods within Greek art, tracing a trajectory from growth to maturity and then imitation or decadence that continues to have influence to the present day. Winckelmann believed that art should aim at “noble simplicity and calm grandeur” and praised the idealism of Greek art, in which he said that “not

only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as an ancient interpreter of Plato teaches us, come from images created by the mind alone".

In English, the term "Neoclassicism" is used primarily of the visual arts: the similar movement in English literature which began considerably earlier is called Augustan literature, which had been dominant for several decades, and was beginning to decline by the time Neoclassicism in the virtual arts became fashionable.

3.2 Features of English Neoclassicism

The Restoration period clashed with the Neoclassical period in England. The poets of the Restoration and eighteenth century saw the poetry of the early seventeenth century as excessive, even unrefined. They associated the intensity of the tropes in metaphysical poetry with political and epistemological instability. Although the eighteenth century poets valued sociability, the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' that for Wordsworth defined good poetry would no doubt have struck eighteenth poets as unnecessarily impulsive. Between these two periods and the styles associated with them, the poets of the eighteenth century aimed for a balance. Formally, this balance was best achieved in the work of Alexander Pope as we shall see. Stylistically, Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry was dominated by the heroic couplet. This form features pairs or couplets of iambic pentameter lines. That is, each line is composed of ten syllables arranged into five groups or 'feet' of unstressed and stressed syllables; both line sin the pair and with the same sound. Each line, then, can represent a kind of balance within itself. Moreover, the prevalence of this pattern also created an expectation in readers, an expectation against which the poet could play unexpected rhythms and rhymes. The topicality of Restoration poetry, which today makes the poetry seem inaccessible, represents its own kind of balance – an attempt to counter-balance the political pull of power contemporaries.

3.3 Poetry in Neoclassical England

Over the course of the Restoration and eighteenth century, poetry became increasingly balanced. Poetry was dominated by two poets during this period: John Dryden in the Restoration and Alexander Pope through at least the first third of the eighteenth century. Both of them, though, were engaged with the precedent and influence of John Milton (1608-74). For several reasons, Milton is not usually thought of as a Restoration poet, but as his most important poems were all published after 1660 he certainly fits in any consideration of Restoration literature. Because the bulk of his public career spans the English Civil Wars of the 1640s and the Interregnum of the 1650s, Milton is treated, understandably, as a writer from a generation before that of the Restoration authors. In that sense of the Restoration, Milton is not a Restoration poet.

Poetry during the Restoration period in England employed the use of satire. The satire was highly political and social. Political satire is mostly associated with John Dryden while the social satire belongs to Alexander Pope. One thing is important, poetry was written with Neoclassical features. Various rules were followed and this made poetry somehow jerky. Moreover, poetry was used for both political and social commentary – for instance, Dryden sided with successive monarchs. Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" and Macflecknoe" reflect the topical issues of the period.

Like Dryden, Alexander Pope could certainly write satirical poetry. In its focus on dullness, Pope's Dunciad for instance, owes a debt to Dryden's "MacFlecknoe". However, Pope's "essays" such as "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) and "An Essay on Man" (1733-4) also mark an important shift away from the often topical poetry of the Restoration and towards the general and universal claims associated with the enlightenment.

Self-Assessment Exercise
What is difference between political satire and social satire?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The eighteenth century classicism in England went along with the Restoration. Like it has been discussed, the most popular poets around this time were John Dryden and Alexander Pope whose poetry turned around England during the eighteenth century. Both poets had thrived on the use of satire to elucidate most topical issues of the period. Poetry then followed the style of former Greek and Roman epics.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this poem, we have been able to tell you the nature of poetry during the Neoclassical period in England. We reviewed the works of Milton, Dryden and Pope. We said that Milton will not be adjudged a Restoration poet because of the period in which he wrote. We also informed you that thriving device used during this period was satire.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Comment on English Neoclassicism in relation to the Restoration period.

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UNIT 3 JOHN DRYDEN'S POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

John Dryden wrote many poems during the Restoration period, especially his political allegories. John Dryden had a varied career as a writer and often wrote on highly topical subjects – so topical, in fact, that Dryden could write a poem mourning the death of Cromwell in 1658 and a poem, 'Astraea Redux' celebrating Charles II in 1660, just two years later. The poem that earned Dryden his reputation for turning the contemporary into poetry is *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), concerned with the events of 1666, the Fire of London and the defeat of the Dutch navy. We shall look more into Dryden's political and writing career in his biography.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to

1. Discuss the brief history of John Dryden;
2. Analyze Dryden's allegorical poems; and
3. Discuss Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief History of John Dryden

John Dryden was born in Northamptonshire, England on August 9, 1631. He came from a landowning family with connections to parliament and the Church of England. He studied as a king's scholar at the prestigious Westminster school of London, where he later sent two of his own children. Dryden was trained in the art of rhetorical argument, which remained a strong influe4nce on the poet's writing and critical thought throughout his life.

Dryden published his first poem in 1649. He enrolled at Trinity College in Cambridge the following year, where he likely studied classics, rhetoric, and mathematics. He obtained his B.A. in 11654, graduating first in his class. In June of that year, Dryden's father died. After graduation, Dryden found work with

Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State, John Thurloe, marking a radical shift in the poet's political views. Alongside Puritan poets, John Milton and Andrew Marvell, Dryden was present at Cromwell's funeral in 1658 and one year later published his first important poem, Heroic Stanzas, eulogizing the leader.

In 1660, Dryden celebrated the regime of King Charles II with "Astraea Redux", a royalist panegyric in praise of the new king. In that poem, Dryden apologizes for his allegiance with the Cromwell government. Though Samuel Johnson excused Dryden for this, writing in his Lives of the poets (1779) that "if he changed, he changed with the nation, "he also notes that the earlier work was "not totally forgotten" and in fact "raised him enemies".

Despite this, Dryden quickly established himself after the Restoration as the leading poet and literary critic of his day. Following the death of William Davenant in April 1668, Dryden became the first official Poet Laurete of England. Dryden died on May 1, 1700 and was initially buried in St. Anne's Cemetery. In 1710, he was moved to the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey, where a memorial has been erected.

3.2 Dryden's Political Allegories

Traditionally, there is a tendency to see literature and the other arts as having a fragile connection to politics at most. The aesthetic is above the political. Dryden's poetry perfectly illustrates this late seventeenth–century combination of the literary and the political. Depending on the poem, literary issues represent politics and political issues can represent literary ones. "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681) was published just before the treason trial of Shaftesbury, leader of the opposition to James' possible succession, and cast Charles as the biblical David, Shafterbury as Achitophel and the Duke of Monmouth (Charles's illegitimate son) as Absalom. Understanding the poem, then, requires familiarity with the biblical story and the principal players and stakes in the Exclusion Crisis. Removing this poem from the Exclusion Crisis would leave us with a 1,000 line poem on the Bible (as opposed to a 1,000 – line poem which uses the Bible for a defence of the King's position in the Exclusion Crisis).

With "MacFlecknoe", published 1682, Dryden invokes the same anxiety over valid succession, but this time directs his attention toward literary succession skewing Thomas Shadwell: "for anointed dullness he was made". Ironically and unfortunately for Shadwell, it is through "MacFlecknoe" that he is remembered today. At the time, though, Shadwell had recently taken up Shaftesbury's side and published a work criticizing Dryden's defence of the court. In other words, again, the literary and the political merge in any consideration of late seventeenth-century poetry. In this way, it is understandable that the period has on the one

hand resisted the Universalist claims often made for great literature while on the other proved such a fruitful area for historicist approaches to literature.

3.3 Analysis of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel"

Like it has been pointed out in lesson 3.2, the poem is an allegory that uses the story of the rebellion of Absalom against King David as the basis for discussion of the background to the Monmouth Rebellion (1685), the Popish Plot (1678) and Exclusion Crisis.

The story of Absalom's revolt is told in the Second Book of Samuel in the Old Testament of the Bible (Chapters 14 – 18). Absalom rebels against his father King David. The handsome Absalom is distinguished by extraordinarily abundant hair, which is probably meant to symbolize his pride (2 Sam. 14:26). When David's renowned advisor, Achitophel joins Absalom's rebellion, another advisor Hushai plots with David to pretend to defect and give Absalom advice that plays into David's hands. The result was that Absalom takes the advice of the double agent Hushai over the good advice of Achitophel, who realizing that the rebellion is doomed to failure, goes home and hangs himself. Absalom is killed (against David's explicit commands) after getting caught by his hair in the thick branches of a great oak. The death of Absalom causes David enormous personal grief.

Now in 1681 in England, Charles II was in advanced years. He had had a number of mistresses and produced a number of illegitimate children. One of these was James Scott the Duke of Monmouth, who was very popular both for his personal charisma and his fervor for the protestant cause. Charles had no legitimate heirs, and his brother, the future James II of England was openly a Roman Catholic. When Charles' health suffered, there was a panic in the House of Commons over the potential for the nation being ruled by a Roman Catholic King. The Earl of Shaftesbury had sponsored and advocated the Exclusion Bill, which would prevent James II from succeeding to the throne, but this bill was blocked by the House of Lords on two occasions. In the spring of 1681, at the Oxford Parliament, Shaftesbury appealed to Charles II to legitimize Monmouth. Monmouth was caught preparing to rebel and seek the throne, and Shaftesbury was suspected of fostering this rebellion.

The poem was possibly written at Charles' behest, and published in early November 1681. On November 24th, 1681, Shaftesbury was seized and charged with high treason. A trial before a jury picked by Whig sheriff's acquitted him. Later, after the death of his father and unwilling to see his uncle, James II became King; the Duke of Monmouth executed his plans and went into full revolt. The Monmouth Rebellion was put down, and in 1685 the Duke was executed.

The poem tells the story of the first foment by making Monmouth into Absalom, Charles as David and Shaftesbury as Achitophel. It reveals Buckingham, and old enemy of Dryden as Zimri, the unfaithful servant. The poem heaps most of the blame for the rebellion on Shaftesbury and makes Charles a very reluctant and loving man who has to be king before father. The poem also refers to some of the Popish Plot furor.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Why would you consider John Dryden an important voice in English poetry?

4.0 CONCLUSION

John Dryden could, therefore, arguably be taken as a public poet. He discussed in verse the problems of his time, who talked to his readers on terms of easy equality, and who sought to base his work on reason and tolerance. Dryden tried to heal the wounds left by revolution and Civil War. With this, John Dryden remains one of the best poets England ever had.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to look at the poetry of John Dryden. We examined the biography of John Dryden. We also looked into his works as allegorical and analyzed his "Absalom and Achitophel".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Highlight in detail, the literary qualities of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".

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UNIT 4 ALEXANDER POPE'S POETRY

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope remains one of the witty and intelligent satirists in England. Pope's poetry demonstrates the features of Neoclassical literature in England. People today arguably see Pope as the greatest English verse-satirist. He is great by reason of an extraordinarily rich and rapid play of mind. He works with a great variety of satiric modes and devices: concise epigrammatic shafts; sly juxtapositions; light mock-heroic as in "The Rape of the Lock", the meaningful – fantastic and atmosphere in "The Dunciad"; the life-history as of the London citizen Sir Balaam, etc. In this unit, we shall examine the nature of Pope's poetry and an analysis of his poem.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. discuss the life of Alexander Pope;
2. explain the style of Pope's poetry; and
3. analyze Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Short Biography of Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope was born Alexander and Edith Pope in the spring of 1688. Pope's father was a linen-draper and a young convert to Catholicism. Pope's father moved his family from London to Binfield, Berkshire in the face of repressive, anti-catholic legislation from parliament. Described by his biographer, John Spencer, as "a child of a particularly sweet temper", and with a voice so melodious as to be nicknamed the "little Nightingale", the child Pope bears little resemblance to the irascible and outspoken moralist of the later poems. He was barred from attending public school or university because of his religion, Pope was largely self – educated. He taught himself French, Italian, Latin, and Greek, and read widely discovering Homer at the age of six.

At twelve, Pope composed his earliest extant work, “Ode to Solitude”; the same year saw the onset of the debilitating bone deformity that would plague Pope until the end of his life. Originally attributed to the severity of his studies, the illness is now commonly accepted as Pott’s disease, a form of tuberculosis affecting the spine that stunted his growth – Pope’s height did not exceed four and a half feet – and rendered him hunchbacked, asthmatic, frail, and prone to violent headaches. His physical appearance would make him an easy target for his many literary enemies in later years, who would refer to the poet as a “hump-backed toad”.

Essay on Criticism was published anonymously in 1711 and established the heroic couplets as Pope’s principal measure and attracted the attention of Jonathan Swift and John Gay who later became Pope’s friends. They later formed the Scriblerus Club, a congregation of writers endeavouring to satirize ignorance and poor taste through the invented figure of Martins Scriblerus. In 1712, Pope published “The Rape of the Lock” which made him famous. Pope published many other works before his death in 1744.

3.2 The Style of Pope’s Poetry

Pope’s ‘essays’, such as “An Essay on Criticism” (1711) and “An Essay on Man” (1734) mark an important shift away from the often topical poetry of the Restoration and towards the general and universal claims associated with the enlightenment. In “An Essay on Criticism”, Pope sets out to describe what is required for good literary criticism. Against the familiar opposition between critics and authors he argues that the best critics will be the best writers. For Pope, writers and critics ought to follow Nature. Pope’s “nature” combines a late Renaissance classicism with Newtonian mechanical physics. Following from Newton’s discovery of universal mathematical formulae to explain natural phenomena, Pope’s nature is a function of and compatible with rules. Pope offers a vision of criticism that is consistent with his sense of the relationship between nature, rules and standardization.

With “An essay on Man”, the symmetry of Pope’s form is brought to bear on some of the same questions Milton had addressed in a different way in “Paradise Lost”. Like Milton in “Paradise Lost”, Pope begins with a “Garden, tempting with forbidden fruit’ (Norton Anthology, P. 2264, 1.8 (A)). But everything about the form has been changed. Rather than an epic, Pope’s poem is an epistle. Rather than black verse, Pope was the heroic couplet, rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines. Where “An Essay on Criticism” seems to have understand literary criticism in Newtonian terms, “An Essay on Man” understands Newtonian philosophy through a carefully symmetrical poetic form. Nearly every line of “An Essay on Man” is balanced with five syllables on either side of a break called a ‘caesura’. Such balance within each line is complemented by the lines’ rhyming in pairs.

3.3 The Analysis of Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"

In 1712, Pope published "The Rape of the Lock" on heroic comical poem. It is a humorous indictment of the vanities and idleness of 18th century high society. Basing his poem on a real incident among families of his acquaintance, Pope intended his verses to resolve trivial issues among his friends and to laugh at their folly.

The poem is perhaps the most outstanding example in the English language of the genre of mock-epic. The epic had long been considered one of the most serious of literary forms; it had been applied in the classical period, to the lofty subject matter of love and war, and, more recently, by Milton, to the intricacies of the Christian faith. The strategy of Pope's mock epic or parody epic is not to mock the form itself, but to mock his society in its very failure to rise to epic standards, exposing its pettiness by casting it against the grandeur of the traditional epic subjects and the bravery and fortitude of epic heroes: Pope's mock-heroic treatment in "The Rape of the Lock" underscores the ridiculousness of a society in which values have lost all proportion, and the trivial is handled with the gravity and solemnity that ought to be accorded to truly important issues. The society concerned in this work is one that fails to distinguish between things that matter and things that do not. The poem mocks the men it portrays by showing them as unworthy of a form that suited a more heroic culture. Thus the mock-epic resembles the epic in that its central concerns are serious and often moral, but the fact that the approach must now be satirical rather than earnest is symptomatic of how far the culture has fallen.

Pope's use of the mock-epic genre is intricate and exhaustive. "The Rape of the Lock" is a poem in which every element of the contemporary scene conjures up some image from epic tradition or the classical world view, and the pieces are wrought together with a cleverness and expertise that makes the poem surprising and delightful. Pope's transformations are numerous, sticking, and loaded with moral implications. The great battlers of epic become boats of gambling and flirtatious tiffs. The great, if capricious, Greek and Roman gods are converted into a relatively undifferentiated army of basically ineffectual spirits. Cosmetics, clothing, and jewelry substitute for armor and weapons and the rituals of religious sacrifice are transplanted to the dressing room and the altar of love.

The verse form of "The Rape of the Lock" is the heroic couplet; Pope still reigns as the uncontested master of the form. The couplet consists of rhymed pairs of iambic pentameter lines (lines of ten syllables each, alternating stressed and unstressed syllables). Pope's couplets do not fall into strict iambs, however, flowering instead with a rich rhythmic variation that keeps the highly regular meter from becoming heavy or tedious. Pope distributes his sentences, with their resolutely parallel grammar, across the lines and half-lines of the poem in a way

that enhances the judicious quality of his ideas. Moreover, the inherent balance of the couplet form is strikingly well suited to a subject matter that draws on comparisons and contrasts: the form invites configurations in which two ideas or circumstances are balanced, measured or compared against one another.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Pope's poetry really contributed a lot of English poetry as a whole. His wit and intelligence made his poetry popular and his satiric nature made "The Rape of the Lock" one of the best poems ever written in England.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce to you the work of Alexander Pope, the nature of his poetry and the analysis of his adjudged best poem, "A Rape of the Lock".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss Pope's "A Rape of the Lock" as a mock-heroic poem.

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MODULE 4 ENGLISH POETRY AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

This module examines the Romantic Movement in England. The study also forays the events of Romantic verses. With the agrarian economy taking over by the mechanized farming, the Romantics became more interested in the environment which was being eroded day by day. The module consists of four units altogether.

The first unit examines the background to the Romantic Movement. In the unit, the major features of Romantic period are copiously discussed.

The second unit examines William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement. In this unit, the major poems of Wordsworth shall be analyzed.

The third unit looks into the life of John Keats who was one of the earliest Romantic poets. John Keats' background is examined, and some of his poems are analyzed.

The fourth unit examines William Blake. Blake's biography is studied in relation to his poetry. His poems are analyzed to show the Romantic qualities as studied in the first unit.

Unit 1: Background to the Romantic Movement

Unit 2: William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement

Unit 3: John Keats' Poetry

Unit 4: William Blake's Poetry

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Romantic period was an important period in the history of English Poetry. The period was characterized with so many features which the writers of the period canvassed in order to react against some unnecessary rules which had actually dominated the English poetry. We should not forget that, the Romantics were also products of the 18th-century classicism. It was these Neo-classical features that many of the Romantics reacted to and the growth of industrialization which had eroded the rustic way of living in England.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. discuss the historical background of the Romantic period;
2. explain the literary overview of the period;
3. discuss the nature of the English Empire as at then.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

Britain was still operating an agrarian economy when the Romantic period began. When the Romantic period was almost getting to its end, Britain had become a highly industrialized nation with various towns and cities. In the eighteenth century there was no real class consciousness; Britain had a limited aristocracy: professional people, merchants and rural and urban workers. By 1830, something like a modern class-consciousness had emerged with more clearly identifiable upper, middle and working classes. Notions of rank, order, degree and station

based on birth became supplanted by groupings of landlords, capitalists and labourers. In the late eighteenth century, the population of the British Isles began to grow dramatically. The increasing size of the population expanded the labour force, as well as the demand for goods and services. Economically this was beneficial, as a larger labour force reduced the cost of labour and of the goods and services produced, which in turn, accelerated the industrial process. The growth in population also contributed to the process of urbanization. The great commercial, industrial and manufacturing cities of London, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford increased exponentially in size. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's first urbanized society. The factory towns of England tended to become rookeries of jerry-built tenements, which the mining towns became long, monotonous rows of company-built cottages, furnishing minimal shelter. The bad living conditions in the towns can be traced to lack of good bricks, the absence of building codes, and the lack of machinery for public sanitation; but they were also due to the factory owners' tendency to regard workers as commodities and not as human beings.

There were substantial changes in agriculture as the countryside was transformed. Agrarian capitalism reached a period of development. This period witnessed the decline of the independent smallholder often referred to as 'Yeoman' (Poplawski, 2000), movingly presented in Wordsworth's representations of what he referred to as "Cumbrian statesmen', such as Michael from his "Lyrical Ballads".

Eighteenth-century Britain became a society with a marked difference between two spheres of activity, the public and the private. There developed an expanding public sphere of political, civil and intellectual life, typified, in particular, by growth of the coffee house as a venue for reading and debating information. In contrast, the private sphere involved family life and the care of education of children. These two spheres were gendered as masculine and feminine respectively. Notions of gender also underwent a redefinition in the period, largely due to the growth in the mode of sensibility, which influenced all aspects of culture.

The late eighteenth-century was also a time when religious sects usually organized around charismatic individuals and espousing apocalyptic brands of mystical thought, multiplied. William Blake was, for a time, attracted to the writings of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg and attended the New Jerusalem Church of his disciples in Eastcheap before repudiating Sweden borgian teachings in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1990). This reading of political events in terms of

biblical prophecy attracted both plebian and polite audiences. Enlightenment notions of deism and skepticism also continued throughout the Romantic period.

In the late eighteenth century a growing consensus for the reform of the British political system was beginning to emerge. In the 1780s Britain was still a mainly agrarian country and the landed interest was predominant, despite the rapid growth of urban centres. The country was governed in the interests of some two hundred powerful aristocratic families (represented in the House of Lords) and below them a landed gentry (the 'country gentlemen') of some 12,000 families. These families effectively controlled government at central and local levels.

3.2 Literary Overview

It may be very difficult to determine when the Romantic literature started; however, the period is often described as covering the years between the 1780s and the 1830s, although some critics may refer back to the 1760s and others forward to around 1850 as significant dates. Defining the period is difficult because the word "Romantic' refers to a kind of writing which has been defined in opposition to literature which came before it. Romanticism is thus antithetical to eighteenth century non-classicism, rather than a continuation of already established literary and artistic trends. One thing that is important to grasp is that the word "Romantic" itself was not used in the way we use it today by the writers of the time, for whom it meant something pertaining to 'romance'; nor did the writers collected under the heading regarded themselves as forming a coherent group. By critical consensus the Romantic poets are the six male poets: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. Together, they arguably formed a literary and artistic movement known as "Romanticism", which marked a profound shift in sensibility. Generally Romanticism was seen as marking a violent reaction against eighteenth century Enlightenment thought with its emphasis on 'reason' as the predominant human faculty. Romanticism it is often said, was inspired by the political, revolutions of America in 1776 and France in 1789 and that the products of Romanticism tended to be radical or revolutionary. Writers of the Romantic age demonstrate the characteristics listed in the below.

(i) Romantic poets affirm the creative powers of the imagination.

(ii) Romantic poets introduce us to a new way of looking at nature, which becomes the main subject of their work. The Romantics often argue that the possibility of transcendence or 'unity of being' can be achieved through communion with nature. Their work exhibits a preference for

nature in its sublime aspect: mountains, glaciers, chasms, storms, as well as strange and exotic settings.

(iii) Romantic poets tend to explain human society and its development in terms of an organic model, or a model borrowed from nature, and they reject materialist and mechanistic philosophies.

(iv) Romantic poets write about the nature of the individual self and the value of individual experience.

(v) Romantic thought shows a high regard for the figure of the artist, who is variously described as sage, philosopher, prophet and religious saviour.

Traditionally, Romanticism was seen to begin around the time of the Revolution in France and to develop certain stylistic and linguistic innovations. These innovations are reflected in the works of a number of writers. William Blake produced his prophetic and apocalyptic illuminated books during the 1790s. Blake's personal vision, expressed in a highly symbolic language and form, was seen by many to inaugurate a new kind of revolutionary writing. Similarly the publication in 1798 of Wordsworth and Coleridge's "Lyrical Ballads", which contained, in addition to Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', a series of experimental ballads and lyric poems treating rustic subjects and their distress in an elevated and tragic manner, can be seen as a rejection of eighteenth-century poetics. Wordsworth's later apologia for his poems, the 'preface of 1800', defended the serious treatment of such subjects and could be seen as a manifesto for a revolutionary kind of poetry, for a revolutionary age. Wordsworth also claimed that the "Ballads" ushered in a stylistic revolution in poetry, banishing the allegedly stilted diction of earlier neo-classical poets, preferring instead a language closer to that of contemporary usage.

3.3 The Empire, Nationhood and the Other Worlds

What we describe as the Romantic Movement coincided with the beginnings of a modern British imperialism which involved the governance and exploitation of increasingly large portions of the globe as the nineteenth century wore on. It also involved conflict with other imperial formations of the time, some expansive and others in decline: European empires such as the French and Russian, and non-European empires such as the Turkish Ottoman and the Qing Empire of China. Romantic writers were not themselves imperialists in the literal sense of the term, though some of them became implicated in the imperial process: Coleridge, for instance, acted as a civil servant for the governor of Malta, Sir Alexander Ball, and Charles Lamb and Thomas Love Peacock both worked for the British East Indian Company. Many Romantic-period writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, and Jane Austen had family members who were involved in colonial trade or empire in one way or another, and it certainly impinged on their

consciousness as a pressing fact of life. This was also the period in which historians, like Linda Colley, argue that the idea of the British nation was "forged". Colley claims that Britishness was defined against the "others" of Catholic religion and the French nation. This could also be widened to include the various other peoples, races and religions that the British encountered in their imperial history.

The responsibility and accountability of the metropolitan government for the treatment of other cultures was becoming a cause of increasing concern and was an important issue in the trial of Warren Hastings for his administration of Bengal from 1786 onwards. The speeches of Edmund Burke, who prosecuted the case against Hastings, were among some of the manifestations of colonial guilt at the centre of British political life. Certainly there are many affirmations of the manifest destiny of Britons to civilize the world in Romantic writers. Wordsworth's "Excursion" (1814) contains the Wanderer's vision:

So the wide waters, open to the power,
The Will, the instinct, and appointed needs
Of Britain, do invite her to cast off
Her swarms, and in succession send them forth;
Bound to establish new communities
On every shore whose aspect favours hope
Of bold adventure…
Your country must complete
Her glorious destiny. Begin even now.
(Wordsworth, Excursion, PP. 295, 299).

The "Wanderer" predicts that the world will look to Britain for moral and cultural as well as political leadership, and that the country's imperial future will be glorious, Coleridge, in later life, similarly argued that "colonization is not only a manifest expedient – but an imperative duty on Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea". Similarly, a political opponent of the Lake poets, Anna Laetitia Barbauld argues for the identical linkage between colonization, language and culture in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven:*

Wide spread thy race from Ganges to the pole,
Over half the western world they accerts rool:
… Thy stores of knowledge the new states shall know,
And think thy thoughts, and with thy Fancy glow;
Thy lockes, thy paleys shall instruct their youth
Thy leading star direct their search for truth;
Beneath the spreading platan's tent-like shade,
Or by Messouri's rushing waters laid,

'Old Father Thomas' shall be the port's theme,
Of Hagley's woods the enamoured virgin dream,
And Milton's tones the raptured ear enthrall,
Mixt with the roar of Niagara's fall.
(11. 81- 96; Wu, Romanticism, P. 46)

Here Barbauld anticipates nineteenth-century British cultured imperialism, a process by which the colonized accept the hegemony of the culture of the colonizer.

Self-Assessment Exercise

How would you describe the attitude of the proponents of romanticism to the government of their age?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We must not forget that the Romantic Movement stressed the importance of the emotions and feelings in human relationships. From around the 1740s onwards a number of thinkers argued that humans possessed an innate moral sense which manifested itself through the emotions in feelings of sympathy and benevolence for others. This movement has been linked to the rise of the middle classes in the eighteenth century and their growing concern with the reformation of manners.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see the historical review, the literary overview and the state of empire and nationhood in Britain during Romanticism. We have been able to make you see what was in vogue during Romanticism and we also highlighted the major features of Romanticism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

In a sound essay, demonstrate the uniqueness of Romantic poetry

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UNIT 2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth is believed to be the father of English Romanticism. Wordsworth's poetry became popular with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Wordsworth became a poet laureate in 1843. This unit will capture his life briefly, and we shall also be looking at his poetry and its style poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. appreciate Wordsworth's poetry;
2. identify specific themes of Wordsworth's poetry

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Brief Life History of William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April, 1770 in Cocker-Mouth, Cumberland in the Lake District. His father was John Wordsworth, Sir James Lowther's attorney. The magnificent landscape deeply affected Wordsworth's imagination and gave him a love of nature. He lost his mother when he was eight and five years later his father. The domestic problems separated Wordsworth from his beloved and neurotic sister Dorothy, who was a very important person in his life.

With the help of his two uncles, Wordsworth entered a local school and continued his studies at Cambridge University. Wordsworth made his debut as a writer in 1789, when he published a sonnet in the European Magazine. In that same year he

entered St. John's College, Cambridge, from where he took his B.A in 1791. In 1795 he met Coleridge. Wordsworth's financial situation became better in 1795 when he received legacy and was able to settle at Racedown, Dorset, with his sister Dorothy, with Coleridge's encouragement and his close contact with nature, Wordsworth composed his first master–work, "Lyrical Ballads", which opened with Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner". About 1798 he started to write a large and philosophical autobiographical poem, completed in 1805, and published posthumously in 1850 under the title "The Prelude".

Wordsworth spent the winter of 1798-99 with his sister and Coleridge in Germany, where he wrote several poems, including the enigmatic 'Lucy' poems. After he retuned, he moved to Dove Cottage and in 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson. They cared for Wordsworth's sister Dorothy for the last years of her life. Wordsworth's second verse collection appeared in 1807. His central works were produced between 1797 and 1808. In later life Wordsworth abandoned his radical ideas and became a patriotic, conservative public man. In 1843, he succeeded Robert Southey as England's poet laureate. Wordsworth died on April 23, 1850.

3.2 Wordsworth's Poetry

Wordsworth's poetry is largely concerned with Nature. His ideas about Nature are radical and philosophical. In his 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth celebrates and romanticizes nature. The poem begins in the present and refers to Wordsworth's first visit to Tintern Abbey in 1793: 'five years have passed; five summer, with the length/of five long winters!' (11.1-2). The first twenty lines or so suggest the tranquility and harmony that the poet has now achieved in the present. The signs of human activity, the cottages, the pastoral forms, the orchards and the wreaths of smoke, all blend in with the landscape as human and natural activity coalesce and merge: 'Green to the very door' (1. 17). The opening few lines evoke a calm and meditative mood. Wordsworth now moves from the external landscape to describe his own inner state f consciousness. He describes what he has gained personally since his first visit to the Wye Valley. He had been able to carry the landscape he first saw in his mind and thus has calmed and healed his psyche. The memory of the landscape first glimpsed in 1793 has brought him restoration in his 'hours of weariness'. This 'weariness' is associated rather vaguely by the poet, with the materialism of city or urban life (II. 23–30). More than this, Wordsworth claims that the memory of the landscape has led to a growth in his moral sense. It has made him a better man (II. 30–5). He says that he has also attained a sense of spirituality from the vision he had of the Wye Valley those five years ago. He describes a state of lightened perception in

which he is no longer aware of the physical and material forms of nature but is instead aware of an inner, spiritual force which permeates the natural world and exists within humanity as well. The experience comes through sense but transcends the sense; the physical eye is 'made quiet by the power of harmony'. At such moments, Wordsworth claims that we achieve spiritual insight and that we see 'into the life of things' (11. 33-48); a 'blessed mood' in which we lose our sense of self and become aware of a transcendent sense of unity, and of ourselves as a part of that unity. Thus Wordsworth claims he has gained three things since his first visit to the Wye Valley: the smoothening influence that the landscape has had on his mind, making him feel less stressed and alienated; his moral sense has been increased almost unconsciously; and he has received the gift of spirituality.

In "The Solitary Reaper", the poet enjoins his listener to behold a "Solitary Highland lass" reaping and singing by herself in a field. The poem presents real human music encountered in a beloved, rustic setting. The song of the young girl reaping in the fields is incomprehensible to the speaker, but he appreciates its tone, its expressive beauty, and the mood it creates within him. To an extent, this poem ponders the limitations of language, as it does in the third stanza ("Will no one tell me what she sings?"). The speaker simply praises the beauty of music and its fluid expressive beauty, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" that Wordsworth identified as the heart of poetry. By placing this praise and this beauty in a rustic, natural setting, Wordsworth acts on the values of Lyrical Ballads. The poem's structure is simple and its language is natural and unforced. The final two lines of the poem ("its music in my heart I bore /long after it was heard no more") return the focus of the poem to the familiar theme of memory, and the soothing effect of beautiful memories on human thoughts and feelings.

In another poem, "I wandered lonely as a cloud", Wordsworth revisits the familiar subjects of nature and memory, this time with a particularly simple musical eloquence. The plot is extremely simple, depicting, the poet's wondering and his discovery of a field of daffodils by a lake, the memory of which pleases him and comforts him, when he is lonely, bored, or restless. The characterization of the sudden occurrence of a memory – the daffodils "flash upon the inward eye/which is the bliss of solitude" – is psychologically acute, but the poem's main brilliance lies in the reverse personification of its early stanzas. The speaker is metaphorically compared to a natural object, a "cloud" and the daffodils are continually personified as human beings, dancing and "tossing their heads" in "a crowd, a host". This technique implies an inherent unity between man and nature making it one of Wordsworth's most basic and effective methods for instilling in the reader the feeling the poet so often describes himself as experiencing.

3.3 The Style of Wordsworth

Wordsworth's poetry is large, and his poetry is basically on nature. Meanwhile his poetic legacy rests largely on a vast number of his poems varying in length and weight. Most of his themes remain consistent bothering mainly on nature. In the preface to his "Lyrical Ballads", Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in the natural language of common speech, rather than in the lofty and elaborate dictions that were then considered "poetic". He argues that poetry should offer access to the emotions contained in memory. And he argues that the first principle of poetry should be pleasure, that the chief duty of poetry is to provide pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on a subtle pleasure principle that is "the naked and native dignity of man". Many of Wordsworth's poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and the "Intimations of Immortality" deal with the subjects of childhood and the memory of childhood in the mind of the adult in particular, childhood's lost connection with nature, which can be preserved only in memory. Wordsworth's images and metaphors mix natural scenery, religious symbolism and the relics of the poet's rustic childhood such as cottages, hedgerows, orchards, and other places where humanity intersects gently with nature.

Wordsworth's poems initiated the Romantic era by emphasizing feeling, instinct, and pleasure above formality and mannerism. Most of the poems like "The Solitary Reaper" are written in a tight iambic tetrameter.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Using copious examples from two of his poems, examine three themes explored by Wordsworth.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Wordsworth's poetry has occasioned an immense amount of discussion. The aims, it will be remembered, largely concerned diction and choice of subject. Wordsworth, in conscious revolt against the Gothic-horror novel, was to deal with humble and rustic life and he employed a selection of language used by men. Discussion has always centred not only on the aims and on Wordsworth's success or otherwise in adhering to them, but on such things as the particular of his relationship with nature.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to discuss the poetry of William Wordsworth. You have been introduced to the brief history of Wordsworth and how he started his writing. We also analysed his major poems are “Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey”. “The Solitary Reaper” and “I wondered lonely as a cloud”.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a well-argued essay which elucidates Wordsworth’s concept of romanticism.

7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3: JOHN KEATS' POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

John Keats was probably one of the best Romantics. Keats's genius was intense and his feelings for beauty, perfection and art are established in most of his odes. Keats did not live long as we shall see in the biography, yet his poetry is regarded as part of the best Romantic poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. identify John Keats' poetic style and concerns
2. iompare his poetry with Wordsworth's

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief Biography of John Keats

John Keats was born on October 31, 1795 in London. He was the oldest of four children. Keats lost his parents at a very young age. His father died when Keats was eight and his mother died six years later of tuberculosis. His maternal grandmother appointed Richard Abbey and John Rowland Sandell as Keats' guardians. When Keats was fifteen, Abbey withdrew him from the Clarke School, Enfield, to apprentice with a surgeon and study medicine in a London hospital. In 1816 Keats became a licensed surgeon, but he never practiced his profession, rather he ventured into poetry writing. Keats met Leigh Hunt, an influential editor of the Examiner who published his sonnets. Hunt also introduced Keats to a crop of literary giants of his time such Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth.

The group's influence enabled Keats to see his first volume. "Poems by John Keats", published in 1817. This volume was heavily criticized by the critics of the day.

Keats spent the summer of 1818 on a walking tour in Northern England and Scotland, returning home to care for his brother, Tom, who was suffering from tuberculosis. During this period, Keats met Fanny Brawn whom he fell in love with; some of his finest poetry was written between 1818 and 1819. Keats mainly worked on "Hyperion", a Miltonic blank-verse epic of the Greek creation myth. He stopped writing "Hyperion" upon the death of his brother, after completing only a small portion, but in late 1819 he returned to the piece and rewrote it as "The Fall of Hyperion". That same autumn, Keats contracted tuberculosis, and died in Rome on February 23, 1821 at the age of twenty-five, and was buried in the protestant cemetery.

3.2 Keats' Poetry

Keats' poetry is of a truth in volumes but his greatest poems are, by common consent, the four "Odes", on the "Nightingale", "Autumn", "the Grecian Urn" and "Melancholy". In them he expresses and harmonizes the themes of beauty and death, the immortality of art, the relentless passing of time, the fears that he 'may cease to be… before high-piled books in charctery/Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain'. We must always remember that Keats knew all about tuberculosis; he had had a medical training, had nursed his brother Tom who died of the disease, and recognized his own symptoms. All the more striking therefore is the poise and balance of these poems, their lucid architecture. Their mellifluous beauty, and the richness of their imagery have made them popular, and arguably an important influence on the poets of the Victorian Age. Here is the "Ode to Autumn".

Season of mists and mellow fretfulness,
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 blend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet Kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees.
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Autumn brings the fruition of the year, and its death. This may be sad but it is inevitable, and a necessary part of the cycle of life. Its music is not a funeral marc,

but part of life, a harmony ‘nor harsh nor grating though of ample power / To chasten and subdue’. A rich and calm resignation imposes the acceptance of nature’s, of life’s rhythm.

Keats spreads Autumn’s riches in profusion. Note how much of the work is done by verbs: run, load, bless, bend, fill, set, budding; how ‘bosom-friend’, and ‘conspiring’ contrive to suggest to mysterious magic intimacy, a power creating life and wealth everywhere.

In the second verse autumn is personified, but this is no frigidly conventional neo-classic literary device. Autumn is not described; the god, or goddess share in the season’s tasks. Threshing with flails, reaping with scythes and sickles, gleaners, and handworked cider-presses were all common country sights; Keats is not being fanciful or picturesque, but realistic. The figure of the gleaner is active; we feel the weight and balance of her burden as she crosses the plank bridge. The other three figures are in a land of timeless repose, careless, drows’d, patient. The reaper recalls death, but even his sickle is suspended and nature’s bounty, the corn, remains ungathered; nature’s beauty, the flowers, remains undestroyed. One is lulled into a kind of trance.

In his “Ode to a Nightingale” Keats explores creative expression and the mortality of human life. In this ode, the transience of life and the tragedy of old age is set against the eternal renewal of the Nightingale’s sonorous music. The speaker says “Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird”. The speaker rejects the “drowsy numbness” he experienced in “Ode on Indolence”, because in “Indolence” the numbness was a sign of disconnection from experience, while in “Nightingale” it is a sign of too full a connection: being too happy in thy happiness”, the speaker tells the Nightingale. The song of the nightingale wants the speaker to flee the human world and join the bird. His first thought is to reach the bird’s state through alcohol but he rejects that later and longs to do that through poesy.

The nightingale’s music brings about the speaker’s poetic inspiration. Later, the poet imagines himself in the forest with the nightingale. The music later encourages the speaker to embrace the idea of dying, of painlessly succumbing to death. When the nightingale flies away, the reality dawned on him, and then he shouted “forlorn” for he recognizes that he has been living in illusion.

3.3 The Style of Keats’ Poetry

Most of Keats' odes are written in ten-line stanzas. The first seven and the last two lines are usually written in iambic pentameter. The eighth line of each stanza is written in trimeter with only three accented syllables instead of five. "Ode to a Nightingale" is different from other odes because its rhyme scheme is the same in every stanza. Meanwhile, every other ode varies in the order of rhyme in the final three or four lines except "to psyche" which has the loosest structure of all the odes. Each stanza in "Nightingale" is rhymed ABABCDECDE, Keats's most basic scheme throughout the odes. Keats' poetry is characterized by sensual imagery and beauty.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Discuss the romantic qualities of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale".

4.0 CONCLUSION

Keats' contribution to English poetry is not in small measure. His active years of writing poetry were short, yet he produced the kind of poetry which the English people have continued to read for a very long time. Keats' appreciation of beauty is felt in most of his poems. Had Keats lived longer, he probably would have been the best English poet ever lived. Nevertheless, Keats is still very much remembered among the Pantheon of English poets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have briefly outlined the history of John Keats. We discussed that Keats was one of the best English Romantics who contributed in his own small measure to the English poetry from nineteen years to twenty-five years old. We also analyzed few of his odes of which are "Ode to Autumn" and "Ode to a Nightingale".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Do you agree with the assertion that there are points of convergence between John Keats' and William Wordsworth's poetry? Support your answer with relevant examples.

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UNIT 4 WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Blake was one of the earliest English Romantic poets. Blake's poetry emphasizes the importance of recognizing the place of instinct and intuition in human life. Blake was in rapport with the new revolutionary thought. Blake is obscure in his poetry mainly because of his use of symbols. In this unit, we shall consider his poetry – its nature and style. But before this, we shall examine his background.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. summarize Blake's biography
2. highlight Blake's revolutionary poetry
3. compare and contrast Blake's poetry with at least two other Romantic poets.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Summary of William Blake's Life History

William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757 to James and Catherine Blake. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having some visions. His parents tried to discourage him from lying, but they observed that he was different from his peers and he was not forced to attend conventional school. He learned to read and write at home. At age ten, Blake

expressed a wish to become a painter, so his parents sent him to a drawing school. Two years later, Blake began writing poetry. When he turned fourteen, he was an apprentice to an engraver because he could not afford the cost of an art school. One of his assignments during his apprenticeship was to draw the Westminster Abbey which actually exposed him to Gothic styles from which he drew his inspiration throughout his career. After his seven-year term ended, he studied briefly at the Royal Academy.

In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and to write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. Later, she helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today. In 1784, Blake set up a print shop with a friend and former fellow apprentice, James Parker, but the business failed. For the remainder of his life, Blake made a meager living as an engraver and illustrator for books and magazines. Blake's first printed work, Poetical Sketches (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it in 1794 with *Songs of Experience*.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18^{th} – century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. In his final years, he was cohered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients". In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. Linnell also in 1825 commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

3.2 William Blake's Poetry

William Blake's poetry addresses a lot of issues. Being a nonconformist, Blake's poetry radically examines some ideas and feelings which are a result of intense probing into the springs of his own being and character. For instance, Blake wrote against transatlantic slave trade. Blake's "Little Black Boy" from his *Songs of Innocence* raises issues about the representation of slaves and the limits of the abolitionists' sympathy. His black boy accepts hierarchies of colour which the poem's readership affirms despite their humanitarian feelings:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,

And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child.
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

Blackness, rather than having any positive associations, is equated with bereavement in the traditional Christian semiotics of Evangelical abolitionist writing. The boy has imbibed this view of colour from his mother who ascribes their shared blackness to the action of the sun, a kind of degeneration from an original and untarnished white. The poem concludes with a vision of interracial fraternity round the "tent of God" with the black boy shading the white English boy from the searing radiance of God's love:

I'll shade him from the heat ill he can bear
To learn in joy upon our father's knee.
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

The boy has assimilated a Eurocentric view of the world, accepting the Christian notion of a white male father as God, whom he desires to resemble, to "be like him" and be loved by him. Blake's poem represents a speaker in a state of innocence and the poem may function, as other poems in the series, as an ironic rebuttal of the hypocritical Christian evangelicalism the poet so despised.

Innocence and Experience are "contrary states of the human soul" as claimed by Blake. Here is a poem "Chimney Sweeper" from the *Songs of Innocence*.

When my mother died I was very young.
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry, "weep! Weep! Weep! Weep!
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said
'Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot sport your white hair

And so he was quite, and that very night,
As Tom was a – sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in Coffins of Black.

And by came an Angel who had a Bright key,
And he open'd the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

This is a poem about injustice and cruelty which bears some resemblance in general tone. It appears to offer a trite and comforting moral, and might be taken for a kind of tract reconciling the poor to their lot. Yet the poem is enough tinged with Blake's peculiar vision to make such an account seem crude. Blake is really celebrating and romanticizing the indestructibility of the state of innocence, even in the midst of misery.

Next, the chimney sweep in the world of experience.

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying 'weep!, Weep!' in notes of woe!
'Where are thy father and mother? Say?'
'They are both gone up to the church to pray.

'Because I was happy upon the health,
'And smil'd among the winter's snow,
'They clothed me in the clothes of death,
'And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
'And because I am happy and dance and sing,
'They think they have done me no injury,
'And are gone to praise God and his priest and king
'Who make up a heaven of our misery'.

Here is a directed, dynamic indictment of the society which exploits such cruelty, and the religion which condones it. The orthodox conception of the Jealous God, the legalistic, sterile, negative morality of organized religion, supporter and justifier of the state's cruel power, all combined to oppress the poor. And perhaps the worst thing about them is their insensitiveness. The child is still in the world of innocence; he can laugh and sing; therefore they persuade themselves they have done him no injury.

3.3 William Blake's Style of Poetry

Blake is perhaps no more subversive of inertly conventional morality than are the majority of significant writers, but with his startling forms and methods he seemed to his contemporaries all the more dangerous. Blake's insights are often embodied in poetry of great force and beauty; sometimes his visionary narratives and his paradoxes seem confused and are certainly obscure. In his successful poems he is vividly illuminating, and his symbols among them - chains, blossoms, garden, lamb, tiger, trees, churches, the village green, gold, rose, thorns – are wonderfully used in what we cannot but call an expression of wisdom and spiritual health. Most of his poems are a kind of narrative in firm regular rhythm, lines end-stopped, and the statements direct and explicit. He usually relies on the use of couplets and quatrains.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Enumerate and substantiate with illustrations, some of the societal ills addressed by Blake in two of his poems.

4.0 CONCLUSION

William Blake is arguably a romantic poet. Most of his poems address the societal ills in England during his time. He kicks against slavery, industrialization and religion. His poetry has been critiqued negatively by many critics. Yet, Blake romanticizes most of the things he talks about in his poetry.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to talk about the poetry of William Blake. The unit traces the life of Blake to his death as we discussed some of his major ideas and also looked at his style of poetry.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How is Blake's poetry different from or similar to John Keats' and William Wordsworth's poetry?

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MODULE 5 THE VICTORIAN AND THE 20TH CENTURY

ENGLISH POETRY

This module examines the Victorian Poetry and the 20th century Poetry. The module looks at the historical and literary overviews of the Victorian and the 20th century periods. The study includes the works of Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold and also the works of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats all of whom belong to the Victorian and the 20th century respectively. The module consists of four units.

The first unit examines the background to the Victorian Poetry. In this unit, an attempt is made to look at the Victorian period, its history, its government, its religion, and its literature.

The second unit examines the works of Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold, respectively. In this unit, the major poems of both poets are examined.

The third unit examines the background of the 20th century in England. Both the historical and literary overviews of the period are well discussed.

The fourth unit examines the works of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats respectively. Their styles of poetry are well discussed.

Unit 1: Background to the Victorian Poetry
Unit 2: Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold: The Examples of Victorian Poets
Unit 3: The 20th Century English Poetry
Unit 4: T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th Century English Poets

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE VICTORIAN POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Victorian period was a significant era in English literature. The Victorian period is associated with the English monarch, Queen Victoria. Several features characterized this period. Perhaps most important was the shift from a way of life based on ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing. By the beginning of the Victorian period, the Industrial Revolution had created profound economic and social changes, including a mass migration of workers to industrial towns where they lived in new urban slums. We shall see how various poets reacted to this in the main content.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Give a historical overview of the Victorian era;
2. Identify the features of the Victorian period;

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

Given the dramatic changes that occurred throughout the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901), it is fitting that 1832, the year that the first Reform Act passed, is often taken to mark the beginning of the period. Although the French Revolution was long over the time before the Victorian era began, the revolution still

influenced the period. Confidence in the Tories abated as frustration with their ability to ensure economic prosperity increased. The alternative party, the Whigs, was able to unite various groups dissatisfied with the status quo.

There were various calls for reform of an electoral system that had been in place since the 1680s. While industrial cities such as Manchester, now home to the factories on which the British economy increasingly depended, had no political representation, small towns with few inhabitants might benefit from the representation of two MPs in the House of Commons. Only landowners who comprised about 5 percent of the population could vote.

First presented in March 1831, the Reform Bill was defeated in the House of Commons. After a general election increased the Whigs majority, a revised bill was submitted to and passed by the House of Commons in October of the same year. Its defeat in the House of Lords spawned riots throughout the country. A further revised bill was passed in March of the following year and, after a series of dramatic measures that included Earl Grey resigning, the Great Reform Act became Law in 1832. The Reform Act successfully eliminated small constituencies and gave more appropriate representation to a variety of countries and cities that represented national strengths and interests. The number of men eligible to vote doubled to include many more of the middle class. More significantly, the passage of the Act seemed to demonstrate the capacity of the House of Commons and of voting people generally to take precedence over the desire of the House of Lords and even the sovereign. Aristocrats lost politically and economically, and the Whigs retained a majority in the House of Commons for most of the elections held until 1874.

Religion played a key role in many of the reform initiatives undertaken in Victorian Britain. An Evangelical wing within the Church of England supported such organizations as the society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and the society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign lands. Bible, religious tracts and missionary societies prospered under the influence of an Evangelical revival inherited from the eighteenth century. One noteworthy leader was Lord Ashley, the Earl of Shaftburg, a vocal critic of slavery in the colonies who also worked to improve conditions of factory work, to provide education for poor children, and to treat the mentally incompetent humanely.

3.2 Literary Overview

Victorian literary history provides many examples of innovative appropriation of both forms and themes inherited from the eighteenth century and the Romantic era. In her introduction to *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics,* Isobel

Armstrong warns of the danger of seeing Victorian poetry as "on the way to somewhere". "Whether on the way from Romantic poetry, or on the way to modernism", she writes, "it is situated between two kinds of excitement, in which it appears not to participate". Armstrong may be right, for Victorian poets engaged in complicated and innovative ways with the same issues of subjectivity and individuality that preoccupied generations both before and after them.

Tennyson's poetry is instructive in this regard. His poems, *Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) attracted the attention of Henry Hallam. Hallam recognized Tennyson's striking ability to convey intense emotion and to render the distinctive character of various poetic personas. At the same time, he warned the poet against indulgence in melancholic mood, against too-ready acceptance of Romantic poetry of sensation. Certainly, Tennyson's early poetry justified Hallam's critique. Poems like 'Mariana' and 'The Lotos – Eaters' seem positively antithetical to the embrace of work and the duties of the everyday that by mid-century would seem central to the ethos of Victorian culture. Ernest Jone's "The Silent Cell". For example, strongly endorses commitment to everyday struggle:

> But never a wish for base retreat
> Or thought of a recreant part,
> While yet in a single pulse shall beat
> Proud marches in my heart.
> (Chartistpoetry.html).

During the course of his career, Tennyson garnered a reputation and audience comparable to that of Dickens, and his poetry offers special insight into the complicated and sometimes paradoxical tastes and sensibilities of the Victorian reading public. *In Memoriam*, a poem that Queen Victoria compared to the Bible in its consolatory powers, is actually far more expressive of doubt than of faith. In its relentless representation of emotional and intellectual ambiguity, it offers our best evidence of Tennyson's appeal.

Almost all Victorian literature concerns itself with the troubled relationship of the public and the private and in this too, Tennyson's poetry is representative. The long, almost novel-length narrative poems of the Victorian Age evidence the era's prosperity especially after mid-century, to experiment with poetic form. Three prominent examples of this sub-genre of Victorian poetry can be found in Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1869), Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1862) and Elizabeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

Browning's more crucial legacy lies with the dramatic monologue, though he did not invent the form. Writing of the Victorian love affair with the dramatic monologue, E. Warwick Slinn notes that "from its inception in the 1830s and 1840s, its use spread rapidly, flooding the literary market and requiring puzzled

reviewers to learn to describe its idiosyncrasies and implications" ('Poetry' in Tucker, Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture, p. 313). The form is especially interesting in the way it reflects an emerging understanding of the nature of identity. Browning gravitated to disturbed psyches and in poems included in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Men and Women* (1855) readers are invited to reckon with their hidden histories, sordid secrets and immoral thoughts.

Where Browning's poetry conveys energy and enthusiasm, Matthew Arnold's projects what he called in "The Study of Poetry" a "high seriousness". Arnold was well known for his emphasis on "the dialogue of the mind with itself". Arnold would seem to share with Browning, and, indeed with almost every other Victorian poet, an interest in exploring and representing subjective states of mind.

3.3 Science, Nature and Crises of Faith

At the beginning of Victorian reign, tenets of natural theology, most especially the belief that nature reveals evidence of God's design, continued to enable many to accept that their religious beliefs and the scientific study of natural phenomena could peacefully co-exist. The Earl of Bridgewater Commissioned William Whitwell's three Bridgewater Treatises (1833 – 40) to illustrate the goodness of God as manifested in the Creation, Scholars disagree on just how much advances in the study of geology, which undermine the biblical timescale, came also to undermine confidence in natural theology, with some seeing it as the foundation of a widespread crisis of faith and others emphasizing the many people who were able to refashion the story of the creation so that their faith remained intact. Even without the new understanding of time and space emerging from the fields of geology and astronomy, mid Victorians had to contend with an array of other challenges of their faith, among them utilitarian philosophies that questioned the usefulness and rationality of religion and the insights of scholars who advocated the historical and essentially secular approach to the Bible known as Higher Criticism.

Darwin's evolutionary idea of "Natural Selection" made it difficult to embrace the idea of God at the helm of creation and in control of the processes by which man and animals adapted to their environments. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) provides intriguing evidence of the influence of emerging scientific knowledge before either *The Origin of Species* or *Essays and Reviews* arrived on the scene. Tennyson is known to have read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-3) and Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and the influence of these and other scientific studies can be seen in his famous elegy. Some scholars point to Tennyson's *Lyrics* 56 and 123 as illustrative of the poet attempting to come to terms with Lyell's theory of the way fossil records and rock

strata revealed steady physical change in the earth that resulted in the extinction of entire species. At times, the poet conveys only his sense of awe and wonder, as when in Lyric number 123 he writes.

There rolls the deep where grew the tree,
O earth, what changes has thou seen!
There where the long street roars hath been
The stillness of the central sea.
(In Memoriam. P. 91).

In this particular section of *In Memoriam,* Tennyson adapts his understanding of the changing earth to a more personal apprehension of relationships transformed into memory; other portions of the poem reveal a struggle to accept a scientific understanding of the world. Lyric number 56 begins:

So careful of the type? but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.
(In Memoriam, P. 41)

The lyric goes on to post Man as heroically trusting in a beneficent God whose law is love. Throughout *In Memoriam,* Tennyson makes deliberate use of punctuation to emphasize emotions, raise questions, and express resignation. He evokes the resignation of having to live without answers to desperate questions:

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.

Though many critics find in the poem evidence that religious faith is in conflict with scientific understanding, such an interpretation fails to capture Tennyson's nuanced representation of the kaleidoscopic relationship between faith, belief, knowledge, the unknown, feeling, trust, proof, understanding, truth and wisdom in human experience.

To acknowledge the significance of religious language in Victorian literature, and to attend to manifestations of religious belief in a writer who embraced scientific understanding or methodology, is not to downplay the very real ways that literature of the period records crises of faith. Loss of faith is the central theme of Mathew Arnold's mid-century poem, "Dover Beach" (1851), in which he writes that "The sea of faith".

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar.
(Gunningham, Victorians, 533)

Carlyle, Tennyson, John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, Ruskin, Swinburne, Samuel Butler and Edmund Gosse, and many others, each experienced a distinctive version of what is now often considered a classic Victorian paradigm for the loss of belief in religious certainties and authority.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain the significance of religion in the Victorian era.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Victorian period indeed witnessed a lot of changes which also influenced the literature of that period. The colonial extension of Britain in Africa, Australia and the Caribbeans to Asia brought a lot of wealth to Britain. Corruption – physical, social, political and religious – became rampant. A lot of people had begun to lose their faith. The loss of faith is well captured in the works of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson and Mathew Arnold. The Victorian Age was also known to have been hypocritical about its immoral affairs.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been introduced to the Victorian Age, most especially its influence on English poetry. You have been told that, the Victorian period began from 1832, the year the first Reform Act was passed. We also informed you that several writers and poets emerged during this period and their writings contributed to English literature up till today.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“The Victorian period was a period of innovation, wealth and crises of faith”. Discuss.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 ROBERT BROWNING AND MATHEW ARNOLD: THE EXAMPLES OF VICTORIAN POETS

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold are important Victorian poets. Robert Browning may have started writing poetry before Mathew Arnold and Mathew Arnold may have been more of a critic than a poet; both poets' works dominated the Victorian era. In the course of this unit, we shall then examine the lives of the poets, the contents and forms of their works.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the poetry of Robert Browning as a Victorian literary production;
2. Assess Mathew Arnold's contribution to Victorian poetry.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Short Biography of Robert Browning

Robert Browning was born May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was also an artist scholars, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. His rare book collection of more than 6,000 volumes included

works in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Much of Browning's education came from his well-read father. It is believed that he was already proficient at reading and writing by the age of five. A bright and anxious student, browning learned Latin, Greek, and French by the time he was fourteen. From fourteen to sixteen he was educated at home, attended to by various tutors in music, drawing, dancing, and horsemanship. At the age of twelve he wrote a volume of Byronic verse entitled "Incondite", which his parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published. In 1825, he got a collection of Shelley's poetry from his cousin which he liked so much that he asked for more of Shelley's works for his thirteenth the birthday, and declared himself a vegetarian and an atheist in emulation of the poet. In 1828, Browning enrolled at the University of London, but he soon left, anxious to read and learn at his own pace. The random nature of his education later surfaced in his writing, leading to criticism of his poems' obscurities.

In 1833, Browning anonymously published his first major work, *Pauline*, and in 1840 he published *Sordello*, which was widely regarded as a failure. He also tried his hand at drama, but his plays, including Strafford, ran for five nights in 1837. The techniques he developed through his dramatic monologues, especially his use of diction, rhythm, and symbol, are regarded as his most important contribution to poetry, influencing such major poets of the twentieth century as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Robert Frost.

After reading Elizabeth Barrett's Poems (1844) and corresponding with her for a few months, Browning met her in 1845. They were married in 1846 against the wishes of Barrett's father. The couple moved to Pisa and then Florence, where they continued to write. The Browning society was founded while he still lived, in 1881, and he was awarded honorary degree by Oxford University in 1882 and the University of Edinburgh in 1884. Robert Browning died on the same day that his final volume of verse, Asolando, was published, in 1889.

3.2 The Poetry and Style of Robert Browning

Of the works of Robert Browning, we need to consider one aspect. He attempted, notably in the volumes entitled *Men and Women* (1855) and *Dramatis Personae* (1864), to use in his verse the rhythms of spoken language and to convey character by means of the dramatic monologue; but these rhythms are rarely convincing. The 'speech' is too often a jerky jumble of archaisms, distorted syntax and romantic clichés. Let see this in his well-known poem, *My Last Duchess.* An

Italian renaissance duke is showing the portrait of his late wife to the emissary who is arranging his next marriage.

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask me thus, Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
'Over my lady's wrist too much', or 'Paint
'Must never hope to reproduce the faint
'Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that sport of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere
Sir, 'twas one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! But thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred – years- old name
With anybody's gift…

The poem has a roughness of surface which gives it at least the appearance of vigour. It is ingeniously arranged to make the reader work out for himself the implications of the story; the duke's pride, his treatment of his wife as one of his possessions, his jealousy, his cruelty, her death of a broken heart and his proposing to add another unfortunate young woman to his collection are the issues in the poem. Nevertheless, Browning has more in mind than simply creating a colourful

character and placing him in a picturesque historical scene. Rather, the specific historical setting of the poem harbours much significance: the Italian Renaissance held a particular fascination for Browning and his contemporaries, for it represented the flowering of the aesthetic and the human alongside, or in some cases in the place of, the religious and the moral. Thus the temporal setting allows Browning to again explore sex, violence, and aesthetics as all entangled, complicating and confusing each other: the lushness of the language belies the fact that the Duchess was punished for her natural sexuality. The Duke's ravings suggest that most of the supposed transgressions took place only in his mind. Like some of Browning's fellow Victorians, the Duke sees sin lurking in every corner. The reason the speaker here gives for killing the Duchess ostensibly differs from that given by the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" for murder Porphyria; however, both women are nevertheless victims of a male desire to inscribe and fix female sexuality.

3.3 A Brief Account of Mathew Arnold's Life

Mathew Arnold is popularly known for his critical essays. He was born in 1822 and began his career as a poet, winning early recognition as a student at the Rugby School where his father. Thomas Arnold had earned national acclaim as a strict and innovative headmaster. Arnold also studied at Balliot College, Oxford University. In 1844, after completing his undergraduate degree at Oxford, he returned to Rugby as a teacher of classics. After marrying in 1951, Arnold began work as a government school inspector, a position which afforded him the opportunity to travel throughout England and the continent. Throughout his thirty-five years in this position, Arnold developed an interest in education, an interest which fed into both his critical works and his poetry. *Empedocles on Etna* (1852) and *Poems* (1853) established Arnold's reputation as a poet and in 1857 he was offered a position, which he accepted and held until 1867, as professor of poetry at Oxford. Arnold became the first professor to lecture in English rather than Latin. During this time Arnold wrote the bulk of his most famous critical works, *Essays in Criticism* (1865) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which he sets forth idea that greatly reflect the predominant values of the Victorian era.

3.4 The Poetry and Style of Mathew Arnold

Discussing the poetry and style of Mathew Arnold may not be so difficult. We need to reckon with most of his essays on criticism. Arnold wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, religion, and education. Let us examine his most popular poem "Dover Beach".

The sea is calm to-night.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the
French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; there
Cliffs of England stand.
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and flings,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again began,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegan, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Pf the nigh-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The poem is about the human misery. Nature is used to draw a comparison between the fights of nature and the human misery. The poem consists of four stanzas which have a different amount of lines. The first stanza consists of 14 lines, the second of six, the third of eight and the last line contains nine lines. The rhyme is irregular. Arnold expresses shock on the crisis of faith during the Victorian period. In the beginning of the poem, he expresses how calm everything is just like any other night. However, as the poem progresses, he mentions how Sophocles heard the sadness on the Aegean Sea. Arnold mentions the "Sea of Faith", this metaphor actually stands for the church. In mentioning the "Sea of Faith", he reveals what while it looks calm and normal on the surface, the sea is singing a song of sadness and despair. During this time, people began questioning religion and turning to Darwinism. Arnold now posits that love should replace the darkness that has overtaken the world.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Do you think it is appropriate to categorize Mathew Arnold as a Victorian poet? Support your response with a discussion of one of his poems.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have explained how Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning both contributed immensely to English Poetry during the Victorian period. Browning's "My Last Duchess" and Mathew Arnold's "Dover Beach" remain part of the best British poetry collections. Both Browning and Arnold influenced the writings of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and many of the modern poets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to the backgrounds of Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning, how they wrote poetry and their styles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold as Victorian poets, using two of their poems, one of each, as examples.

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UNIT 3 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century in Britain has a lot of phases. The first forty years of the twentieth century saw both the consolidation of a century- and-a-half's industrial growth and development, and a decisive transition towards the now-familiar modernity of our own technologically advanced, mass-democratic and mass-consumerist society. New innovations in science and technology such as motor car, cinema, wireless telegraph, the aeroplane and electric power gave the twentieth century a new look. Nevertheless, the First World War was a severe blow on the century.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. Highlight the major historical events of the twentieth century;
2. Explicate the forms and styles of the twentieth century.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

After the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, things started to change gradually. The new century saw a continuing reaction against what were perceived as deeply entrenched Victorian values and attitudes, especially in religion and morality. Although there were no major upheavals organized, institutional religion in this period in Britain, the profound impact of nineteenth century science, philosophy and thought continued to be widely felt and there was certainly a spreading and deepening crisis of faith among artists and intellectuals, whose questioning and search for alternative systems of belief were now also increasingly influenced by the recently established fields of anthropology and comparative religion.

Several features are known to have dotted the twentieth century. First is the global war. This global war was the First World War which broke out in 1918. Masses of dead bodies littered the streets, plumes of poison gas drifting through the air, hundreds of miles of trenches infested with rats; these are some of the indelible images that have come to be associated with World War I (1914–1918). It was a war that unleashed death, loss, and suffering on an unprecedented scale.

Another crucial feature of the twentieth century is radical artistic experiment. The boundary breaking art, literature, and music of the first decades of the century are the subject of the topic, "Modernist Experiment". Among the leading aesthetic innovations of this era were the composer Igor Stravinsky, the cubist Pablo Picasso, and the Futurist F.T. Marinetti. The waves of artistic energy in the avant-garde European arts soon crossed the English Channel, as instanced by the abstraction and dynamism of Red Stone Dancer (1913–14) by the London-based vorticists, and modernists include such English writers as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot who also responded to the stimulus and challenge of the European avant-garde with manifestos, poems, plays, and other writings. This topic explores the links between continental experiment and the modernist innovations of English language poets and writers during a period of extraordinary ferment in literature and the arts.

The twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of new nations out of European colonial rule. Ireland was the oldest of Britain's colonies and the first in modern times to fight for independence. Politically and ideologically, too, society continued to become more pluralistic and democratic, and the Victorian trend towards a more diverse social – class structure and looser, less deterministic social networks continued apace.

3.2 Literary Overview

The literature of the first third or so of the twentieth century is usually defined in terms of its rejection of the values, attitudes and practices of the immediately preceding Victorian age – or at least of those aspects of the age that had come to stand for a 'Victorianism' defined, among other things, by hypocrisy and puritanical narrow-mindedness. Reaction against such Victorianism had been gathering pace since at least the 1880s, but after Queen Victoria's death reaction became outright rebellion as a new age of skepticism and searching critique began to assert itself and all the assumed Victorian verities were challenged and questioned. Indeed, this questioning spirit is perhaps the outstanding characteristic of early twentieth- century literature.

The wars of the period inevitably added impetus and edge to anti-Victorian critique, and if the experience and consciousness of war, with all the ramifications

of its newly realized potential for destruction, was an all-pervasive feature of the literature of the period. Especially after 1914, war itself supplied the direct and indirect subject matter for innumerable literary texts. The resulting literary experiments and debates gave rise to an extra-ordinarily rich and diverse range of writings, and this has meant that there is still no entirely settled 'map' of the literature of the period. For some writers, even towards the end of the period, it was effectively 'business as usual' where, although issues may well have changed, the tried and tested techniques of the Victorians would still more or less suffice. In the second half of the twentieth century, the standard model of literary critical classification for these years, especially in the field of fiction, has been one which identifies two major trends or modes of writing, defined principally by their different stylistic and technical features.

3.3 Forms, Genres and Styles

Modernism and realism have always been identified as the two main lines of stylistic development within this period. Modernist writing has been seen as the genuinely new, original and authentic art of the century while realist art has been considered as simply a continuation of worthy but outmoded nineteenth-century forms. From another point of view, modernist art has been considered obscure, elitist and out of touch with everyday experience, while realist art has been embraced for its direct relevance to people's lives in striving to present an accurate and truthful representation of historical and political actuality. As a broad categorization of stylistic tendencies at least, it can be helpful still to distinguish between these two modes of modern writing.

David Lodge helpfully elaborates on the distinction between modernism and realism as follows:

> Modernism turned its back on the traditional idea of art as imitation and substituted the idea of art as an autonomous activity. One of its most characteristics slogans was Walter Pater's assertion, "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music" – music being, of all arts, the most purely formal, the least referential… the fundamental principle of aesthetics before the modern era was that art imitates life… but by the end of that (nineteenth) century it had been turned on its head. 'Life imitates art', declared Oscar Wilde, meaning that we compose the reality we perceive by mental structures that are cultural, not natural in origin, and that it is art which is most likely to change and renew those structures when they become inadequate or unsatisfying… (T)raditional realism… does not aspire to the condition of music; rather it aspires to the condition of history… it regards literature as the communication of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the act of communication.
>
> ('Modernism, Anti-Modernism and PostModernism" PP. 5 – 6).

In the work of archetypal modernists such as Yeats, Eliot and Pound, modernism produced a 'poetry that distinguishes itself from ordinary referential discourse by violently dislocated syntax and bewildering shifts of register… in which there are no narrative or logical climaxes but instead vibrant, suggestive, ambiguous images and symbols' (Lodge, P. 6).

Meanwhile, poets like Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, Robert Bridges, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare and John Masefield stand out most strongly in contrast to the modernist for largely continuing to use metrical verse forms rather than free verse.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Explore five events that characterized the twentieth century.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The twentieth century seems the most interesting mainly because it was the most debatable century. The wars, economic recession, widespread corruption, disillusionment all made the twentieth century poetry in England something worth of attention. Both Yeats and Eliot became foremost poets of the period.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to the factors which made the twentieth century writers wrote the way they wrote. We traced the background of that period from the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. We concluded that the major schools of writers then were the modernists and the realists.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What factors influenced the twentieth-century writing in Britain?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 T.S. ELIOT AND W.B. YEATS: THE EXAMPLES OF 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH POETS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The two poets, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats contributed a lot to what is known as modernist poetry. Their works contain some fragments of the World War and the disillusionment that followed. Their biographies are briefly given and then their works are explicated.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. relate the accounts of Eliot and Yeats lives;
2. analyze the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats as modernist works.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief Biography of T.S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888. He lived in St. Louis during the first eighteen years of his life and attended Harvard University. In 1910, he left the United States for the Sorbonne, having earned both undergraduate and master degrees and having contributed several poems to the Harvard Advocate.

After a year in Paris, he returned to Harvard to pursue a doctorate in philosophy, but returned to Europe and settled in England in 1914. The following year, he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and began working in London, first as a teacher and later for Lloyd's Bank. It was in London that Eliot came under the influence of his contemporary Ezra Pound who recognized his poetic genius at once, and assisted in the publication of his work in a number of magazines, most notably "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1915. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917, and immediately established him

as a leading poet of the avant-garde. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Eliot's reputation began to grow to nearly mythic proportions; by 1930, and for the next thirty years, he was the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism in the English-speaking world. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948, and died in London in 1965.

3.2 The Poetry and Style of T.S. Eliot

Eliot is well known for two of his poems, The *Waste Land,* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.* We are going to examine *The Waste land*. With its bewilderingly fragmented, imagistic evocation of a sterile and broken civilization, Eliot's *The Waste Land* has long been considered an archetypal text of literary modernism, providing a conveniently concentrated example of almost all the major features associated with that label. Although the poem's wide range of cultural reference suggests many other relevant contexts too (urbanization, popular culture and entertainment, and the developing fields of anthropology and comparative religion), the First World War is perhaps its most obvious shaping context.

The war is explicitly alluded to in the semi-comic repartee of the women in the pub in Part II of the poem, and literal echoes of the war can be head in lines like 'Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air' (Part V, 1, 373); but the impact and aftermath of the war is deeply embedded in the poem's all-pervasive and many-faceted sense of death and loss, fracture and disorientation. The imagery of death and desolation is everywhere, from the very first section sub-title, 'The Burial of the Dead', through to the fourth, 'Death by Water'. The land is dead, trees are dead, the bones of dead men lie in garrets and alleys, 'Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year' (Part III, 1.195):

> He who was living is now dead
> We who are living are now dying
> (Part V, II. 328-9).

As this last line suggests, though, the poem is not in any simple way a memorial to the men who literally died in the war. It is also, if not more so, a lament for the living death that the war symbolically bequeathed to the world in marking the end of a cultural cycle and the shattering of its fundamental values, beliefs and aspirations. The city of modernity is now an "Unreal City', a hellish ghostly waste land, full of 'Falling towers' and the walking undead –

> 'A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death and undone so many'.
> (Part I, II. 62-3)

As the recurrent imagery of dryness and sterility makes clear, the poem is in this sense actually about the spiritual death of western civilization, and the poem's fragmented web of allusions to Christianity and to various other religions, myths and rituals is intended to evoke the anguished modern search for new sources of faith and meaning in the world.

The narrative disjunctions and the sudden shifts of location and language in the poem are clearly functional to this sense of profound spiritual disorientation in the modern world. Eliot's waste land may probably be a spiritual one, nevertheless, it captures the meaninglessness and fragmentations of the twentieth century.

3.3 A Brief Account of W.B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1865. His father, John Yeats was a painter. He spent his childhood in country Sligo, where his parents were raised, and in London. He returned to Dublin at the age of fifteen to continue his education and study painting, but quickly discovered he preferred poetry. Yeats became involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period, which sought to promote the spirit of Ireland's native heritage. Though Yeats never learned Gaelic, his writing at the turn of the century drew extensively from sources in Irish mythology and folklore. Also a potent influence on his poetry was the Irish revolutionary Mewed Gonne, whom he met in 1889, a woman equally famous for her passionate nationalist politics and her beauty.

Yeats was deeply involved in politics in Ireland, and in the twenties, despite Irish Independence from England, his verse reflected pessimism about the political situation in his country and the rest of Europe, paralleling the increasing conservatism of his American counterparts in London, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. His work after 1910 was strongly influenced by Pound, becoming more modern in its concision and imagery, but Yeats never abandoned his strict adherence to traditional verse forms. W.B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and died in 1939 at the age of 73.

3.4 The Poetry and Style of W.B. Yeats

Yeats wrote a lot. Some of his best poems are "Byzantium" and "Among the School Children". His poems reflect on modernity using powerful images and symbols. In "Byzantium", Yeats imagines himself within the symbol city towards which he was sailing. Yeats' symbols change their significance. Most of his poems have common meanings, associations, themes, but in any poem these are part of a whole and their range of reference is controlled by the structure of the poem itself.

"Byzantium"

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walker's song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades bobbin bound in mummy – cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman:
I call it death – in – life and life – in – death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can lime the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.
At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit.
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave.
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot single a sleeve.

If one ponders the superbly modulated first line of this poem, one will discover that of its five stresses, three come together on the second, third and fourth syllables; the last two are regularly spaced. Such an arrangement gives a calm, solid conclusive feeling to the second half of the line.

In the first stanza, the drunken soldiery and the night – walkers are silenced by the great cathedral gong, the curfew that ends day and ushers in night, symbol, like the dome of the sky, 'the artifice of eternity', all describe the serenity of the city. In

"Sailing to Byzantium" the speaker stated his desire to be 'out of nature' and to assume the form of a golden bird. In "Byzantium", the bird, appears, and scores of dead spirits arrive on the backs of dolphins, to be forged into "the artifice of eternity" – ghostlike images with no physical presence ("a flame that cannot single a sleeve"). The narrative and imagistic arrangement of this poem is highly ambiguous and complicated; it is unclear whether Yeats intends the poem to be a register of symbols.

The speaker's demonstrated preoccupation with "French images" has led some critics to conclude that the poem is really an allegory of the process by which fantasies are rendered into art.

Self-Assessment Exercise
"The poetry of W. B. Yeats and T.S. are perfect examples of modernist poetry". Expatiate.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The two poems discussed in this unit seem to be very difficult to interpret. But you should understand that it is part of the features of twentieth century poetry to use images and symbols. The two poems by Eliot and Yeats are full of mythical symbols which may better be understood by the people of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, we tried to interpret and analyze these poems as simple as possible for you to understand.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have discussed the poetry of Eliot and Yeats. We also highlighted their literary and cultural backgrounds. We tried as much as possible to familiarize you with the styles of their writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How modernist is T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* or W.B. Yeats' "Among the School Children"?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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COURSE GUIDE

ENG372 **ENGLISH POETRY**

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ENG372: ENGLISH POETRY

INTRODUCTION

The term “English poetry” is an ambiguous one. It can mean poetry written by the English people or poetry written in the English language. Nevertheless, this course is meant to acquaint you with poetry written by the English poets and others from Scotland, Wales,and Ireland, from the earliest days of Anglo-Saxon to the modern period of English. The history of English poetry extends from the middle of the 7th century to the present day. Over this period, a lot of poems have been written in Western culture. By this, the English language and its poetry have travelled all over the globe.

The earliest surviving poetry was likely transmitted orally and then written down in versions that do not now survive; Caedman is believed to have written some religious verses. The earliest surviving poetry was written in Anglo-Saxon and may have been composed as early as the 7th century. This writing is generally accepted as the beginning of Anglo-Saxon poetry, while *Beowulf* is one of the earliest surviving epic poems. The earliest known English poem is a hymn on the creation.

Course Aims

The main aim of this course is to acquaint students with the background to the various traditions of English poetry embedded in this course, the different movements and their representative poets. Students will also be introduced to the

major themes and literary techniques of the selected poems. This may therefore be realized by:

i. examining the earliest English poetry,
ii. discussing the major works of the period and their representative poets,
iii. providing information on the themes of selected poems,
iv. explaining the nature of the Anglo-Norman period and the Later Middle Ages,
v. explicating the Renaissance in England and its features,
vi. discussing the Restoration and the 18th century movement and their representative poets,
vii. highlighting the preoccupation of the Romantic Movement,
viii. examining the Victorian poetry and its features,
ix. discussing 20th century poetry and its characteristic features, and
x. elucidating the nature of new or contemporary English poetry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this course is to equip students with detailed information on the nature and advancement of English poetry from the earliest period of Anglo-Saxon to the present age of modern English. It is hoped therefore that at the end of the course, the students should be able to:

(i) discuss the concept of the earliest English poetry;

(ii) explain the themes and features of Anglo-Norman and the Middle Age Poetry;

(iii) explain the term Renaissance and its major representative poets and the concept of their works;

(iv) highlight the concept of Romantic poetry;

(v) examine the influence of William Wordsworth on the English Romantic Poetry;

(vi) discuss the major achievements of the Victorian poets

(vii) discuss extensively the 20th century poetry, especially modernist poetry.

Working through the Course

Students are advised to commence the study by reading the course guide, which gives a quick overview of the course. The units must be read carefully starting from Unit One. Always make sure that before a particular unit is read its objectives have been understood as this will provide the overall picture of the unit. Try and read the recommended textbooks and other related materials in order to deepen your understanding of the course. Each unit has a self-assessment question, which you are expected to use in assessing your knowledge of the course. Note down the areas that seem unclear and need more clarification.

Course Materials

i. Course guide

ii. Study units

iii. Textbooks

iv. Assignment file

v. Presentation schedule

Study Units

This course is a three-credit unit course comprising five modules. Each module is made up of different study units depending on the contents and scope of the study. On the whole, the course has twenty study units of varying lengths. The modules and their units are as follows:

Module 1 The Earliest English Poetry and the Anglo-Norman Period

Unit 1 Background to the Earliest English Poetry

Unit 2 *Beowulf* and the Earliest English Epic

Unit 3 The Battle of Maldon

Unit 4 Chaucer's Poetry

Module 2 The Renaissance Poetry

Unit 1 What is Renaissance?

Unit 2 Elizabethan Poetry

Unit 3 Shakespearean Sonnets

Unit 4 Metaphysical Poetry

Module 3 English Poetry in the Restoration and 18th Century

Unit 1 Satire in the 18th Century

Unit 2 18th Century Classicism

Unit 3 John Dryden's Poetry

Unit 4 Alexander Pope's Poetry

Module 4 English Poetry and the Romantic Movement

Unit 1 Background to Romantic Movement

Unit 2 William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement

Unit 3 John Keats' Poetry

Unit 4 William Blake's Poetry

Module 5: The Victorian Poetry and the 20th Century English Poetry

Unit 1 Background to the Victorian Poetry

Unit 2 Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold: The Examples of Victorian Poets

Unit 3 20th Century English Poetry

Unit 4 T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th century Poets

Each module is preceded by a miniature table of contents, including introduction, unit objective, the main content, Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE), as well as one Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA) which you are required to answer and submit for grading.

Textbooks for further Reading

At the end of every unit, you will find a list of books and other such materials that will enable you have a firm grasp of the course. The books are to aid your understanding of this course. You are, therefore, expected to consult as many materials as possible. This will enable you to grasp the course deeply.

Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. Remember that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

Assignment File

The file contains the details of all the assignments you must do and submit to your tutor for marking. The mark you obtain from these assignments will form part of the final mark you will obtain in this course.

Assessment

The course has two types of exercises or questions you are expected to tackle. The first is the Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) which you are expected to solve but not submit at the end of the study. The second is the Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMAs) which you must solve and submit in an assignment file in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the successful completion of the course. The TMA accounts for 30% of your total score for the course.

Every unit has a Tutor-Marked Assignment, which is a compulsory question that must be answered and submitted at the end of the course. You will minimize your chance of doing well in the course if you fail to submit answers to all the Tutor-Marked Assignments as required.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for this course has a duration of three hours. The examination itself will carry 70%. It will be made up of questions that reflect the self-testing exercises as well as the tutor-marked assignments. You are expected to spend quality time to read the contents of the units and all the SAEs and TMAs for the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

The table below shows how actual course marking scheme is broken down.

Assessments	**Marks**
Assignment 1-4	Assignments of which the best three marks of the four count as 30% of course marks.
Final examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme.

Course overview

The table below brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them and the assignments that follow them.

Units	Title of work	Week's activity	Assessment(s) (End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
	Module 1		
1	Background to the Earliest English Poetry	1	Assignment 1
2	*Beowulf* and the earliest English Epic.	2	Assignment 2
3	The Battle of Maldon	3	Assignment 3
4	Chaucer's Poetry	4	Assignment 4
	Module 2		
1	What is Renaissance?	5	Assignment 1
2	Elizabethan Poetry	6	Assignment 2
3	Shakespearean Sonnets	7	Assignment 3
4	The Metaphysical Poetry	8	Assignment 4
	Module 3		
1	Satire in the 18th Century	9	Assignment 1
2	18th Century Classicism	10	Assignment 2

3	John Dryden's Poetry	11	Assignment 3
4	Alexander Pope's Poetry	12	Assignment 4
	Module 4		
1	Background to the Romantic Movement	13	Assignment 1
2	William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement	14	Assignment 2
3	John Keats' Poetry	15	Assignment 3
4	William Blake's Poetry	16	Assignment 4
	Module 5		
1	Background to the Victorian Poetry	17	Assignment 1
2	Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold: The examples of Victorian Poetry	18	Assignment 2
3	20th Century English Poetry	19	Assignment 3
4	T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th Century English Poets	20	Assignment 4
	Revision	21	
	Examination	22	

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

Fifteen tutorial hours are provided for in this course to enable the students and their tutors meet and examine the contents of the course at intervals. You will be informed of the dates, time and venue for these tutorials, along with the name and particulars of your tutor as soon as one is assigned to your group. Your tutor will grade and comment on your assignments, monitor your progress and provide answers to your questions during tutorials. You must submit your assignments in good time to enable your tutor to read them well and to make appropriate comments. Do not play with your tutorials or hesitate to consult your tutor when the need arises. Tutorials afford you opportunity to meet and discuss with your tutor face to face and they help you to get immediate answers to troubling questions. Apart from tutorials, you may consult your tutor when:

- You do not understand any part of the study units;
- You have difficulty understanding Self-Assessment Exercises or Tutor-Marked Assignment:
- When you have problems with the tutor's comments on your assignments or their grading. To gain maximally from the tutorials, you ought to prepare a list of questions before attending them and you must endeavor to participate actively in discussions during tutorials.

Summary

This course is historical, theoretical, as well as analytical in dimension. It will enable you to understand how the English tastes, characters and sensibilities are captured in poetry over time, as well as help you to know those who influenced English poetry and the trend of their thought. This course examines the English poetry from its beginning to the 20th century. It explains the factors that helped to nurture the different kinds of poetic traditions inherent in English world, the works of selected poets and the various themes espoused in them and the nature of the English audience.

The course guide is, therefore, designed to make the course enjoyable and rewarding experience. However, what you get depends on how much time you dedicate to studying the various course units.

Good luck!

MODULE 1

THE EARLIEST (ANGLO-SAXON) ENGLISH POETRY AND THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD

This module examines the earliest English poetry. The study traces the English poetry to the Anglo-Saxon period when poetry writing was mainly based on epic qualities. The earliest period of English poetry arguably laid the foundation for Anglo-Norman poetry.

The module which comprises four units will elucidate the features of earliest English poetry with various examples. The first unit will crystallize the background to the earliest English Poetry. In this first unit, we shall see the various factors that characterized and shaped the Anglo-Saxon period.

The second unit will discuss *Beowulf* as an example of the earliest English epic. We shall analyze the poem and examine the qualities of the work with the view of connecting the work with the culture of the earliest English people.

The third unit will discuss *The Battle of Maldon.* In this unit, we shall analyze the features of *The Battle of Maldon.*

The fourth unit will examine and discuss Chaucer's poetry. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* will be studied. The unit will examine how Anglo-Saxon poetry gave way to Anglo-Norman poetry. We shall closely look into the differences between the Anglo-Saxon poetry and the Middle Ages Poetry.

Unit 1: Background to the Earliest English Poetry
Unit 2: *Beowulf* and the Earliest English Epic
Unit 3: *The Battle of Maldon*
Unit 4: Chaucer's Poetry

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE EARLIEST ENGLISH POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The end of Roman rule in Britain enabled the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, which is often regarded as the origin of England and the English people (Wikipedia). The Anglo-Saxons were of Germanic origin who established several kingdoms that became the primary powers in what is now England and parts of Southern Scotland. They introduced the Old English language which displaced the previous British language. The Anglo-Saxons warred with British states in Wales, Cornwall and the Brythonic speaking parts of northern England and southern Scotland. The Vikings and Norsemen raided England about 800AD, took control and introduced Norse language into large parts of what is now England. During this period, several rulers attempted to unite the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and this effort led to the emergence of the kingdom of England by the 10th century.

Meanwhile, of several poems dealing with English history and preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* the most notable is "The Battle of Brunanburb," a panegyric on the occasion of King Athelstan's victory over a coalition of Norsemen and Scots in the year 937. *The Battle of Maldon,* is another heroic poetry dealing with English history. The poem describes the defeat of Aldorman Byrhtnoth at the hands of Viking invaders in 991.

Anglo–Saxon poetry is categorized by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices of the late 10th and early 11th centuries known as the Caedmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the Beowulf manuscript. *Beowulf* is the only heroic epic to have survived in its entirely but fragments of others such as *Waldere* and the *funnesburg Fragment* are also available. Other genres include much religious verses, from devotional works to biblical paraphrase such as "The Wanderer", "The Seafairer" and "The Ruin".

Anglo-Saxon depends on alterative verse for its structure. The poetry is formulaic, drawing on a common set of stock phrases and phrase patterns, applying standard epithets to various classes of characters, and depicting scenery with such recurring images as the eagle and wolf, which wait during battles to feast on carrion, and the ice and snow, which appear in the landscape to signal sorrow. Several wars took place which shaped the history and language of England. This unit is important for this course as it opens up various factors that led to the emergence of England and its poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the factors that led to the emergence of England;
- account for the earliest English period;
- discuss the earliest English poetry and its style;
- explain the significance of wars in the earliest English period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Earliest English Period

Both the Vikings and the Norse men inhabited England and changed its history and language consequently. By 1066, the Normans invaded and conquered England. The Norman Dynasty established by William the Conqueror ruled England for over half a century before the period of succession crisis known as the Anarchy. Following the Anarchy, England came to be ruled by the House of Plantagenet, a dynasty which also had claims to the kingdom of France. Many wars were fought before there could be a stable kingdom in England.

3.2 The Earliest English Poetry

The history of English poetry begins from the middle of the 7th century. The earliest surviving manuscripts are dated from the 10th century. Much of the poetry was written in Latin, Brythonic and Anglo-Saxon languages. Probably, much of this old English poetry was intended to be chanted, with harp accompaniment, by the Anglo-Saxon bard. Old English poetry was bold and strong, but also mournful and elegiac in spirit. This poetry emphasizes the sorrow and ultimate futility of life and the helplessness of humans before the power of fate. Almost all this poetry is composed without rhyme, in which a line or verse of four stressed syllables alternate with an indeterminate number of unstressed syllables. Another unfamiliar feature in the formal character of Old English poetry is structural alliteration or the use of syllables beginning with similar sounds in two or three of the stresses in each line. All these features of form and spirit are exemplified in the epic poem *Beowulf*.

Nevertheless, the earliest known English poem is a hymn on creation. A humble man of the late 7th century who was described by the historian and theologian Saint Bede the Venerable may have written the "Hymn on Creation". His name was Caedmon. Part of the challenges of the earliest English poetry was dating. For instance, Beowulf's dating ranges from 608AD to 1000 AD. There has been no consensus ever since (Wikipedia). Many other poems such as "The Battle of Brunanburh" (957) and the "Battle of Maldon" (991) may have been composed to document various was that took place in English history.

Anglo-Saxon poetry is categorized by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices or bound ancient manuscripts of the late 10th and early 11th centuries known as the Caedmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscripts.

3.3 The Style of Earliest English Poetry

Most of the Earliest English poems have similar qualities. According to Albert Tolman (1887), Anglo-Saxon poetry has various qualities which are:

i. conciseness and vigour;
ii. repetition of thought with variation of expression;
iii. disconnectedness;
iv. freedom from the sensual and idealization of the common;
v. seriousness and
vi. tenderness.

Conciseness and Vigour

The extreme emphasis resulting from accent and alliteration combined in the same syllables naturally goes with a highly intense, vigorous style. Anglo-Saxon poetry is always more than lively, it is intense. The Anglo-Saxon verse demands strong nouns, adjectives, and verbs; and these, of necessity, state the thought with brevity and power.

Repetition of Thought with Variation of Expression

The Anglo-Saxon poet repeats his ideas in every possible way, but not his words. The repetition of the main idea is made enjoyable by the constant variation of the language. Each repetition must emphasize some new phase or characteristic by the use of new terms. This repetition with variation takes many forms. A noun may have three to four appositional phrases scattered through all parts of the sentence, or there may be complete parallelism of successive sentences, which is a favourite form of expression. But parallelism is evidently not a principle with the Anglo-Saxon poet. The principle is as it has been stated. This is an illustration from *Beowulf:*

The round the mound the battle-brave rode,
Sons of athelings, twelve in all,
Wished to tell their sorrow, bewail the king,
Wreak their words, and speak of the man.
(Beowulf 3131*).*

Disconnectedness

Ideas are usually expressed in disconnected manner in Anglo-Saxon poetry, though it is hard to generalize. Here and there, especially in the later poetry, passages can be found in which the rhetoric is really elaborate and the connections of thought are very fully indicated. This is true of the part of "Genesis". There is an instance of disconnectedness made expressive:

Alas! Had I control of my hands,
And could I for a time get loose,
Be free for one winter-hour, then I with this troop –
But about me lie iron-bonds,
The rope of fetters rides me.
(Genesis 368*)*

Freedom from the Sensual and Idealization of the Commonplace

Anglo-Saxon poetry is devoid of sensuality and idealization of the commonplace. There are no Anglo-Saxon love poems. The entire absence of the relation of lover and maid from this poetry, and the scanty references to that of husband and wife, are very striking. A woman appears but rarely, and then as the noble, honoured spouse, chaste and dignified. She is her husband's best and dearest friend. The relation, who is dearest of all to Anglo-Saxon poetry, is that of lord and follower. The true Lord loves his subjects dearly. He is the kind friend and guardian of all. Beowulf and Hrothgar grieve over the sufferings of their harassed people. It reminds one of the Christian conceptions of Christ's followers; that they constitute his very body. "The Wanderer", one of the most touching poems of the Anglo-Saxons, is the lament of a poor solitary follower over his dear, dead lord-friend.

The idealization of all that is commonplace permeates Anglo-Saxon life and poetry. Etiquette is a prime consideration with the Anglo-Saxon**;** and no good warrior fails in the definite ceremonials which are evidently considered of very great importance. The poem *Beowulf* is full of interesting details of court and warrior life. This life is all idealized, and nothing gross appears. Every person and object is exalted almost to a state of perfection, or is dismissed from sight and mentioned as completely bad.

Seriousness

There was an ethical sternness and a grand earnestness in the Anglo-Saxons, which was mirrored in an all-pervading seriousness of style. A great fondness for moralizing appears everywhere. The shortness and uncertainty of life are constantly called up. A remarkable instance of moralizing is offered in "Beowulf", when the hero has just killed Grendel's mother and so exterminated the hated race. The tone was always serious compared to some of the poems written during the renaissance.

Tenderness

The Anglo-Saxons were as tender and thoughtful as they were brave. The vast problems of life and death oppress the hearts which do not quake before the enemy. Elegiac pathos, tender mournfulness, is then, an important feature of Anglo-Saxon style. "Beowulf" is full of it. "The Wanderer" has lost his dear lord and is friendless in the world.

Often the fugitive findeth mercy,
The mildness of God. Moody and weary,
Wandering ever over the water-way,
Hath he with hands of toil, homeless and sad,
Stirred the sea, rime-cold. Rigorous fate
(The Wanderer).

Behind every joy and at every banquet, to the mind of the Anglo-Saxon, wait disappointment and sorrow.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The unit examines the background to the earliest English Poetry and its impact on the poetry of the period. The unit looks into various qualities of the Anglo-Saxon poetry such as conciseness and vigour, repetition of thought with variation of expression, disconnectedness, freedom from the sensual and idealization of the common seriousness and tenderness.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this course, we have been able to see the background of Anglo Saxon poetry. We also highlighted various features of Anglo Saxon poetry. We hope to take this topic further by discussing *Beowulf* in detail in the next unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss at least five features of Anglo-Saxon Poetry.

6.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2: BEOWULF AND THE EARLIEST ENGLISH EPIC

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic consisting of 3182 alliterative long lines, set in Scandinavia. It is arguably the first Anglo-Saxon epic as it is the earliest surviving epic of Anglo-Saxon literature. "Beowulf" is an important Anglo-Saxon poem to be studied in this course. The long narrative epic depicts the conquests, history and culture of the Danes.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss *Beowulf* as a literary product of the Anglo-Saxon period,
- identify and discuss specific epic qualities in *Beowulf* and
- discuss the literary style of *Beowulf.*

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is an Epic?

An epic is a long narrative poem on a serious subject representing characters of heroic stature in adventures of great historical, legendary, or religious significance. The following are characteristics of an epic.

- The setting of the work is vast in scope, covering a whole nation, the world, or even the universe.
- The actions described in the work are deeds of great valor, often requiring super human strength, intelligence, or endurance.
- Supernatural forces (gods, angels, demons) take interest in the action and intervene from time to time.
- An elevated style and diction, deliberately distanced from everyday speech, is used throughout the poem.

In most epic poems, the poet begins the work by stating his topic and by calling upon the Muse of Epic Poetry for help in rising to the task. This convention is known as the invocation to the Muse, a part of which is the epic statement of theme. The poet opens his narrative in *medias res* (Latin expression for 'middle of the action'). The preceding history is then supplied at various points throughout the remainder of the work by means of retrospection, similar to the flashback of the modern novel. This is exemplified in the story of another Beowulf who has lived before the great Beowulf. There is also a retelling of the story of a good king who "throve under heaven in power and pride/till alien peoples beyond the ocean/Paid toll and tribute. A good king he!" (Lines 7-10). It is a form introduction to the heritage of greatness into which Hrothgar has grown as a Danish king. Another good example could be found in Lines 993- 1050, which is supposed to give the background of a praise song performed in honour of Beowulf after the slaying of Grendel. It tells of a story a Danish king, Hnaef who was killed while on a visit to his sister and her spouse, Finn the king of the Jutes in Finnsburg. His people, led by Hengest, came back on a reprisal attack and killed the Jutes for this treachery but only stopped the destruction of the Jutes after a truce was reached- that king Finn would continually give gifts to the Danes to appease the death of their king and that if any Frisian attempted to refer to the unfortunate incidence, the jutes should avenge. Meanwhile, Hengest and some Danish warriors remained with the Jutes but Hengest was ever thinking about avenging the death of his king. Thus, the opportunity came after winter and he murdered Finn, the king of the Jutes and returned to Danes land with the queen if the Jutes, thereby breaking the truce. Apart from using this to honour Beowulf and his men, it also performs another function which is explained in the next paragraph.

This story gives a hint of some of the cultural practices of the Anglo-Saxons such as revenge, burial rites which include pyre burning and the singing of dirge. Pyre burning refers to the burning of the dead with their belongings and treasures. This is the same way Beowulf is buried at the end of the poem. The story is therefore a prospective narrative as well, which tells the audience what is to happen later in the work or after the work.

The poet may also include many elaborate enumerations of subjects and items such as ships, warriors, armies, gifts etc; this kind of list is called an epic catalogue. In *Beowulf*, after the defeat of Grendel, king Hrothgar rewards Beowulf with gifts and they are described in elegant terms:

> Hrothgar bestowed a standard of gold,
> A banner embroidered, a bryny and a helm.
> In sight of many, a costly sword…
> To others on ale-bench, richer rewards,

Four such treasures fretted with gold!
Eight horses also with plated headstalls
The lord of heroes bade lead into hall;
On one was saddle skillfully fashioned
And set with jewels, the battle-seat…
And the prince of Ingwines gave all these gifts
To the hand of Beowulf, horses and armor;
Bade him enjoy them! With generous heart
The noble leader, the lord of heroes,
Rewarded the struggle with steeds and with treasure,
So that none can belittle, and none can blame,
Who tells the tale as it truly happened (lines 946 -975)

Gift-giving as part of the Anglo-Saxon culture is giving prominence in the poem. Many lords like Hrothgar are portrayed as generous leaders who do not allow the efforts and loyalty of their warriors to go unrewarded. The gifts are elaborately described in order to show both the generosity of the giver and the greatness of the acts of the hero.

The poet also uses extended and elaborate formal speeches or monologues by the main characters. These speeches are also called epic boast if they are delivered before a war takes place of whenever a great person introduces himself. Beowulf introduces himself to king Hrothgar in Lines 400-411 with an epic boast, recounting the great and heroic deeds he has performed before embarking on the quest to exterminate Grendel:

The best of my people, prudent and brave,
Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
They had in remembrance my courage and might,
Many had seen me come safe from conflict,
Bloody from battle; five foes I bound
Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.etc

The boast is expected to encourage the speaker, his hearers and followers, especially the king that he has come to help. Since this is their first meeting, Beowulf takes his audience through the many feats he has performed so that they might be reassured that they have the right person for the job. Beowulf's last boast in the poem is found just before he goes to kill the dragon, which incidentally is his last act:

I came in safety through many conflicts
In the days of my youth; and now even yet,
Old as I am, I will fight this feud,
Do manful deeds, if the dire destroyer
Will come from his cavern to meet my sword' (Lines 2369-2373)

The poet also gives a detailed family background, epic genealogy, for many of the heroes. Importance is attached to paternal lineage. The poet refers to a hero by his patronymic, which means a form of the father's name with an ending meaning "son of". Heorogar, hrothgar's brother is describes as "the son of Healfdene" (Line 450), Unferth is referred to as "Ecglaf's son" in Line 481 and Beowulf himself as "the son of Ecgtheow". All these are great men begotten by heroes.

The poet also uses long, extended comparisons which are known as epic similes that make the unfamiliar familiar by stressing its similarity to observable, common phenomena and objects. The poet also uses many epithets, adjectives or adjectival phrases used to point out a characteristic quality of a person, a god, or less frequently, an animal or an object. Beowulf calls Hrothgar "Prince of the Danes, protector of Syldings,/Lord of nations, and leader of men, (lines 412-413). He describes his breastplate as "the best of corselets that covers my breast/heirloom of Hrethel, and Wayland's work, /Finest of byrnies." (Lines 437-438). This implies that the armor is not an ordinary one but a potent one crafted by a skillful magical smith. Also, the rest of Beowulf's weapons like his helmet and sword are elaborately described in Lines 1327-11349.

The poet may also rely on the use of kennings which mean metaphoric expressions employed to render vivid narrations. Examples: Grendel's mother is tagged "battle-flasher" (Line 1407), the sun is named the "world-candle" in Line 1839 and Beowulf is called the "shoulder-companion" of Hygelac in Line1846. They are epithets deployed to intimate the audience with the qualities of these subjects.

The use of foreshadowing, which means warning about something bad that is about to happen, is also common in epic poetry. Likewise, the use of rhetorical and poetic devices such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole and irony are also common features of epic poetry.

3.2 A Summary of *Beowulf*

Beowulf, a warrior and hero of the Geats in Scandinavia, comes to assist Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, whose Mead Hall in Heorot has been terrorized several times by a monster known as Grendel. He is the central figure in the poem and his actions or heroic deeds qualify the poem to be called an epic. These actions are discussed below. Beowulf confronts Grendel and slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and she is being defeated by Beowulf also. Beowulf goes home to

Geatland in Sweden and later becomes king of the Geats. Fifty years after Grendel's mother was defeated, Beowulf also defeats a dragon, but is fatally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants bury him in a tumulus, a burial mound, in Geatland.

According to Jane Chance in her article "The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The problem of Grendel's Mother", Beowulf has a two-part structure which is divided into the battle with Grendel and with the dragon and the battle with Grendel's mother. The poem opens with the story of king Hrothgar, who built a very large hall named Heorot for his people. In it, he, his wife Weathpeow, and his warriors spend their time singing and celebrating, until Grendel, a troll-like monster who is disturbed by the noise of their merriment, attacks the hall and devours many of Hrothgar's warriors while they sleep. But Grendel does not touch the throne of Hrothgar, for it is described as protected by a powerful god. Hrothgar and his people in their helplessness vacate Heorot.

Beowulf, a brave warrior from Geatland hears of Hrothgar's troubles and with his king's permission leaves his home land to help Hrothgar. Beowulf and his men spend the night in Heorot. Beowulf carries no arm because he wants to be like the beast that bears no arm. After they have slept, Grendel enters the hall and attacks, devouring one of Beowulf's men. Beowulf, who has been pretending to sleep, leaps up to clench Grendel's hand. The two fight to a standstill. Beowulf's men arise to help but their swords cannot penetrate Grendel's body. Eventually, Beowulf tears Grendel's arm from his body while Grendel shouts and runs home to die.

The following night, after celebrating Grendel's defeat, Hrothgar and his men sleep in Heorot. Grendel's mother, angered by the punishment of her son, appears and attacks the hall. She kills Hrothgar's most trusted warrior, Aeschere, in revenge for Grendel's defeat.

Hrothgar, Beowulf and their men track Grendel's mother to her home under a lake. Beowulf prepares himself for battle; he is presented with a sword by Unferth, a warrior who had doubted him and wishes to make amends. Having stipulated a number of conditions to Hrothgar in case of his death, Beowulf enters into the lake. He is quickly detected and attacked by Grendel's mother. Nevertheless, she is unable to harm Beowulf through his armour and drags him to the bottom of the lake where Grendel's mother and Beowulf engage in fierce combat.

Grendel's mother seems to prevail initially, and Beowulf sensing that his sword cannot harm his foe discards it in fury. Beowulf grabs a magical sword from Grendel's mother's treasure, and with it beheads her. The blade of the magic sword melts like ice when it touches her toxic blood, until only the hilt is left. This

hilt is the only treasure that Beowulf carries out of the cave, which he presents to Hrothgar upon his return to Heorot. Beowulf then returns to the surface and to his men at the "ninth hour". Beowulf is greatly rewarded by Hrothgar in accordance with the culture of the Anglo-Saxons.

Beowulf returns home to become king of his own people. Fifty years after Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, a slave steals a golden cup from the lair of an unnamed dragon at Earnaness, when the dragon sees that the cup has been stolen, it leaves its cave in a rage, burning everything in sight. Beowulf and his warriors embattle the dragon. Later, Beowulf fights the dragon alone while his men wait. Beowulf fights with the dragon supported by Wiglaf and they both kill the dragon. Beowulf sustains a mortal injury during the fight with the dragon. Beowulf is buried in Geatland on a cliff overlooking the sea.

3.3 The Style of *Beowulf* and Other Epic Features in *Beowulf*

Beowulf is different from modern poetry. The original manuscript was written in old English and what we have now are translations of the original text. Though all translators claim to have rendered translations that are very close to the original text, there are some features that have most likely been introduced by them. For instance, whereas most translations are in verse, the translations by Thomas Arnold (1876) and J.M. Kemble (1833) are in prose, raising questions about the "poetic" quality of *Beowulf*. Being an oral poetry before it being converted into writing, the poem has many tales and legends about other warriors apart from Beowulf. In the first three lines of the poem,

> Lo! the Spear-Danes' glory through splendid achievements
> The folk-kings' former fame we have heard of,
> How princes displayed then their prowess in battle (1-3).

The speaker talks about the things they have "heard of" which they now retell:

> Great-minded Healfdane; the Danes in his lifetime
> He graciously governed, grim-mooded, aged.
> Four brains of his body born in succession
> Woke in the world, war-troopers' leader
> Heorogar, hrothgar, and Halga the good;
> Heard I that Elan was Ongentheow's consort,
> The well-beloved bedmate of the war-Scylfing leader (59-66).

Names and deeds of these great men are included in the epic to show the culture of heroism that was prevalent at the time among Anglo-Saxons.

Anglo-Saxon poets typically used alliterative verse, a form of verse that uses alliteration as the principal structuring device to unify lines of poetry, as opposed to other devices such as rhyme, a tool which is used rather infrequently. This is a technique in which the first half of the line (the a-verse) is linked to the second half (the b-verse) through similarity in initial sound. In addition, the two halves are divided by a caesura: “Oft Scyld Scefing \\ sceapena preatum” (Old English1-4). This is a form of accentual verse, as opposed to our accentual-syllabic verse. There are four beats in every line – and two in every half-line.

The poet also has a choice of epithets to use in order to fulfill the alliteration, The letter “h”, for example, is always pronounced (Hroðgar: HROTH-gar) and the digraph “cg” is pronounced like “dj”, as in the word “edge”. Both “f” and “s” vary in pronunciation depending on their phonetic environment. Between vowels or voiced consonants, they are voiced, sounding like modern “v” and “z”, respectively.

In addition to the fact that the poem narratives the great deeds of heroic figures, it also contains passages that are sometimes didactic and meditative geared towards teaching a moral or imparting some cultural values to the audience. Let us examine lines 19-25:

> So must a young man strive for good
> With gracious gifts from his father’s store,
> That in later seasons, if war shall scourge,
> A willing people may serve him well.
> Tis by honour a man may rise
> In every state. Then his hour struck,
> And Scyld passed on to the peace of God

Here, the main story being told by the poet is that of the great Danish king named Scyld who had lived before Beowulf and is also shown to have been an accomplished leader. But in between the beginning of this story and the end is infused a word of advice to young people which we find in lines 19-24. This is a unique style of Beowulf as an Anglo-saxon poetry because apart from its didactic function, it shows the culture of the Anglo-Saxons that - giving gifts was a way of winning the hearts of one’s subjects as we find in this example. Again, in lines 626-628 are these words “Be mindful of glory, show forth your strength,/Keep watch against foe! No wish of your heart/Shall go unfulfilled if you lived through the fight”. Though they are the words of Hrothgar to the warriors before he left the hall for Beowulf and his men to face Grendel, they also apply to other listeners. Other meditative passages could be found in lines 928-933 and 984-987.

Another feature in the poem which makes it an epic is the narration of epic/historic tournaments and games some of which are described in lines 301-709. In these lines, some of the contests or games in which the hero, Beowulf has participated in and won are vividly described.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Beowulf is a tragedy. The tragedy of the hero becomes explicit in Part II; in his own death and in the destruction of his nation made inevitable by his death. The epic hero may defy augury, but his defiance is at the same time a resignation, recognition that man can achieve so much and that no man lives forever. Epic touches on the brevity of human life and on the wonder of man's achievements. Epic also arouses poignancy and awe.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit examines "Beowulf" as an epic poem during the Anglo-Saxon period. Beowulf is considered as a tragic hero in the poem. We are able to see various expeditions embarked upon by Beowulf. All these expeditions make him a result most especially as he dies for his country home.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the epic qualities in *Beowulf.*

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3: *THE BATTLE OF MALDON*

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Battle of Maldon is an Anglo-Saxon war poem. Heroic battles were common in the Anglo-Saxon era because powerful kings were always seeking to expand their kingdoms, which invariably led to general instability. Military campaigns or battles were the foremost means of conquest and each conquest produced heroes who must have shown loyalty to their kings by fighting their foes to finish even at the expense of their own lives. To be honourable would mean to be willing to defend ones land, its people and the king. In this text, we shall see how Anglo-Saxon warriors engaged in warfare. The poem is about an old man named Bryhtnoth and his retainers, petty noblemen of Essex, fighting and dying in a local battle which may be called a scuffle of no great importance. We shall look at the poem and its heroic style.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define what a heroic poem is
- discuss *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem
- analyse the heroic style in *The Battle of Maldon*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Heroic Poetry?

Heroic poetry is a long narrative verse that is elevated in mood and uses a dignified, dramatic, and formal style to describe the deeds of aristocratic warriors and rulers, it is usually composed without the aid of writing and is chanted or recited to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It is transmitted orally from bard to bard over generations.

Heroic poetry ranges from ancient to modern works produced over a widespread geographic area. It includes what are probably the earliest forms of this verse, panegyrics praising a hero's lineage and deeds, funeral arrangements or lines composed on a hero's death. Homer relates that when Hector's body was brought home "they laid it upon the bed and seated minstrels round it to lead the dirge".

Another type of heroic poetry is the short, dramatic lay devoted to a single event, such as the Old English "Battle of Maldon" (c. 991), describing a Viking raid on Essex, or the Old High German "Hildebrandslied" (c. 800), dealing with a duel between father and son. The mature form of heroic poetry is the full-scale epic.

The heroic age varies in different native literatures. The heroic poetry of the German, Scandinavian, and English peoples deals chiefly with a period from the 4th to the 6th century AD, the time of the great migrations of the Germanic people. Though some of the heroes portrayed are historical personages, their actions are often combined and related for artistic purposes with no regard for actual historical chronology.

Nevertheless, a heroic tale is assumed by the poet and his listeners to be somehow true. Its style is impersonal and objective, and the graphic realism of its details gives it an air of probability that outweighs the occasional intrusion of marvelous elements. None of the mundane details of the hero's acts and none of the amenities connected with them are slighted. The listener is told how the hero looks, what he wears, what he eats, and how he sleeps.

3.2 *The Battle of Maldon*: A Heroic Poem

The battle of Maldon actually took place between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons. In August AD 991, a large fleet of Viking ships, led by the Norwegian Olaf Trygvasson, came to the River Blackwater, near Maldon in Essex, to be met by a smaller force of Englishmen. The poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, tells how the Vikings crossed the causeway over the river, and in the ensuing fight, the leader of the English Earldoman Byrhtnoth, was killed, and the English force defeated. The English defeat is not difficult to explain. They were outnumbered, Byrhtnot allowed the Vikings to cross the causeway, and many of the English forces fled when Byrthnoth was killed.

According to www.ringnett.com, depending on how big the ships were, the Vikings would have had a force of between 1,800 and 3,700 warriors. In a note, J. Campbell suggests that if Byrhtnoth's host was recruited from Essex on the five hide system, then there would have been about 600-700 men (Cooper, 1993: 90). This contrast in force of numbers must have contributed to the defeat of Earldoman Byrhtonoth and his men. Analysis of the poem matched with archaeology reveals that most of the fighting was around the mouth of the

causeway over the River Pante between the mainland and Northey Island in the Blackwater estuary. The Vikings had landed and disembarked on Northey Island. This indicates that most of the fighting would have been in a relatively small area, and this would have been a disadvantage for the defending English.

The main factor that cost the English the battle was that Byrhtnoth invited the Vikings to cross the ford, a seemingly reckless thing to do. The poem states that it was 'foolhardy pride' that made him invite the enemy onto firm ground (line 89). However, it has been suggested that because of the shallow draughts of the Viking ships, Byrhtnoth may have thought that in the dark they would be able to go further upriver and put in there, and so get around him and his troops (see "Battle of Maldon" in www.ringnett.com). Scraggy agrees with this. He says that Byrhtnoth's forces in their original position had stalemated the Vikings. He could keep them on the Island, but could not force them to engage nor prevent them from evacuating by ship. Withdrawing and letting the Vikings over the causeway was the only way to bring them to battle, thus to a certain extent securing the safety of the town of Maldon (Scragg, 1991:148). R. Elliot suggests that it may have "Byrhtnoth's very English belief in fair play, that it wasn't cricket to let the other side just sit there that made him take this fatal step". Had Byrhtnoth not invited the enemy onto the battle ground and waited until the tide had gone out before starting the battle, reinforcements may have had time to arrive, helping to balance the forces. Nevertheless, for whatever reason he did it, inviting the Vikings onto the mainland sacrificed a very good position, and gave up what small advantage that the English had.

The Battle of Maldon contains qualities that most heroic poems contain. Almost always, heroic poems narrate the deeds of dead warriors or achievers who may have died struggling. We can see how the bard or the poet narrates the deeds of Byrhtnoth in battle. The poet uses both dramatic and formal styles. The dramatic style makes the words of Byrhtnoth sound and clear. It gives the opportunity for Byrhtnoth to make his speech. This style will enable the poem to be easily adapted into drama. The poet's narrative technique is also formal. He seems not too familiar with the hero. He recounts his strengths and weaknesses objectively. His journalistic documentation of the poem makes it different from a full-fledged epic poem. The next sub-topic will elucidate more on the nature of heroic poetry as exemplified in *The Battle of Maldon*.

3.3 The Heroic Style in *The Battle of Maldon*

All heroic poems have some relationship with history, either genuine history or what is believed to be genuine history; but only in "Maldon" is the history so recent as to make the account of the battle almost a news story. Research shows that English chroniclers and Scandinavian skalds often produced occasional verse

in celebration of particular events, but such verse is likely to be a collection of the facile phrases of official court eulogy or of patriotic propaganda.
The structure of the poem falls into two parts: the first part deals with the beginning of the battle and the death of Byrhtnoth; the second part describes the individual speeches and actions of the surviving retainers. These two parts are noticeably different in style and tone.

The focus in the first part is mainly on Byrhtnoth and his activities as a leader. He orders his retainers into formation, gives elementary instruction to the crowd of untrained peasants who make up the army, and serves spokesman for his people. He, at first, orders the ford to be held and then allows the Vikings access to the mainland.

In a general way, the poem is dominated by what we might call simply the realistic style – plain, concrete, sometimes almost like prose, and with very few of the noun-compounds so common in most Old English verse. The following passage points to this:

> When they (the Vikings) understood and saw clearly that they were meeting fierce defenders of the bridge, the hateful strangers began to use trickery and asked to have access (to the shore), to go over the ford and bring their troops.

In itself this style is rather remarkable, for it could not have been easy to use the Old English poetic style, with its unfortunate tendency to dissolve frequently into echoing and eddying variations, to tell a plain tale with such economy. The poet may have intentionally used the broken style to signify the fall of the Anglo-Saxon. Nevertheless the starting of the poem seems the poem may have been abridged as it begins with ellipsis before we are being introduced to the main action of the warriors on the field.

	…. Was broken.
He bade a warrior	abandon his horse
And hurry forward	to join the fighters,
	(Lines 1-3)

That the poem makes use of prosaic diction in some places does not lessen its weight of being categorized as a heroic poem. This is because as the poem progresses the prosaic style becomes elevated most especially in the way Byrhtnoth Viking messenger:

Byrhtnoth addressed him,	brandished his shield
Shook pliant ash-spear,	speaking with words

Enraged and resolute, gave him answer:
'Hear you, sea-rover, what my people say?
The tribute they'll send you is tribute of spears,
Ancient sword-edge and poisoned point,
Weapons availing you little in war!
Pirate messenger, publish this answer,
Proclaim to your people tidings more grim;
Here stands no ignoble eorl with his army
Guarding my lord aEthelred's country and coast
His land and his folk. The heathen shall fall
In the clash of battle. Too shameful it seems
That you with your tribute should take your ships
Unfought when thus far you have invaded our land.
You shall not so easily take our treasure,
But sword edge and spear-point first shall decide,
The grim play of battle, ere tribute is granted.'
(Lines 42-59)

There is a marked tendency in Maldon" for these two styles to alternate, an alternation which usually coincides with shifts from action to summarizing reflection, or from personal encounters in battle to mass "tactical" movements, or from concrete details to generalizations. Epic diction become noticeably more frequent as the poem goes on, not only in set-pieces like the passage quoted but also in the language of the speeches and particularly in the highly stylized way of describing the fighting. This increasing use of epic diction is very much related to the meaning of the poem. A real historical event is being raised to a higher level of significance; the actions thus become increasingly symbolic; the ordinary identifiable men of Essex approach and enter the world of heroes, the world of legend.

The pattern of the poem from line 40 may be described as an elevation of style, if we may extend style to mean a way of acting as well as a way of speaking. It is the heroic style itself which is embodied in the figure of Byrhtnoth, both in the way he speaks and in the way he acts. He is the pattern and formula for the rest. He acts and talks like a hero. Ho encourages his soldiers and sthrenghten them. When he is dying, his courage never ceases. He speaks boldly for the repose of his soul if he dies.
Like Beowulf when he encounters Unferth at King Hrothgar's court, Byrhtnoth is faced with a verbal challenge. The Viking messenger's speech (29-41) is a master-piece of insult, deliberately infuriating in its arrogance and its tone of contemptuous wheedling. The heroic verbal response is unquestionably demanded.

Like Beowulf, Byrhtnoth meets his challenge perfectly. He can match irony with even greater irony. Like the spear which Wulfmaer later draws from Byrhtnoth's body and sends back to kill a Viking, the barbed words of the Viking's challenge are deftly caught, ironically accepted, and sent back in a notable display of heroic wit.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Just like *Beowulf, The Battle of Maldon* is another Anglo-Saxon war poem which ends tragically. The poem's simplicity and directness point to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon poet has created a heroic poem out of brute fact. He has been able to forego the great resources of the epic poets- the romantic glamour of antiquity and strange beings, or the plot and characters already long cherished by the audience.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see what heroic poetry is all about. We also discussed *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem. We were able to also trace the history of England to the period of several battles between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxon.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss *The Battle of Maldon* as a heroic poem.

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UNIT 4: CHAUCER'S POETRY

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Geoffrey Chaucer is regarded as the father of English literature. This is so because it is sometimes argued that the greatest contribution that his work made to English literature was in popularizing the literary use of the vernacular, English, rather than French or Latin. English had, however, been used as a literary language for centuries before Chaucer's life, and several of Chaucer's contemporaries such as John Gower, William Langland, and the Pearl Poet also wrote major literary works in English. This unit therefore, examines Chaucer's major poem, *The Canterbury Tales*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- relate Chaucer's biography;
- discuss the nature of Chaucer's poetry;
- assess the style of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales;*
- examine the themes of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.*

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Chaucer's Biography

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London sometime around 1343, though the precise date and location of his birth remain unknown. His father and grandfather were both London vintners, several previous generations had been merchants in Ipswich. (His family name derives from the French "Chausseur" meaning "Shoemaker"). In 1324 John Chaucer, Geoffrey's father, was kidnapped by an aunt in the hope of marrying the twelve-year-old boy to her daughter so that she could keep the property in Ipswich. The aunt was imprisoned and the £250 fine levied suggests that the family was financially secure – bourgeois, if not elite.

John Chaucer married Agnes Copton, who, in 1349, inherited properties including 24 shops in London from her uncle, Hamo de Copton, who is described in a will, dated 3 April 1354 and listed in the city Hustings Roll as "Moneyer"; he was said to be moneyer at the Tower of London. In the City Hustings Roll 110, 5, Ric II, dated June 1380.

Geoffrey Chaucer worked for Elizabeth de Burgh, the countess of Ulster as a courtier. He also worked as a diplomat and a civil servant. In 1359, in the early stages of the Hundred Years' War, Edward III invaded France and Chaucer travelled with Lionel of Antwerp, 1st Duke of Clarence, Elizabeth's husband, as part of the English army. In 1360, he was captured during the siege of Rheims. Edward paid £16 for his ransom, a considerable sum, and Chaucer was released. Around 1366, Chaucer married Phllipa (de) Roet. She was lady-in-waiting to Edward III's queen, Philippa of Hainaubt.

Chaucer probably studied law in the Inner Temple in London. He became a member of the Royal court of Edward III as a variet de Chambre on 20 June, 1367, a position which could entail a wide variety of tasks. He travelled abroad many times, at least some of them in his role as a varlet. Chaucer travelled to Picardy as part of a military expedition, and visited Genoa and Florence in 1373. Numerous scholars such as Skeat, Boitani, and Rowland suggested that, on this Italian trip, he came into contact with Petrarch or Boccaccio. They introduced him to medieval Italian poetry, the forms and stories of which he would use later.

A widespread knowledge of Chaucer's works is attested to by the many poets who imitated or responded to his writing. John Lydgate was one of the earliest poets to write continuations of Chaucer's unfinished Tales while Robert Henryson's Testament of Cressied completed the story of Cressida left unfinished in his "Troilus and Criseyde". Many of the manuscripts of Chaucer's works contain material from these poets and later appreciations by the romantic era poets were shaped by their failure to distinguish the later "additions" from original Chaucer. Seventeenth and eighteenth century writers such as John Dryden admired Chaucer for his stories, but not for his rhythm and rhyme, as few critics could then read Middle English and the text had been butchered by printers. It was not until the late 19th century that the official Chaucerian canon, accepted today, was decided upon, largely as a result of Walter William Skeat's work.

Roughly seventy-five years after Chaucer's death, the *Canterbury Tales* was selected by William Caxton to be one of the first books to be printed in England.

3.2 Chaucer's Poetry

Chaucer's poetry is different from the Anglo-Saxon poetry. Chaucer wrote in continental accentual-syllabic meter, a style which had developed around the twelfth century as an alternative to the alliterative Anglo-Saxon metre. Chaucer is known for his metrical innovation, inventing the rhyme royal, and being one of the first English poets to use the five-stress line, decasyllabic, in his work; only a few anonymous short works used it before him.

The arrangement of these five-stress lines into rhyming couplets, first seen in his "The Legend of Good Women", was used in much of his later work and became one of the standard poetic forms in English. His early influence as a satirist is also important, with the common humorous device, the funny accent of a regional dialect, apparently making its first appearance in "The Reeve's Tale". Chaucer's poetry along with other writers of the era, is credited with helping to standardize the London dialect of the Middle English language from a combination of the Kentish and Midlands dialects. This is probably overstated; the influence of the court, chancery and bureaucracy of which Chaucer was a part remains a more probable influence on the development of Standard English. Modern English is somewhat distanced from the language of Chaucer's poems owing to the effect of the Great Vowel Shift some time after his death. This change in the pronunciation of English, still not fully understood, makes the reading of Chaucer difficult for the audience. The status of the final "-e" in Chaucer's verse is uncertain: it seems likely that during the period of Chaucer's writing the final "-e" was dropping out of colloquial English and that its use was somewhat irregular. Chaucer's versification suggests that the final "-e" is sometimes to be vocalized, and sometimes to be silent; however, this remains a point on which there is disagreement. When it is vocalized, most scholars pronounce it as a schwa. Apart from the irregular spelling, much of the vocabulary is recognizable to the modern reader.

3.3 *The Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century. The tales are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.

The innovation of spring with which the General Prologue begins is lengthy and formal compared to the language of the rest of the prologue.

> When April the sweet showers fall
> And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all

The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tander shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep sway the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long tto go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick
(The Canterbury Tales)

The first lines situate the story in a particular time and place, but the speaker does this in cosmic and cyclical terms, celebrating the vitality and richness of spring. This approach gives the opening lines a dreamy, timeless, unspecified locality, and it is therefore surprising when the narrator reveals that he is going to describe a pilgrimage that he himself took rather than telling a love story. A pilgrimage is a religious journey undertaken for penance and grace. As pilgrimages went, Canterbury was not a very difficult destination for an English person to reach. It was, therefore, very popular in fourteenth–century England, as the narrator mentions. Pilgrims travelled to visit the remains of Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170 by Knights of King Henry II. Soon after his death, he became the most popular saint in England. The pilgrimage in *The Canterbury Tales* should not be thought of as an entirely solemn occasion, because it also offered the pilgrims an opportunity to abandon work and take a vacation.

In line 20, the narrator abandons his unspecified, all-knowing point of view, identifying himself as an actual person for the first time by inserting the first person "I" as he relates how he met the group of pilgrims while staying at the Tabard Inn. He emphasizes that this group, which he encountered by accident, was itself formed quite by chance (25-26). He then shifts into the first-person plural, referring to the pilgrims as "we" beginning in line 29, asserting his status as a member of the group.

The narrator ends the introductory portion of his prologue by noting that he has "tyme and space" to tell his narrative. His comments underscore the fact that he is

writing some time after the events of his story, and that he is describing the characters from memory. He has spoken and met with these people, but he has waited a certain length of time before sitting down and describing them. He seeks to describe each pilgrim as he or she seemed to him is also important, for it emphasizes that his descriptions are not only subject to his memory but are also shaped by his individual perceptions and opinions regarding each of the characters. He positions himself as a mediator between two groups: the group of pilgrims, of which he was a member, and us, the audience, whom the narrator explicitly addresses as "you" in lines 34 and 38.

On the other hand, the narrator's declaration that he will tell us about the "condition", "degree" and "array" (dress) of each of the pilgrims suggests that his portraits will be based on observed facts as well as his own opinions. He spends considerable time characterizing the group member according to their social positions. The pilgrims represent a diverse cross section of fourteenth – century English society. Medieval social theory divided society into three broad classes, called "estates": the military, the clergy, and the laity. In the portraits that are seen in the rest of the "General Prologue", the knight and squire represent the military estate. The clergy is represented by the prioress (and her nun and three priests), the Monk, the Frair, and the Parson. The other characters, from the wealthy Frankling to the poor Polyman, are the members of the laity. These lay characters can be further subdivided into landowners (the Franklin), professionals (the Clerk, the Man of the Law, the Guildsmen, the physician, and the shipman). Labourers (the cook and the Polyman), stewards (the Miller, the Manciple, and the Reeve), and church offers (the Summoner and the Pardoner). Chaucer's descriptions of the various characters and their social roles reveal the influence of the medieval genre of estates satire.

3.4 Chaucer's Style

The variety of Chaucer's tales shows the breadth of his skill and his familiarity with countless rhetorical forms and linguistic styles. Medieval schools of rhetoric at the time encouraged such diversity, dividing literature into high, middle, and low styles as measured by the density of rhetorical forms and vocabulary. Another popular method of division came from St. Augustine, who focused more on audience response and less on subject matter. Augustine divided literature into "majestic persuades", "temperature pleases", and "subdued teaches". Writers were encouraged to write in a way that kept in mind the speaker, subject, audience, purpose, manner, and occasion. Chaucer moves freely between all of these styles. He not only considers the readers of his work as an audience but the other pilgrims within the story as well, creating a multi-layered rhetorical puzzle of ambiguities. Chaucer's rises above medieval theories of style and rhetoric.

It can be said that Chaucer avoids targeting any specific audience or social class of readers, focusing instead on the characters of the story and writing their tales with

a skill proportional to their social status and learning. However, even the lowest characters, such as the Miller, show surprising rhetorical ability, although their subject matter is more lowbrow. Vocabulary also plays an important part, as those of the higher classes refer to a woman as a "lady", while the lower classes use the word "wenche", with no exceptions. At times the same word will mean entirely different things between classes. The word "pitee", for example, is a noble concept to the upper classes, while in the "Merchant's Tales" it refers to sexual intercourse. Again, however, tales such as the Nun's Priest's Tale show surprising skill with words among the lower classes of the group, while the "Knight's Tale" is at times extremely simple.

Chaucer uses the same meter throughout in most of the tales, with the exception of "Sir Thomas" and his prose tales. It is a *decasyllable* line, probably borrowed from French and Italian forms, with *riding rhyme* and, occasionally, with a Caesura in the middle of a line. His meter would later develop into the heroic meter of the 15th and 16th centuries and is an ancestor of iambic pentameter.

3.5 Themes of *the Canterbury Tales*

There are various themes in the work. The major themes are discussed below.

Religion

The Tales reflect various views of the church in Chaucer's England. After the Black Death, many Europeans began to question the authority of the established church. Some turned to "lollardy", while others chose less extreme paths, starting new monastic orders or smaller movements exposing church corruption in the behaviour of the clergy, false church relics or abuse of indulgences. Many of the characters in the tales are religious figures, and the very setting of the pilgrimage to Canterbury is religious making religion a significant theme of the work. Two characters, the pardoner and the summoner, whose roles apply the church's secular power, are both portrayed as deeply corrupt, greedy, and abusive. A pardoner in Chaucer's days was a person from whom one bought Church "indulgences" for forgiveness of sins, but pardoners were often thought guilty of abusing their office for their own gain. Chaucer's pardoner openly admits the corruption of his practice while hawking his wares. The summoner is a church officer who brought sinners to the church court for possible excommunication and other penalties. Corrupt summoners would write false citations and frighten people into bribing them in order to protect their interests. Chaucer's summoner is portrayed as guilty of the very kinds of sins he is threatening to bring others to court for, and is hinted as having a corruption relationship with the pardoner.

Social Class and Convention

The upper class or nobility, represented chiefly by the knight and his squire, was in Chaucer's time steeped in a culture of chivalry and courtliness. Nobles were

expected to be powerful warriors who could be ruthless on the battlefield, yet mannerly in the King's court and Christian in their actions. Knights were expected to form a strong social bond with the men who fought alongside them, but an even stronger bond with a woman whom they idealized in order to strengthen their fighting ability. Though the aim of chivalry was to noble action, often its conflicting values degenerated into violence. Church leaders often tried to place restrictions on jousts and tournaments, which at times ended in the death of the loser. "The Knight's Tale" shows how the brotherly love of two fellow knights turns into a deadly feud at the sight of a woman whom both idealize, with both knights willing to fight the other to death in order to win her. Chivalry was in Chaucer's day on the decline, and it is possible that "The Knight's Tale" was intended to show its flaws, although this is disputed. Chaucer himself had fought in the Hundred Year's War under Edward III, who heavily emphasized chivalry during his reign.

Relativism versus Realism

Chaucer's characters each express different views of reality, creating an atmosphere of relativism. As Helen Cooper says:

> Different genres give different readings of the world:
> The fabliau scarcely notices the operations of God, the saint's
> life focuses on those at the expense of physical reality, tracts and
> sermons insist on prudential or orthodox morality, romances
> privilege human emotion.

The sheer number of varying persons and stories renders the *Tales* as a set unable to arrive at any definite truth or reality.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Geoffrey Chaucer has been recognized as the father of English literature. His works influenced the rest of other literary works which were written after him. He popularized the local English language and his works became accessible to many English people. This unit examines Chaucer and his poetry.

5.0 SUMMARY

The unit examines briefly the biography of Geoffrey Chaucer and the nature of his poetry. Attempt is made to discuss the *Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer's Style as well. The unit also looks into the themes of *Canterbury Tales*.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

i. Discuss Chaucer's style in *The Canterbury Tales.*
ii. Discuss the themes of *The Canterbury Tales.*

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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MODULE 2: THE RENAISSANCE POETRY

INTRODUCTION

Module 2 discusses Renaissance as a literary movement in England. The whole module will specifically discuss what Renaissance is; some Elizabethan Poems, Shakespearean sonnets and some of the metaphysical poets.

Unit 1: What is Renaissance?
Unit 2: Elizabethan Poetry
Unit 3: Shakespearean Sonnets
Unit 4: Metaphysical Poetry

UNIT 1 WHAT IS RENAISSANCE?

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Renaissance came immediately after the Middle Ages. Renaissance cut across the whole of Europe beginning from Italy. Till today, most poets still pattern their works after Renaissance poetry. This unit simply examines what Renaissance is and its features.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. explain what Renaissance is;
2. discuss the features of Renaissance;
3. describe the nature of English Renaissance.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Renaissance?

The Renaissance was a cultural movement that profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period. The Renaissance began from Italy and spread to the rest of Europe by the 16th century. Its influence was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, religion, and other aspects of intellectual inquiry. Renaissance scholars employed the humanist method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art (*Wikipedia*).

There remains a long debate about what exactly constituted the Renaissance. Essentially, it was a cultural and intellectual movement, intimately tied to society and politics of the late fourteenth to early seventeenth centuries, although it is commonly restricted to just the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In a way, some

scholars claimed that it must have been stimulated by Petrarch, who had a passion for rediscovering lost manuscripts and a fierce belief in the civilizing power of ancient thought, and in part by conditions in Florence. The Renaissance was a movement dedicated to the rediscovery and use of classical learning. By classical learning we mean knowledge and attitudes from the Ancient Greek and Roman periods.

Literarily, Renaissance means "rebirth", and Renaissance thinkers believed the period between themselves and the fall of Rome, which they labeled the Middle Ages, had seen a decline in cultural achievement compared with the earlier eras. Participants intended, through the study of classical texts, textual criticism and classical techniques, to both reintroduce the heights of those ancient days and improve the situation of their contemporaries.

3.2 Features of Renaissance

The main features of Renaissance include the following:

- Realism and expressionism – Realism is the general attempt to depict things accurately, from either a visual, social or emotional perspective.
- Humanism is another feature of Renaissance. Humanism is devoted to the study of mankind, instead of the theological devotion of the Middle Age. The Renaissance scholars were known as "humourists" and their subjects of study came to be called the "humanities". In other words, they emphasized reason, a questioning attitude, experimentation, and free inquiry.
- It glorified the individual and approved worldly pleasures, viewing life as worthwhile for its own sake, not chiefly as a preparation for the life to come.
- It focused attention upon secular society rather than the medieval preoccupation with the church and religious affairs.
- It featured great achievements in literature, art, and science.

3.3 The English Renaissance

As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, English students were frequenting the Italian universities. Soon the study of Greek was introduced into England, also, first at Oxford; and it was cultivated with such good results that when, early in the sixteenth century, the great Dutch student and reformer, Erasmus, unable through poverty to reach Italy, came to Oxford instead, he found there a group of accomplished scholars and gentlemen whose instruction and hospitable companionship aroused his unbounded delight. One member of this group was John Colet, Later Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, who was to bring new life into the secondary education of English boys by the establishment of St. Paul's

Grammar School, based on the principle of kindness in place of the merciless severity of the traditional English system.

The established literary culture influenced Renaissance in England. While Greek was spoken so powerfully by the cultivated class, other forces were contributing to revolutionize life as a whole and all men's outlook upon it. The invention of printing, multiplying books in unlimited quantities where before there had been only a few manuscripts laboriously copied page by page, absolutely transformed all the processes of knowledge and almost of thought. Not much later began the vast expansion of the physical world through geographical exploration. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, the new worlds were discovered. The discovery of the new worlds further helped in the expansion of Renaissance.

The whole of England was profoundly stirred by the Renaissance to a new and most energetic life, but not least was this true of the Court, where for a time literature was very largely centred. Since the old nobility had mostly perished in the wars, both Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor line, and his son, Henry VIII, adopted the policy of replacing the nobility with able and wealthy men of the middle class, who would be strongly devoted to themselves. The court therefore became a brilliant and crowded circle of unscrupulous but unusually adroit statesmen, and a centre of lavish entertainments and display. Under this new aristocracy the rigidity of the feudal system was relaxed, and life became somewhat easier for all the dependent classes. Modern comforts were largely introduced, and with them the Italian arts; Tudor architecture, in particular, exhibited the originality and splendor of an energetic and self-confident age. William Shakespeare and Thomas Wyatt were royal poets. Wyatt himself was popular with his courtly poems.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Discuss at least five features of renaissance poetry.

4.0 CONCLUSION

English Renaissance had a strong tradition of literature in the English vernacular and it gradually increased as the use of the printing press became common by the mid-16th century. The royal court really helped in popularizing arts and many English people had access to reading since the Anglican Church had adopted the use of English to communicate. Renaissance humanism became popular, even Queen Elizabeth herself was a product of Renaissance humanism. English people eventually dropped the medieval concern with faith, authority and tradition. Reason became glorified as more and more people began to read.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the Renaissance in England to you. We also gave you the peculiar features of Renaissance and where it probably started from. In the next unit therefore, you will be introduced to Elizabethan poetry. Here, you will be able to see how Renaissance features appear in most of these poems.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by Renaissance?
2. How did it affect the English people?

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UNIT 2 ELIZABETHAN POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Elizabethan period (1558 to 1603) in poetry is characterized by a number of frequently overlapping developments. The introduction and adaptation of themes, models and verse forms from other European traditions and classical literature, the Elizabethan song tradition, the emergence of a courtly poetry often centred around the figure of the monarch and the growth of a verse-based drama are among the most important of these developments.

Moreover, a large number of Elizabethan poets wrote songs, including Nicholas Grimald, Thomas Nashe and Robert Southwell. There are also a certain number of extant anonymous songs from the period. Arguably, the greatest of all the songwriters was Thomas Campion. Campion is notable because of his experiments with metres based on counting syllables rather than stresses. These quantitative metres were based on classical models and should be viewed as part of the wider Elizabethan revival of Greek and Roman artistic methods. The songs were printed either in miscellanies or anthologies such as Richard Tottel's 1557 songs and sonnets printed to be performed. These performances formed an integral part of both public and private entertainments. By the end of the 16th century, a new generation of composers, including John Dowland, William Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons emerged. Thomas Morley was instrumental to promoting the art of Elizabethan song to an extremely high musical level.

3.2 HUMFREY GIFFORD: A MAJOR ELIZABETHAN POET

Most writers of the history of the poetry and literature of the Elizabethan age have not so much mentioned the name of Humfrey Gifford. George Ellis gives three short pieces of Giffords in his "Specimens of the Early English Poets" (1845), and Edward Farr reprinted seven of the religious poems in his "Select Poetry, Chiefly Devotional, of the Reign of Elizabethan" (1845), and the Rev. Alexander B. Grosart reprinted the poems of Gifford in 1870 in an edition of one hundred and six copies, and again in 1875 in one of forty-five copies, both impressions being for private circulation.

There is but one copy of the original edition of Gifford's collection of poems and prose translations called "A Posie of Gilloflowers". This according to L.W. Payne ((1903) is catalogued in the British Museum. The most important and trustworthy evidence one could find concerning Gifford is found in the Epistles-Dedicatory prefixed to the "Posie" and in certain occasional and personal references in the poems themselves. The first of the Epistles begins with" "To the worshipful, his very good Master, Edward Cope of Edon". The second Epistle – Dedicatory is addressed to "the worshipful John Stafford of bletherwicke, Esquire", to whom the author acknowledges himself deeply indebted for professed courtesies and good opinion.

Gifford's poetry could be classified into love poems, humorous pieces, religious and allegorical poems and occasional poems. As to the general features of style, it may be noted that the use of alliteration is quite frequent and often rather rough and inharmonious in effect. This was, however, a prominent feature of the poetry of his time, and should not be condemned too severely. Here are a few examples: *Rash Rancour's rage procures fond furious fightes; peace makes men swim in seas of sweet delights.*

(A commendation of peace p. 58).

Who wisely waies false fortune's fickle change.

(Of the Instability of Fortuen, p. 70).

The juxtaposition of extremes, commonly known as Petrarchism, is of frequent occurrence. The following example illustrates also the extreme pressure on alliteration:

In mirth they moane, yet smile amidst their woe:
In fire they freese, in frost they fry straightway:
Swift legges to runne, yet are not able goe:
Such is the state in which poore lovers stay.

(Of the Uncontented Estate of Lovers, p. 18).

Another quotation showing the combination of internal rhyme with alliteration has a pleasing effect:

Her smiles are wyles, to cause men hope for hap,
Her traynes breed paynes, thought pleasant be the show,
Him whom she now doth dandle in her lap,
Straightway sustains a wretched overthrow.
(On the Instability of Fortune, p. 71).

It seems the metrical structure is almost mechanical in its regularity, yet, as has been indicated, it flows naturally and spontaneously.

The love poems seem to center around one Gentlewoman. One could easily imagine that every poem records some phase of an actual passion. In the poem, "A Renouncing of Love", the poet argues from the absolutely foolish antics of lovers that there is no reason in love:

They frye and freese in myldest weather.
They weepe and laugh, even both together…
Since reason rules not Venus' sport,
No reason bids me scale that forte.

In another, "For his Friende", he bewails the torments of Cupid's bondage which he must endure, and prays his mistress to have pity on him:

As late abrode I cast my lookes,
In Fancie's lune I fast was cought,
And beauty with her bayted hookes,
Hath me alas in bondage brought;
I love, but lacke the thing I crave:
I live, but want my chiefest good,
I hope, but hap I cannot have,
I serve, but starve for want of foode…
Deare dame, in humble sort I sew,
Since mine estate to you is known
Voutsafe my dolefull case to rew.
And save his life who is your owne.

Humfrey Gifford's verses are fine Renaissance verses. Most of his verses are written in couplets and quatrains. They are not too different from Shakespearean sonnets and other Elizabethan poems.

3.3 The Style of Elizabethan Poetry

Elizabethan poems were often written in iambic meters, based on a metrical foot of two syllables, one unstressed and one stressed. However, much metrical experimentation took place during the period, and many of the songs, in particular departed widely from the iambic norm. Moreover, most of the poems were courtly poems usually written in couplets and quatrains. While some of the Elizabethan

poets dwelt so much on the use of wit and conceit. For instance, Shakespeare's sonnets contain much units and conceits.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Drawing examples from two of Humfrey Gifford's poems studied in this unit, discuss the style of Elizabethan poetry.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Elizabethan poetry was important in the phase of English poetry. The Elizabethan period brought a lot of changes to modern English poetry. Hitherto, many of the new English poets still follow the Elizabethan pattern of poetry writing. Hence, it can be deduced that the Elizabethan period was as important in the history of English poetry just like any other periods.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the Elizabethan poetry and its place during the Renaissance in England. We have discussed the important trends of Elizabethan period and most importantly, we also introduced Humfrey Gifford to you as an example of Elizabethan poet. In the next unit, we shall discuss the sonnets of Shakespeare and Shakespearean style.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the significance of Elizabethan poetry in renaissance England.

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UNIT 3 SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Shakespearean sonnets arguably set a template for most of the sonnets written during the Renaissance in England and even after. It would be easy for any student of literature to identify William Shakespeare as one of the architects of Renaissance in England. Many English and non-English poets have continued to pattern their works after the Shakespearean style. In this unit, we shall examine the life of Shakespeare briefly and some of his beautiful sonnets.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. summarize the biography of William Shakespeare;
2. discuss some sonnets of Shakespeare;
3. explain the Shakespearean style of sonnets.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-on-Avon. The son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, he was probably educated at the King Edward IV Grammar school in Stratford, where he learned Latin and some Greek and read the Roman dramatists. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years older than him. Together they raised two daughters: Susana, who was born in 1583 and Judith (whose twin brother died in boyhood), born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's activities between 1585 and 1592. Shakespeare may have taught at school during this period, but it seems more probably that shortly after 1585 he went to London to begin his apprenticeship as an actor. Due to the plague, the London theatres were often closed between June 1592 and April 1594. During that period, Shakespeare probably had some income from his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his first two poems, "Venus and Adonis" (1593) and "the Rape of Lucrece" (1594). The former was a long narrative depicting the rejection of Venus by Adonis, his death, and the consequent disappearance of beauty from the world. Despite conservative objections to the poem's glorification of sensuality, it was immensely popular and was reprinted six times during the nine years following its publication.

In 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamber Lain's company of actors, the most popular of the companies acting at court. In 1599, Shakespeare joined a group of Chamber Lain's Men that would form a syndicate to build and operate a new playhouse: the Globe, which became the most famous theatre of its time. With his share of the income from the Globe, Shakespeare was able to purchase New Place, his home in Stratford.

Though Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not plays, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. The edition, The sonnets of Shakespeare, consists of 154 sonnets, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean. The sonnets fall into two groups: sonnets 1 – 126, addressed to a beloved friend, a handsome and noble young man, and sonnets 127-152, to a malignant but fascinating "Dark Lady" whom the poet loves in spite of himself.

Shakespeare is known to have invented thousands of words, often combining or contorting Latin, French and native roots. His impressive expansion of the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, includes such words as: arch-villain, birthplace, bloodsucking, courtship, dewdrop, downstairs, fanged, heartsore, hunchbacked, leapfrog, misquote, pageantry, radiance, schoolboy, stillborn, watchdog, and zary.

3.2 The Sonnets of Shakespeare

Nearly all of Shakespeare's sonnets examine the inevitable decay of time and the immortalization of beauty and love in poetry. Shakespeare's sonnets are a collection of 154 sonnets. Majority of the sonnets (1 – 126) are addressed to a young man, with whom the poet has an intense romantic relationship. The poet spends the first seventeen sonnets trying to convince the young man to marry and have beautiful children that will look like their father, ensuring his immortality. Many of the remaining sonnets focus on the power of poetry and pure love to defeat death and "all oblivious enmity" (55.9). Here, the second sonnet is analyzed:

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,
Will be a tattered weed of small worth held:
Where all the treasure of the lusty days;
To say within thine own deep sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer "This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse'
Proving his beauty by succession of thine.
This were to be new made when thou art old.
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

In this sonnet, the speaker warns the addressee about old age. According to him, in forty years more, that is, forty more years added to the recipient's age, the addressee will no longer be a youth. All his strength must have gone by this time. The speaker now advises this young man to replicate his beauty by having a son who will stand for him after he must have gone.

The final sonnets (127 – 154) are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman known to modern readers as the dark lady. Both the poet and his young man have become obsessed with the raven-haired temptress in these sonnets, and the poet's whole being is at odds with his insatiable "sickly appetite" (147.4). The tone is distressing with language of sensual feasting, uncontrollable urges, and sinful consumption. Here, sonnet 130 is analyzed:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red, than her lips red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head:
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight,

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know.
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet by heaven I think my love as rare,
As any she belied with false compare.

The speaker in this sonnet compares the beauty of his mistress with the sun. To him, his mistress' eyes glow like the sun. The speaker keeps on praising his mistress' beauty negatively comparing parts of her body with some elements of nature like roses, the sun, snow, perfumes. He condemns her eyes, hair, cheeks, breath, speech and walk. The language is sarcastic and highly ironical.

3.3 The Style of Shakespearean Sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnets are written predominantly in a meter called iambic pentameter, a rhyme scheme in which each sonnet line consists of ten syllables. The syllables are divided into five pairs called iambs or iambic feet. An iamb is a metrical unit made up of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. A line of iambic pentameter flows thus:

do REE / do REE / do REE / do REE / do REE

These examples are taken from the sonnets:

When I / do COUNT / the CLOCK / that TELLS / the TIME (Sonnets 12)
When IN / dis GRACE / with FOR / tune AND / men's EYES
I ALL / a LONe / be WEEP / my OUT / Cast STATE (Sonnet 29)
Shall I / com PARE / thee TO / a SUM / ser's DAY?
Thou ART / more LOVE / ly AND / more TEM / per ATE (sonnets 18)

There are fourteen lines in a sonnet. In the case of a Shakespearean sonnet, the first twelve lines are divided into three quatrains with four lines each. In the three quatrains, the poet establishes a theme or problem and then resolves it in the final two lines, called the couplet. The rhyme scheme of the quatrain is abab cdcd efef. The couplet has the rhyme scheme gg. This sonnet structure is commonly called the English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet, to distinguish it from the Italian Petrarchan Sonnet form which has two parts: a rhyming octave (abbaabba) and a rhyming sestet (cdcdcd). The Petrarchan sonnet style was extremely popular with Elizabethan sonneteers; much to Shakespeare disdain he mocks the conventional and excessive Petrarchan style in sonnet 130.

Whereas sonnets are usually made up of fourteen lines, three of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets do not conform to this structure. Sonnet 99 has 15 lines; sonnet 126 has 12 lines; and sonnet 145 which is written in iambic tetrameter.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Assess the aesthetics of two sonnets by Shakespeare

4.0 CONCLUSION

Shakespearean sonnets are very important in the phase of English poetry. In his sonnets, Shakespeare coined a lot of new words and also consolidated his style as the English style for sonnet writing instead of the Petrarchan style. A lot of modern poets have patterned their works after Shakespeare's sonnets. Wendy Cope's poetry is parodied after Shakespearean sonnets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the sonnets of William Shakespeare to you. We have told you that the first 17 sonnets are addressed to a Youngman while the ones from 127-154 are addressed to a promiscuous and scheming woman. The whole 154 sonnets are rich in English tradition.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a two-page essay on the sonnets of Shakespeare, paying close attention to the poet's thematic concerns and style of delivery.

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UNIT 4 METAPHYSICAL POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The metaphysical poets came after the Elizabethan poets and their poetry seems to be very popular in England alone. These metaphysical poets may have been so popular in the first half of the seventeenth century. This unit shall examine who these poets were, their style of writing and how they took over English poetry during their time.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. explain who are the metaphysical poets;
2. discuss the poetry of John Donne as being metaphysical;
3. examine the works of Andrew Marvell as metaphysical poetry

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Who are the Metaphysical Poets?

It is customary to refer to one group of poets in the first half of the seventeenth century as Metaphysical. The term "Metaphysical Poets" was coined by the poet and critic Samuel Johnson to describe a loose group of British lyric poets of the 17th century, whose work was characterized by the inventive use of conceits and their poetry revolved round love and religion. These poets were not really connected together; in fact, most of them did not even know or read each other.

Samuel Johnson referred to the beginning of the seventeenth century in the chapter on Abraham Cowley in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poet* as a

“race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets”. This does not really imply that he intended metaphysical to be used in its true sense, in that he was probably referring to a witticism of John Dryden who said of John Donne that, “he affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love”. Probably, the only writer before Dryden to speak of a certain metaphysical school or group of metaphysical poets is Drummond of Hawthornden (1585 – 1649), who in one of his letters speaks of “metaphysical ideas and Scholastical Quiddities”.

There is no scholarly consensus regarding which seventeenth century English poets or poems may be regarded as in the “metaphysical” genre. Colin Burrow, writing for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, describes John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Crashaw as the “central figures” of metaphysical poetry. In 1921, Herbert Grieson published *metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, which collected poems by Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell and Carew.

3.2 The Background of John Donne

John Donne was born in 1572 in London, England. He is known as the founder of the Metaphysical Poets, a term created by Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth-century English essayist, poet, and philosopher. The loosely associated group also includes George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and John Cleveland. The Metaphysical poets are known for their ability to startle the reader and coax new perspective through paradoxical images, subtle argument, inventive syntax, and imagery from art, philosophy, and religion using an extended metaphor known as a conceit. Donne reached beyond the rational and hierarchical structures of the seventeenth century with his exacting and ingenuous conceits, advancing the exploratory spirit of his time.

Donne entered the world during a period of theological and political unrest for both England and France; a protestant massacre occurred on Saint Bartholomew’s day in France; while in England, the Catholics were the persecuted minority. Being born into a Roman Catholic family, Donne’s personal relationship with religion was tumultuous and passionate, and at the centre of much of his poetry. He studied at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities in his early teen years. He did not take a degree at either school, because to do so would have meant subscribing to the thirty-nine Articles, the doctrine that defined Anglicanism. At age twenty he studied law at Lincoln’s Inn. Two years later he succumbed to

religious pressure and joined the Anglican Church after his younger brother, convicted for his Catholic loyalties, died in prison. Donne wrote most of his love lyrics, erotic verse, and some sacred poems in the 1590s, creating two major volumes of work: Satires, and Songs and Sonnets.

In 1598, after returning from a two-year naval expedition against Spain, Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton. Donne secretly married Anne More, the sixteen-year-old niece of Lady Egerton. Donne's father-in-law disapproved of the marriage. As punishment, he did not provide a dowry for the couple and had Donne briefly imprisoned.

Donne started writing the Divine poems in 1607. In Pseudo-Martyr published in 1610, Donne displayed his extensive knowledge of the laws of the church and state, arguing that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their faith. In 1615, James I pressured him to enter the Anglican Ministry by declaring that Donne could not be employed out of the church. He was appointed Royal Chaplain later that year. His wife died in 1617 aged thirty-three shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child. The holy sonnets are also attributed to this phase of his life.

In 1621, he became dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral. In his later years, Donne's writing reflected his fear of his inevitable death. He wrote his private prayers, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, during a period of severe illness and published them in 1624. He was best known for his vivacious, compelling style and thorough examination of mortal paradox. John Donne later died in London in 1631.

3.3 John Donne's Poetry

John Donne wrote several poems, and his poetry is full of wits and conceits. Most of his poems express love, religion and fear of death. The first of Donne's poems we shall examine is the fifth of the Elegies, "His Picture" probably written in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

ELEGIE V – HIS PICTURE

Here, take my picture; though I bid farewell,
Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When weather-beaten I come backe; my hand,
Perhaps with rude oares torne, or sun beams tann'd.
My face and brest of hairecloth, and my head

With cares rash sodaine stormes, being o'rsopread,
My body' a sack of bones, broke within,
And powders blew staines scatter'd on my skinne;
If rival fooles taxe thee to 'have lov'd a man,
So foule, and course, as Oh, I may seeme than,
This shall say what I was: and thou shalt say,
Does his hurts reach mee? doth my worth decay?
Or doe they reach his judging minde, that hee
Should now love lesse, what hee did love to see?
That which in him was faire and delicate,
Was but the milke, which in loves childish state
Did nurse it: who now is grown strong enough
To feed on that, which to discus'd tasts seemes tough.

Note, to begin with, the 'real-life' situation. The poet is going away, perhaps, to join the cadiz expedition of 1596-1697, an overseas posting, we might say, and he gives his beloved a picture to remember him by. Nevertheless, this is not a simple poem, but one which holds and balances many conflicting emotions and attitudes. It begins abruptly thus:

Here, take my Picture…

The poet's feelings burst forth; he cannot stay for formality, or even for common politeness. In both the literary and the social sense this is an "unconventional" poem. Then the poet implies that though the lady needs a picture to remind her to her lover, he doesn't need a picture of her, because her image is engraved in his heart "where his soul dwells", and his love is not dependent on anything physical. Next is a wry and harsh allusion to death, to the fact that he may not return. The picture resembles him. It is a good "likeness'; yet is not reality, but a 'shadow'; therefore, if he is dead, and becomes a 'shade' it will resemble him still more. Then he compares what he may be when he returns with what the picture represents him to be now. The grammar of the next sentence is:

'*When… I come back'* – the worse for wear, and other girls ask what you can see in me – 'this' – the picture - 'shall say what I was'. The vivid evocation of perils and suffering – note that the energy of "*My body's a sack of bones, broken within/And powders blew staines scatter'd on my skinne:"* is horrifyingly real, but we also feel that the poet is ironically asking for sympathy, and we are pulled up short by the "rival fooles". They are his sweetheart's girlfriends, imagined tittering at the strange, battered bearded figure that he "may be then", and wondering what she finds attractive in him. He tells her what to say in reply. She can point to the picture and prove by its means that she fell in love with "as proper a man as ever went on neat's leather".

Next is one of the sixteen Holy Sonnets.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so;
For, those, whom thou thinkst, thou dost over throw,
Die not, poore Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy picture bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's deliverie.
Thou'rt slave to Fate, Chance, Kings and Desperate men,
And dost with poison, warre, and siciknesse dwell,
And popppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shall die.

The theme is simple. The language is plain, the tone assured and full of energy. This is a lively poem about death, and a simple, calm denial "for thou art not so" establishes its feeling. Here we meet again the theme of death and sleep, of the picture and reality. As sleep refreshes us, and delivers us from life, so does death. Death has no power in himself; we die when it is our fate to do so, or by accident, or through the exercise of arbitrary power, or we are murdered. Death, so to speak, 'lives' in bad and miserable company. Donne believes that death will no longer live in the mortal bodies of humans. "One short sleep past, we wake eternally". These clauses bring hope in the reader that one day, human race shall be alive eternally.

3.4 The Life of Andrew Marvell

Due to the inconsistencies of ambiguities within his work and the scarcity of information about his personal life, Andrew Marvell has been a source of fascination for scholars and readers since his work found recognition in the early decades of the twentieth century. Born in 1621, Marvell grew up in the Yorkshire town of Hull where his father, Rev. Andrew Marvell, was a lecturer at Holy Trinity Church and Master of the Chaterhouse. At age twelve Marvell began his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge. Four years later two of Marvell's poems, one in Latin and one in Greek, were published in an anthology of Cambridge poets. After receiving his B.A. in 1639, Marvell stayed on at Trinity, apparently to complete an M.A. degree. In 1641, however, his father drowned and Marvell abandoned his studies. During the 1640's, Marvell travelled extensively on the continent, adding Dutch, French, Spanish, and Italian, to His Latin and Greek.

Marvell spent most of the 1650's working as a tutor first for Mary Fairfax, daughter of a retired Cromwellian general, then for one of Cromewll's wards. Scholars believe that Marvell's greatest lyrics were written during this time. In

1657, Marvell was appointed Milton's Latin secretary, a post Marvell held until his election to parliament in 1660.

Marvell used his political status to free Milton, who was jailed during the Restoration, and quite possibly saved the elder poet's life. In 1678, after 18 years in parliament, Marvell died rather suddenly of a fever. Gossip of the time had it that the Jesuits (a target of Marvell's satire) may have poisoned him. After his death he was remembered as a fierce and loyal patriot.

3.5 The Poetry of Andrew Marvell

In the poems of Marvell, metaphysical wit is dominant. Let us examine "*The Fair Singer"*, one of his best poems. "The Fair Singer" is a slight and charming love lyric in which the metaphysical conceit is used with playful ingenuity; indeed it was in the skill with which the game was played, the convention exploited, that the seventeenth-century reader of verse such as this found much of pleasure. The Lady's beauty is dazzling, her voice enchanting: she has made a conquest of the poet who is her prisoner. The war-captivity conceit is resolved in the last stanza, where the lady's beauty and voice become the wind and sun, natural powers against which the poet is helpless, as a ship might be against an enemy bearing down with the sun behind him.

To make a final conquest of all me,
Love did compose so sweet an Enemy,
In whom both Beauties to my death agree,
Joining themselves in fatall harmony;
That while she with her Eyes my Heart does bind,
She with her Voice might captivate my Mind.

Our last poem is the famous "To His Coy Mistress". The poem is a metaphysical poem written during or before the interregnum. The poem is considered one of Marvell's finest and is possibly the best recognized carpe diem poem in English. Although the date of its composition is not known, it may have been written in the early 1650s'. At that time, Marvell was serving as a tutor to the daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax.

The speaker of the poem addresses a woman who has been slow to respond to his sexual advances. In the first stanza, he describes how he would love her if he were to be unencumbered by the constraints of a normal lifespan. He could spend centuries admiring each part of her body and her resistance to his advances (i.e., coyness) would not discourage him.

I would
Love you ten years before the flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow.
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should to go praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead Gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.

In the second stanza, he laments how short human life is. One life is over, the speaker contends, the opportunity to enjoy one another is gone, as no one embraces in death. In the last stanza, the speaker urges the woman to requite his efforts, and argues that in loving one another with passion, they will both make the most of the brief time they have to live.

Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
Through the Iron gates of Life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter and rhymes in couplets. The first verse paragraph "Had we…" is ten couplets long, the second "But at my back…" Six, and the third "Now, therefore,…" seven. The logical form of the poem runs thus:

If….
but ….
Therefore ….

3.6 The Metaphysical Style

The Metaphysical style was characterized by wit and metaphysical conceits. The metaphysical conceits are unusual similes or metaphors such as in Andrew Marvell's comparison of the soul with a drop of dew; in an expanded epigram format, with the use of simple verse forms, octosyllabic couplets, quatrains or stanzas in which length of line and rhyme scheme enforce the sense. The specific definition of wit which Johnson applied to the school was: "a kind of Discordia Concors' a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike". Their poetry diverged from the style of their times, containing neither images of nature nor allusions to classical mythology as were common. Several metaphysical poets especially John Donne were influenced by Neo-Platonism. One of the primary Platonic concepts found in metaphysical poetry is the idea that the perfection of beauty in the beloved acted as a remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm. Their work relies on images

and references to the contemporary scientific or geographical discoveries. These were used to examine religious and moral questions, often employing an element of casuistry (i.e. theoretical reasoning used to resolve moral problems, often evasive or arcane) to define their understanding or personal relationship with God.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Examine the craft of one metaphysical poet.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Metaphysical poets, though not many, really changed the phase of English poetry. These poets with their wit and conceits held my poetry lovers spell bound during the Renaissance. Nevertheless, critical opinion of the school has been varied. Some believed they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. No matter what, the group may have influenced T.S. Eliot's poetry who praised them in his essay *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921).

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce the metaphysical poets to you. We have discussed how they influenced English Poetry with their wit and conceits which were peculiar to their style of writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Who are the Metaphysical poets? Discuss any of the poems of any of them, bringing out their metaphysical qualities.

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MODULE 3 ENGLISH POETRY IN THE RESTORATION PERIOD AND THE 18TH CENTURY

This module examines the Restoration and the 18th century period. The study looks into turbulent days of England most especially the Civil War that broke out in England. The restoration period is an important period in the history of poetry in England. The module consists of four units altogether.

The first unit will discuss Satire. Satire is important to be discussed in this module because it was a tool employed during the Restoration by many poets to critique the English society.

The second unit will examine the 18th century classicism as related to the Restoration. We shall look into the style of writing poetry during this time and the major features of 18th century classical poems will be examined.

The third unit will discuss the poetry of John Dryden. Here, we shall analyse the major poems of Dryden.

The fourth unit will examine the work of Alexander Pope. We shall analyse his major poems and look at his style of writing poetry.

Unit 1: Satire in the 18th century
Unit 2: 18th Century Classicism
Unit 3: John Dryden's Poetry
Unit 4: Alexander Pope's Poetry

Unit 1 SATIRE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the Restoration and the eighteenth century, satire became a tool of writing poetry, drama and even prose. Satire is an artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or short comings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Discuss what satire is;
2. Explain the nature of satire;
3. Discuss the nature of satire in the 18th century England.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Satire?

Satire is a genre of literature, and sometimes graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement (Wikipedia). The great English lexicographer Samuel Johnson defined satire as “a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured”, and more elaborate definitions are rarely more satisfactory. In literary works, satire can be direct or indirect. With direct satire, the narrator speaks directly to the reader. With indirect satire, the author’s intent is realized within the narrative and its story. As funny as satire is, the purpose of satire is usually meant to be funny; its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit as a weapon.

3.2 The Nature of Satire

A common feature of satire is strong irony or sarcasm, but parody, burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, analogy are all frequently used in satirical writing.

This irony or sarcasm often professes to approve of the very things the satirist wishes to attack.

The word satire comes from the Latin word 'Satur' and the subsequent phrase 'lanxsatura'. Satur meant 'full', but the juxtaposition with lanx shifted the meaning to 'miscellany or medley': the expression lanx satura literally means "a full dish of various kinds of fruits".

For its nature and social role, satire has enjoyed in many societies a special freedom license to mock prominent individuals and institutions. The satiric impulse, and its ritualized expressions, carries out the function or resolving social tension. Institutions like the ritual clowns represent a safety value which reestablishes equilibrium and health in the collective imaginary which are jeopardized by the repressive aspects of society.

3.3 Satire in the 18th Century England

The 18th century was one in which exaltation of wit and reason came to the forefront of literature in the form of both Horatian and Juvenalian satires, which, through keen observation and sharp nimbleness of thought, exposed the superficial follies and moral corruption of society during the neoclassical period in Britain. Underneath the enlightenment ideals of rationality, order and knowledge, society embraced a pervasive obsession with "decorum", a façade of established traditions and vanities, as well as an innate sense of moral and political supremacy. Satires during this period aimed to point out the shortcomings of society through ridiculing unaccepted standards of thought, exposing Britain's flaws and chastising the hypocrisy of the time. Enlightenment writers Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift used different mediums of satire, different types of logic, and different targets of ridicule in order to shine a light on separate aspects of British society, providing much needed criticism of the profuse moral corruption of a society that sometimes seemed to forget the true ideals of its age.

Pope and Swift, well known for their sharply perceptive works, both looked to rhetorical masters of the rational, classical past and their separate satirical archetypes for inspiration. Pope, in his "The Rape of the Lock", is Horatian in tone, delicately chiding society in a sly but polished voice by holding up a mirror to the follies and vanities of the upper class. Pope does not actively attack the self-important pomp of the British aristocracy, but rather presents it in such a way that gives the reader a new perspective from which to easily view the actions in the story as foolish and ridiculous. A gentle mockery of the upper class, more delicate and lyrical than his brutal counterpart, Pope nonetheless is able to effectively illuminate the moral degradation of society to the public. Swift's "A Modest Proposal" however, is a quintessential Juvenalian satire, shockingly revealing an often-overlooked dimension of British colonialism with regards to the Irish

through savage ridicule and disdainful contempt. A bitter attack, Swift's morbid tale delineates an immoral and perverse solution to Ireland's economic woes using bizarre yet brilliantly clear logic and a detached tone in order to attack indifference to the poor. Swift's satirical tone, relying on realism and harshness to carry its message, is much more ascorbic than his counterpart, perfectly displaying Juvenalian satire's ability to shock and ridicule.

These two works of satire express their authors' profound dissatisfaction with their society. Literature that pushes for reform of any kind, social or political, acts along with entrenched tradition itself, as a dialectic force: it is the synthesis of that which is and that which is wanted that nudges society to a certain direction. Both Pope and Swift used their considerable literary talents to illuminate contemporary society, forcing them to acknowledge the shortcomings of the Neoclassical period and to move forward into a new era of true enlightenment with regards to social and political morality.

Self Assessment Exercise
What are the attributes of satire?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Most of the Neoclassical works most especially poetry was based on satire. Nevertheless, the poetry of the Neoclassical period was also based on reason and wit. Satire then became an important tool during the Neoclassical period when the upper class had set itself pompously on the affairs of England, poets used satire to deflate the pomposity.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see the meaning of satire, its nature and how it was being used in the 18th century England.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss satire in relation with 18th century England.

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UNIT 2 18TH CENTURY CLASSICISM IN ENGLAND

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Neoclassical movement coincided with the 18th Century Age of Enlightenment and continued into the early 19th century almost clashing with Romanticism. Neoclassicism is a revival of the styles and spirit of classic antiquity inspired directly from the classical period, which coincided and reflected the developments in philosophy and other areas of the Age of Enlightenment, and was at the beginning a reaction against the excesses of the preceding style.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Discuss Neoclassicism as an art movement in England;
2. Identify the features of Neoclassicism; and
3. Explain the nature of poetry during the Neoclassical period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Neoclassicism?

Neoclassicism like we have pointed out in the introduction of this unit has to do with the revival of the styles of classical period. This period coincided with the developments in philosophy and other areas of the Age of Enlightenment. The movement is often described as opposed to Romanticism. The revival can then be traced to the establishment of formal archaeology. The writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann were important in shaping this movement in both architecture and the virtual arts. His books, thoughts on the Imitation of Greek works in Painting and Sculpture were the first to distinguish sharply between Ancient Greek and Roman art, and define periods within Greek art, tracing a trajectory from growth to maturity and then imitation or decadence that continues to have influence to the present day. Winckelmann believed that art should aim at “noble simplicity and calm grandeur” and praised the idealism of Greek art, in which he said that “not

only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as an ancient interpreter of Plato teaches us, come from images created by the mind alone".

In English, the term "Neoclassicism" is used primarily of the visual arts: the similar movement in English literature which began considerably earlier is called Augustan literature, which had been dominant for several decades, and was beginning to decline by the time Neoclassicism in the virtual arts became fashionable.

3.2 Features of English Neoclassicism

The Restoration period clashed with the Neoclassical period in England. The poets of the Restoration and eighteenth century saw the poetry of the early seventeenth century as excessive, even unrefined. They associated the intensity of the tropes in metaphysical poetry with political and epistemological instability. Although the eighteenth century poets valued sociability, the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' that for Wordsworth defined good poetry would no doubt have struck eighteenth poets as unnecessarily impulsive. Between these two periods and the styles associated with them, the poets of the eighteenth century aimed for a balance. Formally, this balance was best achieved in the work of Alexander Pope as we shall see. Stylistically, Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry was dominated by the heroic couplet. This form features pairs or couplets of iambic pentameter lines. That is, each line is composed of ten syllables arranged into five groups or 'feet' of unstressed and stressed syllables; both line sin the pair and with the same sound. Each line, then, can represent a kind of balance within itself. Moreover, the prevalence of this pattern also created an expectation in readers, an expectation against which the poet could play unexpected rhythms and rhymes. The topicality of Restoration poetry, which today makes the poetry seem inaccessible, represents its own kind of balance – an attempt to counter-balance the political pull of power contemporaries.

3.3 Poetry in Neoclassical England

Over the course of the Restoration and eighteenth century, poetry became increasingly balanced. Poetry was dominated by two poets during this period: John Dryden in the Restoration and Alexander Pope through at least the first third of the eighteenth century. Both of them, though, were engaged with the precedent and influence of John Milton (1608-74). For several reasons, Milton is not usually thought of as a Restoration poet, but as his most important poems were all published after 1660 he certainly fits in any consideration of Restoration literature. Because the bulk of his public career spans the English Civil Wars of the 1640s and the Interregnum of the 1650s, Milton is treated, understandably, as a writer from a generation before that of the Restoration authors. In that sense of the Restoration, Milton is not a Restoration poet.

Poetry during the Restoration period in England employed the use of satire. The satire was highly political and social. Political satire is mostly associated with John Dryden while the social satire belongs to Alexander Pope. One thing is important, poetry was written with Neoclassical features. Various rules were followed and this made poetry somehow jerky. Moreover, poetry was used for both political and social commentary – for instance, Dryden sided with successive monarchs. Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" and Macflecknoe" reflect the topical issues of the period.

Like Dryden, Alexander Pope could certainly write satirical poetry. In its focus on dullness, Pope's Dunciad for instance, owes a debt to Dryden's "MacFlecknoe". However, Pope's "essays" such as "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) and "An Essay on Man" (1733-4) also mark an important shift away from the often topical poetry of the Restoration and towards the general and universal claims associated with the enlightenment.

Self-Assessment Exercise
What is difference between political satire and social satire?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The eighteenth century classicism in England went along with the Restoration. Like it has been discussed, the most popular poets around this time were John Dryden and Alexander Pope whose poetry turned around England during the eighteenth century. Both poets had thrived on the use of satire to elucidate most topical issues of the period. Poetry then followed the style of former Greek and Roman epics.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this poem, we have been able to tell you the nature of poetry during the Neoclassical period in England. We reviewed the works of Milton, Dryden and Pope. We said that Milton will not be adjudged a Restoration poet because of the period in which he wrote. We also informed you that thriving device used during this period was satire.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Comment on English Neoclassicism in relation to the Restoration period.

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UNIT 3 JOHN DRYDEN'S POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

John Dryden wrote many poems during the Restoration period, especially his political allegories. John Dryden had a varied career as a writer and often wrote on highly topical subjects – so topical, in fact, that Dryden could write a poem mourning the death of Cromwell in 1658 and a poem, 'Astraea Redux' celebrating Charles II in 1660, just two years later. The poem that earned Dryden his reputation for turning the contemporary into poetry is *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), concerned with the events of 1666, the Fire of London and the defeat of the Dutch navy. We shall look more into Dryden's political and writing career in his biography.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to

1. Discuss the brief history of John Dryden;
2. Analyze Dryden's allegorical poems; and
3. Discuss Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief History of John Dryden

John Dryden was born in Northamptonshire, England on August 9, 1631. He came from a landowning family with connections to parliament and the Church of England. He studied as a king's scholar at the prestigious Westminster school of London, where he later sent two of his own children. Dryden was trained in the art of rhetorical argument, which remained a strong influe4nce on the poet's writing and critical thought throughout his life.

Dryden published his first poem in 1649. He enrolled at Trinity College in Cambridge the following year, where he likely studied classics, rhetoric, and mathematics. He obtained his B.A. in 11654, graduating first in his class. In June of that year, Dryden's father died. After graduation, Dryden found work with

Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State, John Thurloe, marking a radical shift in the poet's political views. Alongside Puritan poets, John Milton and Andrew Marvell, Dryden was present at Cromwell's funeral in 1658 and one year later published his first important poem, Heroic Stanzas, eulogizing the leader.

In 1660, Dryden celebrated the regime of King Charles II with "Astraea Redux", a royalist panegyric in praise of the new king. In that poem, Dryden apologizes for his allegiance with the Cromwell government. Though Samuel Johnson excused Dryden for this, writing in his Lives of the poets (1779) that "if he changed, he changed with the nation, "he also notes that the earlier work was "not totally forgotten" and in fact "raised him enemies".

Despite this, Dryden quickly established himself after the Restoration as the leading poet and literary critic of his day. Following the death of William Davenant in April 1668, Dryden became the first official Poet Laurete of England. Dryden died on May 1, 1700 and was initially buried in St. Anne's Cemetery. In 1710, he was moved to the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey, where a memorial has been erected.

3.2 Dryden's Political Allegories

Traditionally, there is a tendency to see literature and the other arts as having a fragile connection to politics at most. The aesthetic is above the political. Dryden's poetry perfectly illustrates this late seventeenth–century combination of the literary and the political. Depending on the poem, literary issues represent politics and political issues can represent literary ones. "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681) was published just before the treason trial of Shaftesbury, leader of the opposition to James' possible succession, and cast Charles as the biblical David, Shafterbury as Achitophel and the Duke of Monmouth (Charles's illegitimate son) as Absalom. Understanding the poem, then, requires familiarity with the biblical story and the principal players and stakes in the Exclusion Crisis. Removing this poem from the Exclusion Crisis would leave us with a 1,000 line poem on the Bible (as opposed to a 1,000 – line poem which uses the Bible for a defence of the King's position in the Exclusion Crisis).

With "MacFlecknoe", published 1682, Dryden invokes the same anxiety over valid succession, but this time directs his attention toward literary succession skewing Thomas Shadwell: "for anointed dullness he was made". Ironically and unfortunately for Shadwell, it is through "MacFlecknoe" that he is remembered today. At the time, though, Shadwell had recently taken up Shaftesbury's side and published a work criticizing Dryden's defence of the court. In other words, again, the literary and the political merge in any consideration of late seventeenth-century poetry. In this way, it is understandable that the period has on the one

hand resisted the Universalist claims often made for great literature while on the other proved such a fruitful area for historicist approaches to literature.

3.3 Analysis of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel"

Like it has been pointed out in lesson 3.2, the poem is an allegory that uses the story of the rebellion of Absalom against King David as the basis for discussion of the background to the Monmouth Rebellion (1685), the Popish Plot (1678) and Exclusion Crisis.

The story of Absalom's revolt is told in the Second Book of Samuel in the Old Testament of the Bible (Chapters 14 – 18). Absalom rebels against his father King David. The handsome Absalom is distinguished by extraordinarily abundant hair, which is probably meant to symbolize his pride (2 Sam. 14:26). When David's renowned advisor, Achitophel joins Absalom's rebellion, another advisor Hushai plots with David to pretend to defect and give Absalom advice that plays into David's hands. The result was that Absalom takes the advice of the double agent Hushai over the good advice of Achitophel, who realizing that the rebellion is doomed to failure, goes home and hangs himself. Absalom is killed (against David's explicit commands) after getting caught by his hair in the thick branches of a great oak. The death of Absalom causes David enormous personal grief.

Now in 1681 in England, Charles II was in advanced years. He had had a number of mistresses and produced a number of illegitimate children. One of these was James Scott the Duke of Monmouth, who was very popular both for his personal charisma and his fervor for the protestant cause. Charles had no legitimate heirs, and his brother, the future James II of England was openly a Roman Catholic. When Charles' health suffered, there was a panic in the House of Commons over the potential for the nation being ruled by a Roman Catholic King. The Earl of Shaftesbury had sponsored and advocated the Exclusion Bill, which would prevent James II from succeeding to the throne, but this bill was blocked by the House of Lords on two occasions. In the spring of 1681, at the Oxford Parliament, Shaftesbury appealed to Charles II to legitimize Monmouth. Monmouth was caught preparing to rebel and seek the throne, and Shaftesbury was suspected of fostering this rebellion.

The poem was possibly written at Charles' behest, and published in early November 1681. On November 24th, 1681, Shaftesbury was seized and charged with high treason. A trial before a jury picked by Whig sheriff's acquitted him. Later, after the death of his father and unwilling to see his uncle, James II became King; the Duke of Monmouth executed his plans and went into full revolt. The Monmouth Rebellion was put down, and in 1685 the Duke was executed.

The poem tells the story of the first foment by making Monmouth into Absalom, Charles as David and Shaftesbury as Achitophel. It reveals Buckingham, and old enemy of Dryden as Zimri, the unfaithful servant. The poem heaps most of the blame for the rebellion on Shaftesbury and makes Charles a very reluctant and loving man who has to be king before father. The poem also refers to some of the Popish Plot furor.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Why would you consider John Dryden an important voice in English poetry?

4.0 CONCLUSION

John Dryden could, therefore, arguably be taken as a public poet. He discussed in verse the problems of his time, who talked to his readers on terms of easy equality, and who sought to base his work on reason and tolerance. Dryden tried to heal the wounds left by revolution and Civil War. With this, John Dryden remains one of the best poets England ever had.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to look at the poetry of John Dryden. We examined the biography of John Dryden. We also looked into his works as allegorical and analyzed his "Absalom and Achitophel".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Highlight in detail, the literary qualities of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".

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UNIT 4 ALEXANDER POPE'S POETRY

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope remains one of the witty and intelligent satirists in England. Pope's poetry demonstrates the features of Neoclassical literature in England. People today arguably see Pope as the greatest English verse-satirist. He is great by reason of an extraordinarily rich and rapid play of mind. He works with a great variety of satiric modes and devices: concise epigrammatic shafts; sly juxtapositions; light mock-heroic as in "The Rape of the Lock", the meaningful – fantastic and atmosphere in "The Dunciad"; the life-history as of the London citizen Sir Balaam, etc. In this unit, we shall examine the nature of Pope's poetry and an analysis of his poem.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. discuss the life of Alexander Pope;
2. explain the style of Pope's poetry; and
3. analyze Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Short Biography of Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope was born Alexander and Edith Pope in the spring of 1688. Pope's father was a linen-draper and a young convert to Catholicism. Pope's father moved his family from London to Binfield, Berkshire in the face of repressive, anti-catholic legislation from parliament. Described by his biographer, John Spencer, as "a child of a particularly sweet temper", and with a voice so melodious as to be nicknamed the "little Nightingale", the child Pope bears little resemblance to the irascible and outspoken moralist of the later poems. He was barred from attending public school or university because of his religion, Pope was largely self – educated. He taught himself French, Italian, Latin, and Greek, and read widely discovering Homer at the age of six.

At twelve, Pope composed his earliest extant work, “Ode to Solitude”; the same year saw the onset of the debilitating bone deformity that would plague Pope until the end of his life. Originally attributed to the severity of his studies, the illness is now commonly accepted as Pott’s disease, a form of tuberculosis affecting the spine that stunted his growth – Pope’s height did not exceed four and a half feet – and rendered him hunchbacked, asthmatic, frail, and prone to violent headaches. His physical appearance would make him an easy target for his many literary enemies in later years, who would refer to the poet as a “hump-backed toad”.

Essay on Criticism was published anonymously in 1711 and established the heroic couplets as Pope’s principal measure and attracted the attention of Jonathan Swift and John Gay who later became Pope’s friends. They later formed the Scriblerus Club, a congregation of writers endeavouring to satirize ignorance and poor taste through the invented figure of Martins Scriblerus. In 1712, Pope published “The Rape of the Lock” which made him famous. Pope published many other works before his death in 1744.

3.2 The Style of Pope’s Poetry

Pope’s ‘essays’, such as “An Essay on Criticism” (1711) and “An Essay on Man” (1734) mark an important shift away from the often topical poetry of the Restoration and towards the general and universal claims associated with the enlightenment. In “An Essay on Criticism”, Pope sets out to describe what is required for good literary criticism. Against the familiar opposition between critics and authors he argues that the best critics will be the best writers. For Pope, writers and critics ought to follow Nature. Pope’s “nature” combines a late Renaissance classicism with Newtonian mechanical physics. Following from Newton’s discovery of universal mathematical formulae to explain natural phenomena, Pope’s nature is a function of and compatible with rules. Pope offers a vision of criticism that is consistent with his sense of the relationship between nature, rules and standardization.

With “An essay on Man”, the symmetry of Pope’s form is brought to bear on some of the same questions Milton had addressed in a different way in “Paradise Lost”. Like Milton in “Paradise Lost”, Pope begins with a “Garden, tempting with forbidden fruit’ (Norton Anthology, P. 2264, 1.8 (A)). But everything about the form has been changed. Rather than an epic, Pope’s poem is an epistle. Rather than black verse, Pope was the heroic couplet, rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines. Where “An Essay on Criticism” seems to have understand literary criticism in Newtonian terms, “An Essay on Man” understands Newtonian philosophy through a carefully symmetrical poetic form. Nearly every line of “An Essay on Man” is balanced with five syllables on either side of a break called a ‘caesura’. Such balance within each line is complemented by the lines’ rhyming in pairs.

3.3 The Analysis of Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"

In 1712, Pope published "The Rape of the Lock" on heroic comical poem. It is a humorous indictment of the vanities and idleness of 18th century high society. Basing his poem on a real incident among families of his acquaintance, Pope intended his verses to resolve trivial issues among his friends and to laugh at their folly.

The poem is perhaps the most outstanding example in the English language of the genre of mock-epic. The epic had long been considered one of the most serious of literary forms; it had been applied in the classical period, to the lofty subject matter of love and war, and, more recently, by Milton, to the intricacies of the Christian faith. The strategy of Pope's mock epic or parody epic is not to mock the form itself, but to mock his society in its very failure to rise to epic standards, exposing its pettiness by casting it against the grandeur of the traditional epic subjects and the bravery and fortitude of epic heroes: Pope's mock-heroic treatment in "The Rape of the Lock" underscores the ridiculousness of a society in which values have lost all proportion, and the trivial is handled with the gravity and solemnity that ought to be accorded to truly important issues. The society concerned in this work is one that fails to distinguish between things that matter and things that do not. The poem mocks the men it portrays by showing them as unworthy of a form that suited a more heroic culture. Thus the mock-epic resembles the epic in that its central concerns are serious and often moral, but the fact that the approach must now be satirical rather than earnest is symptomatic of how far the culture has fallen.

Pope's use of the mock-epic genre is intricate and exhaustive. "The Rape of the Lock" is a poem in which every element of the contemporary scene conjures up some image from epic tradition or the classical world view, and the pieces are wrought together with a cleverness and expertise that makes the poem surprising and delightful. Pope's transformations are numerous, sticking, and loaded with moral implications. The great battlers of epic become boats of gambling and flirtatious tiffs. The great, if capricious, Greek and Roman gods are converted into a relatively undifferentiated army of basically ineffectual spirits. Cosmetics, clothing, and jewelry substitute for armor and weapons and the rituals of religious sacrifice are transplanted to the dressing room and the altar of love.

The verse form of "The Rape of the Lock" is the heroic couplet; Pope still reigns as the uncontested master of the form. The couplet consists of rhymed pairs of iambic pentameter lines (lines of ten syllables each, alternating stressed and unstressed syllables). Pope's couplets do not fall into strict iambs, however, flowering instead with a rich rhythmic variation that keeps the highly regular meter from becoming heavy or tedious. Pope distributes his sentences, with their resolutely parallel grammar, across the lines and half-lines of the poem in a way

that enhances the judicious quality of his ideas. Moreover, the inherent balance of the couplet form is strikingly well suited to a subject matter that draws on comparisons and contrasts: the form invites configurations in which two ideas or circumstances are balanced, measured or compared against one another.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Pope's poetry really contributed a lot of English poetry as a whole. His wit and intelligence made his poetry popular and his satiric nature made "The Rape of the Lock" one of the best poems ever written in England.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to introduce to you the work of Alexander Pope, the nature of his poetry and the analysis of his adjudged best poem, "A Rape of the Lock".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss Pope's "A Rape of the Lock" as a mock-heroic poem.

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MODULE 4 ENGLISH POETRY AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

This module examines the Romantic Movement in England. The study also forays the events of Romantic verses. With the agrarian economy taking over by the mechanized farming, the Romantics became more interested in the environment which was being eroded day by day. The module consists of four units altogether.

The first unit examines the background to the Romantic Movement. In the unit, the major features of Romantic period are copiously discussed.

The second unit examines William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement. In this unit, the major poems of Wordsworth shall be analyzed.

The third unit looks into the life of John Keats who was one of the earliest Romantic poets. John Keats' background is examined, and some of his poems are analyzed.

The fourth unit examines William Blake. Blake's biography is studied in relation to his poetry. His poems are analyzed to show the Romantic qualities as studied in the first unit.

Unit 1: Background to the Romantic Movement

Unit 2: William Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement

Unit 3: John Keats' Poetry

Unit 4: William Blake's Poetry

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Romantic period was an important period in the history of English Poetry. The period was characterized with so many features which the writers of the period canvassed in order to react against some unnecessary rules which had actually dominated the English poetry. We should not forget that, the Romantics were also products of the 18th-century classicism. It was these Neo-classical features that many of the Romantics reacted to and the growth of industrialization which had eroded the rustic way of living in England.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. discuss the historical background of the Romantic period;
2. explain the literary overview of the period;
3. discuss the nature of the English Empire as at then.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

Britain was still operating an agrarian economy when the Romantic period began. When the Romantic period was almost getting to its end, Britain had become a highly industrialized nation with various towns and cities. In the eighteenth century there was no real class consciousness; Britain had a limited aristocracy: professional people, merchants and rural and urban workers. By 1830, something like a modern class-consciousness had emerged with more clearly identifiable upper, middle and working classes. Notions of rank, order, degree and station

based on birth became supplanted by groupings of landlords, capitalists and labourers. In the late eighteenth century, the population of the British Isles began to grow dramatically. The increasing size of the population expanded the labour force, as well as the demand for goods and services. Economically this was beneficial, as a larger labour force reduced the cost of labour and of the goods and services produced, which in turn, accelerated the industrial process. The growth in population also contributed to the process of urbanization. The great commercial, industrial and manufacturing cities of London, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford increased exponentially in size. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's first urbanized society. The factory towns of England tended to become rookeries of jerry-built tenements, which the mining towns became long, monotonous rows of company-built cottages, furnishing minimal shelter. The bad living conditions in the towns can be traced to lack of good bricks, the absence of building codes, and the lack of machinery for public sanitation; but they were also due to the factory owners' tendency to regard workers as commodities and not as human beings.

There were substantial changes in agriculture as the countryside was transformed. Agrarian capitalism reached a period of development. This period witnessed the decline of the independent smallholder often referred to as 'Yeoman' (Poplawski, 2000), movingly presented in Wordsworth's representations of what he referred to as "Cumbrian statesmen', such as Michael from his "Lyrical Ballads".

Eighteenth-century Britain became a society with a marked difference between two spheres of activity, the public and the private. There developed an expanding public sphere of political, civil and intellectual life, typified, in particular, by growth of the coffee house as a venue for reading and debating information. In contrast, the private sphere involved family life and the care of education of children. These two spheres were gendered as masculine and feminine respectively. Notions of gender also underwent a redefinition in the period, largely due to the growth in the mode of sensibility, which influenced all aspects of culture.

The late eighteenth-century was also a time when religious sects usually organized around charismatic individuals and espousing apocalyptic brands of mystical thought, multiplied. William Blake was, for a time, attracted to the writings of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg and attended the New Jerusalem Church of his disciples in Eastcheap before repudiating Sweden borgian teachings in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1990). This reading of political events in terms of

biblical prophecy attracted both plebian and polite audiences. Enlightenment notions of deism and skepticism also continued throughout the Romantic period.

In the late eighteenth century a growing consensus for the reform of the British political system was beginning to emerge. In the 1780s Britain was still a mainly agrarian country and the landed interest was predominant, despite the rapid growth of urban centres. The country was governed in the interests of some two hundred powerful aristocratic families (represented in the House of Lords) and below them a landed gentry (the 'country gentlemen') of some 12,000 families. These families effectively controlled government at central and local levels.

3.2 Literary Overview

It may be very difficult to determine when the Romantic literature started; however, the period is often described as covering the years between the 1780s and the 1830s, although some critics may refer back to the 1760s and others forward to around 1850 as significant dates. Defining the period is difficult because the word "Romantic' refers to a kind of writing which has been defined in opposition to literature which came before it. Romanticism is thus antithetical to eighteenth century non-classicism, rather than a continuation of already established literary and artistic trends. One thing that is important to grasp is that the word "Romantic" itself was not used in the way we use it today by the writers of the time, for whom it meant something pertaining to 'romance'; nor did the writers collected under the heading regarded themselves as forming a coherent group. By critical consensus the Romantic poets are the six male poets: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. Together, they arguably formed a literary and artistic movement known as "Romanticism", which marked a profound shift in sensibility. Generally Romanticism was seen as marking a violent reaction against eighteenth century Enlightenment thought with its emphasis on 'reason' as the predominant human faculty. Romanticism it is often said, was inspired by the political, revolutions of America in 1776 and France in 1789 and that the products of Romanticism tended to be radical or revolutionary. Writers of the Romantic age demonstrate the characteristics listed in the below.

(i) Romantic poets affirm the creative powers of the imagination.

(ii) Romantic poets introduce us to a new way of looking at nature, which becomes the main subject of their work. The Romantics often argue that the possibility of transcendence or 'unity of being' can be achieved through communion with nature. Their work exhibits a preference for

nature in its sublime aspect: mountains, glaciers, chasms, storms, as well as strange and exotic settings.

(iii) Romantic poets tend to explain human society and its development in terms of an organic model, or a model borrowed from nature, and they reject materialist and mechanistic philosophies.

(iv) Romantic poets write about the nature of the individual self and the value of individual experience.

(v) Romantic thought shows a high regard for the figure of the artist, who is variously described as sage, philosopher, prophet and religious saviour.

Traditionally, Romanticism was seen to begin around the time of the Revolution in France and to develop certain stylistic and linguistic innovations. These innovations are reflected in the works of a number of writers. William Blake produced his prophetic and apocalyptic illuminated books during the 1790s. Blake's personal vision, expressed in a highly symbolic language and form, was seen by many to inaugurate a new kind of revolutionary writing. Similarly the publication in 1798 of Wordsworth and Coleridge's "Lyrical Ballads", which contained, in addition to Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', a series of experimental ballads and lyric poems treating rustic subjects and their distress in an elevated and tragic manner, can be seen as a rejection of eighteenth-century poetics. Wordsworth's later apologia for his poems, the 'preface of 1800', defended the serious treatment of such subjects and could be seen as a manifesto for a revolutionary kind of poetry, for a revolutionary age. Wordsworth also claimed that the "Ballads" ushered in a stylistic revolution in poetry, banishing the allegedly stilted diction of earlier neo-classical poets, preferring instead a language closer to that of contemporary usage.

3.3 The Empire, Nationhood and the Other Worlds

What we describe as the Romantic Movement coincided with the beginnings of a modern British imperialism which involved the governance and exploitation of increasingly large portions of the globe as the nineteenth century wore on. It also involved conflict with other imperial formations of the time, some expansive and others in decline: European empires such as the French and Russian, and non-European empires such as the Turkish Ottoman and the Qing Empire of China. Romantic writers were not themselves imperialists in the literal sense of the term, though some of them became implicated in the imperial process: Coleridge, for instance, acted as a civil servant for the governor of Malta, Sir Alexander Ball, and Charles Lamb and Thomas Love Peacock both worked for the British East Indian Company. Many Romantic-period writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, and Jane Austen had family members who were involved in colonial trade or empire in one way or another, and it certainly impinged on their

consciousness as a pressing fact of life. This was also the period in which historians, like Linda Colley, argue that the idea of the British nation was "forged". Colley claims that Britishness was defined against the "others" of Catholic religion and the French nation. This could also be widened to include the various other peoples, races and religions that the British encountered in their imperial history.

The responsibility and accountability of the metropolitan government for the treatment of other cultures was becoming a cause of increasing concern and was an important issue in the trial of Warren Hastings for his administration of Bengal from 1786 onwards. The speeches of Edmund Burke, who prosecuted the case against Hastings, were among some of the manifestations of colonial guilt at the centre of British political life. Certainly there are many affirmations of the manifest destiny of Britons to civilize the world in Romantic writers. Wordsworth's "Excursion" (1814) contains the Wanderer's vision:

So the wide waters, open to the power,
The Will, the instinct, and appointed needs
Of Britain, do invite her to cast off
Her swarms, and in succession send them forth;
Bound to establish new communities
On every shore whose aspect favours hope
Of bold adventure…
Your country must complete
Her glorious destiny. Begin even now.
(Wordsworth, Excursion, PP. 295, 299).

The "Wanderer" predicts that the world will look to Britain for moral and cultural as well as political leadership, and that the country's imperial future will be glorious, Coleridge, in later life, similarly argued that "colonization is not only a manifest expedient – but an imperative duty on Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea". Similarly, a political opponent of the Lake poets, Anna Laetitia Barbauld argues for the identical linkage between colonization, language and culture in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven:*

Wide spread thy race from Ganges to the pole,
Over half the western world they accerts rool:
… Thy stores of knowledge the new states shall know,
And think thy thoughts, and with thy Fancy glow;
Thy lockes, thy paleys shall instruct their youth
Thy leading star direct their search for truth;
Beneath the spreading platan's tent-like shade,
Or by Messouri's rushing waters laid,

'Old Father Thomas' shall be the port's theme,
Of Hagley's woods the enamoured virgin dream,
And Milton's tones the raptured ear enthrall,
Mixt with the roar of Niagara's fall.
(11. 81- 96; Wu, Romanticism, P. 46)

Here Barbauld anticipates nineteenth-century British cultured imperialism, a process by which the colonized accept the hegemony of the culture of the colonizer.

Self-Assessment Exercise

How would you describe the attitude of the proponents of romanticism to the government of their age?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We must not forget that the Romantic Movement stressed the importance of the emotions and feelings in human relationships. From around the 1740s onwards a number of thinkers argued that humans possessed an innate moral sense which manifested itself through the emotions in feelings of sympathy and benevolence for others. This movement has been linked to the rise of the middle classes in the eighteenth century and their growing concern with the reformation of manners.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to see the historical review, the literary overview and the state of empire and nationhood in Britain during Romanticism. We have been able to make you see what was in vogue during Romanticism and we also highlighted the major features of Romanticism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

In a sound essay, demonstrate the uniqueness of Romantic poetry

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth is believed to be the father of English Romanticism. Wordsworth's poetry became popular with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Wordsworth became a poet laureate in 1843. This unit will capture his life briefly, and we shall also be looking at his poetry and its style poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. appreciate Wordsworth's poetry;
2. identify specific themes of Wordsworth's poetry

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Brief Life History of William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April, 1770 in Cocker-Mouth, Cumberland in the Lake District. His father was John Wordsworth, Sir James Lowther's attorney. The magnificent landscape deeply affected Wordsworth's imagination and gave him a love of nature. He lost his mother when he was eight and five years later his father. The domestic problems separated Wordsworth from his beloved and neurotic sister Dorothy, who was a very important person in his life.

With the help of his two uncles, Wordsworth entered a local school and continued his studies at Cambridge University. Wordsworth made his debut as a writer in 1789, when he published a sonnet in the European Magazine. In that same year he

entered St. John's College, Cambridge, from where he took his B.A in 1791. In 1795 he met Coleridge. Wordsworth's financial situation became better in 1795 when he received legacy and was able to settle at Racedown, Dorset, with his sister Dorothy, with Coleridge's encouragement and his close contact with nature, Wordsworth composed his first master–work, "Lyrical Ballads", which opened with Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner". About 1798 he started to write a large and philosophical autobiographical poem, completed in 1805, and published posthumously in 1850 under the title "The Prelude".

Wordsworth spent the winter of 1798-99 with his sister and Coleridge in Germany, where he wrote several poems, including the enigmatic 'Lucy' poems. After he retuned, he moved to Dove Cottage and in 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson. They cared for Wordsworth's sister Dorothy for the last years of her life. Wordsworth's second verse collection appeared in 1807. His central works were produced between 1797 and 1808. In later life Wordsworth abandoned his radical ideas and became a patriotic, conservative public man. In 1843, he succeeded Robert Southey as England's poet laureate. Wordsworth died on April 23, 1850.

3.2 Wordsworth's Poetry

Wordsworth's poetry is largely concerned with Nature. His ideas about Nature are radical and philosophical. In his 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth celebrates and romanticizes nature. The poem begins in the present and refers to Wordsworth's first visit to Tintern Abbey in 1793: 'five years have passed; five summer, with the length/of five long winters!' (11.1-2). The first twenty lines or so suggest the tranquility and harmony that the poet has now achieved in the present. The signs of human activity, the cottages, the pastoral forms, the orchards and the wreaths of smoke, all blend in with the landscape as human and natural activity coalesce and merge: 'Green to the very door' (1. 17). The opening few lines evoke a calm and meditative mood. Wordsworth now moves from the external landscape to describe his own inner state f consciousness. He describes what he has gained personally since his first visit to the Wye Valley. He had been able to carry the landscape he first saw in his mind and thus has calmed and healed his psyche. The memory of the landscape first glimpsed in 1793 has brought him restoration in his 'hours of weariness'. This 'weariness' is associated rather vaguely by the poet, with the materialism of city or urban life (II. 23–30). More than this, Wordsworth claims that the memory of the landscape has led to a growth in his moral sense. It has made him a better man (II. 30–5). He says that he has also attained a sense of spirituality from the vision he had of the Wye Valley those five years ago. He describes a state of lightened perception in

which he is no longer aware of the physical and material forms of nature but is instead aware of an inner, spiritual force which permeates the natural world and exists within humanity as well. The experience comes through sense but transcends the sense; the physical eye is 'made quiet by the power of harmony'. At such moments, Wordsworth claims that we achieve spiritual insight and that we see 'into the life of things' (11. 33-48); a 'blessed mood' in which we lose our sense of self and become aware of a transcendent sense of unity, and of ourselves as a part of that unity. Thus Wordsworth claims he has gained three things since his first visit to the Wye Valley: the smoothening influence that the landscape has had on his mind, making him feel less stressed and alienated; his moral sense has been increased almost unconsciously; and he has received the gift of spirituality.

In "The Solitary Reaper", the poet enjoins his listener to behold a "Solitary Highland lass" reaping and singing by herself in a field. The poem presents real human music encountered in a beloved, rustic setting. The song of the young girl reaping in the fields is incomprehensible to the speaker, but he appreciates its tone, its expressive beauty, and the mood it creates within him. To an extent, this poem ponders the limitations of language, as it does in the third stanza ("Will no one tell me what she sings?"). The speaker simply praises the beauty of music and its fluid expressive beauty, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" that Wordsworth identified as the heart of poetry. By placing this praise and this beauty in a rustic, natural setting, Wordsworth acts on the values of Lyrical Ballads. The poem's structure is simple and its language is natural and unforced. The final two lines of the poem ("its music in my heart I bore /long after it was heard no more") return the focus of the poem to the familiar theme of memory, and the soothing effect of beautiful memories on human thoughts and feelings.

In another poem, "I wandered lonely as a cloud", Wordsworth revisits the familiar subjects of nature and memory, this time with a particularly simple musical eloquence. The plot is extremely simple, depicting, the poet's wondering and his discovery of a field of daffodils by a lake, the memory of which pleases him and comforts him, when he is lonely, bored, or restless. The characterization of the sudden occurrence of a memory – the daffodils "flash upon the inward eye/which is the bliss of solitude" – is psychologically acute, but the poem's main brilliance lies in the reverse personification of its early stanzas. The speaker is metaphorically compared to a natural object, a "cloud" and the daffodils are continually personified as human beings, dancing and "tossing their heads" in "a crowd, a host". This technique implies an inherent unity between man and nature making it one of Wordsworth's most basic and effective methods for instilling in the reader the feeling the poet so often describes himself as experiencing.

3.3 The Style of Wordsworth

Wordsworth's poetry is large, and his poetry is basically on nature. Meanwhile his poetic legacy rests largely on a vast number of his poems varying in length and weight. Most of his themes remain consistent bothering mainly on nature. In the preface to his "Lyrical Ballads", Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in the natural language of common speech, rather than in the lofty and elaborate dictions that were then considered "poetic". He argues that poetry should offer access to the emotions contained in memory. And he argues that the first principle of poetry should be pleasure, that the chief duty of poetry is to provide pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on a subtle pleasure principle that is "the naked and native dignity of man". Many of Wordsworth's poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and the "Intimations of Immortality" deal with the subjects of childhood and the memory of childhood in the mind of the adult in particular, childhood's lost connection with nature, which can be preserved only in memory. Wordsworth's images and metaphors mix natural scenery, religious symbolism and the relics of the poet's rustic childhood such as cottages, hedgerows, orchards, and other places where humanity intersects gently with nature.

Wordsworth's poems initiated the Romantic era by emphasizing feeling, instinct, and pleasure above formality and mannerism. Most of the poems like "The Solitary Reaper" are written in a tight iambic tetrameter.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Using copious examples from two of his poems, examine three themes explored by Wordsworth.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Wordsworth's poetry has occasioned an immense amount of discussion. The aims, it will be remembered, largely concerned diction and choice of subject. Wordsworth, in conscious revolt against the Gothic-horror novel, was to deal with humble and rustic life and he employed a selection of language used by men. Discussion has always centred not only on the aims and on Wordsworth's success or otherwise in adhering to them, but on such things as the particular of his relationship with nature.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to discuss the poetry of William Wordsworth. You have been introduced to the brief history of Wordsworth and how he started his writing. We also analysed his major poems are “Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey”. “The Solitary Reaper” and “I wondered lonely as a cloud”.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a well-argued essay which elucidates Wordsworth’s concept of romanticism.

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UNIT 3: JOHN KEATS' POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

John Keats was probably one of the best Romantics. Keats's genius was intense and his feelings for beauty, perfection and art are established in most of his odes. Keats did not live long as we shall see in the biography, yet his poetry is regarded as part of the best Romantic poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. identify John Keats' poetic style and concerns
2. iompare his poetry with Wordsworth's

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief Biography of John Keats

John Keats was born on October 31, 1795 in London. He was the oldest of four children. Keats lost his parents at a very young age. His father died when Keats was eight and his mother died six years later of tuberculosis. His maternal grandmother appointed Richard Abbey and John Rowland Sandell as Keats' guardians. When Keats was fifteen, Abbey withdrew him from the Clarke School, Enfield, to apprentice with a surgeon and study medicine in a London hospital. In 1816 Keats became a licensed surgeon, but he never practiced his profession, rather he ventured into poetry writing. Keats met Leigh Hunt, an influential editor of the Examiner who published his sonnets. Hunt also introduced Keats to a crop of literary giants of his time such Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth.

The group's influence enabled Keats to see his first volume. "Poems by John Keats", published in 1817. This volume was heavily criticized by the critics of the day.

Keats spent the summer of 1818 on a walking tour in Northern England and Scotland, returning home to care for his brother, Tom, who was suffering from tuberculosis. During this period, Keats met Fanny Brawn whom he fell in love with; some of his finest poetry was written between 1818 and 1819. Keats mainly worked on "Hyperion", a Miltonic blank-verse epic of the Greek creation myth. He stopped writing "Hyperion" upon the death of his brother, after completing only a small portion, but in late 1819 he returned to the piece and rewrote it as "The Fall of Hyperion". That same autumn, Keats contracted tuberculosis, and died in Rome on February 23, 1821 at the age of twenty-five, and was buried in the protestant cemetery.

3.2 Keats' Poetry

Keats' poetry is of a truth in volumes but his greatest poems are, by common consent, the four "Odes", on the "Nightingale", "Autumn", "the Grecian Urn" and "Melancholy". In them he expresses and harmonizes the themes of beauty and death, the immortality of art, the relentless passing of time, the fears that he 'may cease to be… before high-piled books in charctery/Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain'. We must always remember that Keats knew all about tuberculosis; he had had a medical training, had nursed his brother Tom who died of the disease, and recognized his own symptoms. All the more striking therefore is the poise and balance of these poems, their lucid architecture. Their mellifluous beauty, and the richness of their imagery have made them popular, and arguably an important influence on the poets of the Victorian Age. Here is the "Ode to Autumn".

Season of mists and mellow fretfulness,
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 blend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet Kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees.
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Autumn brings the fruition of the year, and its death. This may be sad but it is inevitable, and a necessary part of the cycle of life. Its music is not a funeral marc,

but part of life, a harmony ‘nor harsh nor grating though of ample power / To chasten and subdue’. A rich and calm resignation imposes the acceptance of nature’s, of life’s rhythm.

Keats spreads Autumn’s riches in profusion. Note how much of the work is done by verbs: run, load, bless, bend, fill, set, budding; how ‘bosom-friend’, and ‘conspiring’ contrive to suggest to mysterious magic intimacy, a power creating life and wealth everywhere.

In the second verse autumn is personified, but this is no frigidly conventional neo-classic literary device. Autumn is not described; the god, or goddess share in the season’s tasks. Threshing with flails, reaping with scythes and sickles, gleaners, and handworked cider-presses were all common country sights; Keats is not being fanciful or picturesque, but realistic. The figure of the gleaner is active; we feel the weight and balance of her burden as she crosses the plank bridge. The other three figures are in a land of timeless repose, careless, drows’d, patient. The reaper recalls death, but even his sickle is suspended and nature’s bounty, the corn, remains ungathered; nature’s beauty, the flowers, remains undestroyed. One is lulled into a kind of trance.

In his “Ode to a Nightingale” Keats explores creative expression and the mortality of human life. In this ode, the transience of life and the tragedy of old age is set against the eternal renewal of the Nightingale’s sonorous music. The speaker says “Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird”. The speaker rejects the “drowsy numbness” he experienced in “Ode on Indolence”, because in “Indolence” the numbness was a sign of disconnection from experience, while in “Nightingale” it is a sign of too full a connection: being too happy in thy happiness”, the speaker tells the Nightingale. The song of the nightingale wants the speaker to flee the human world and join the bird. His first thought is to reach the bird’s state through alcohol but he rejects that later and longs to do that through poesy.

The nightingale’s music brings about the speaker’s poetic inspiration. Later, the poet imagines himself in the forest with the nightingale. The music later encourages the speaker to embrace the idea of dying, of painlessly succumbing to death. When the nightingale flies away, the reality dawned on him, and then he shouted “forlorn” for he recognizes that he has been living in illusion.

3.3 The Style of Keats’ Poetry

Most of Keats' odes are written in ten-line stanzas. The first seven and the last two lines are usually written in iambic pentameter. The eighth line of each stanza is written in trimeter with only three accented syllables instead of five. "Ode to a Nightingale" is different from other odes because its rhyme scheme is the same in every stanza. Meanwhile, every other ode varies in the order of rhyme in the final three or four lines except "to psyche" which has the loosest structure of all the odes. Each stanza in "Nightingale" is rhymed ABABCDECDE, Keats's most basic scheme throughout the odes. Keats' poetry is characterized by sensual imagery and beauty.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Discuss the romantic qualities of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale".

4.0 CONCLUSION

Keats' contribution to English poetry is not in small measure. His active years of writing poetry were short, yet he produced the kind of poetry which the English people have continued to read for a very long time. Keats' appreciation of beauty is felt in most of his poems. Had Keats lived longer, he probably would have been the best English poet ever lived. Nevertheless, Keats is still very much remembered among the Pantheon of English poets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have briefly outlined the history of John Keats. We discussed that Keats was one of the best English Romantics who contributed in his own small measure to the English poetry from nineteen years to twenty-five years old. We also analyzed few of his odes of which are "Ode to Autumn" and "Ode to a Nightingale".

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Do you agree with the assertion that there are points of convergence between John Keats' and William Wordsworth's poetry? Support your answer with relevant examples.

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UNIT 4 WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Blake was one of the earliest English Romantic poets. Blake's poetry emphasizes the importance of recognizing the place of instinct and intuition in human life. Blake was in rapport with the new revolutionary thought. Blake is obscure in his poetry mainly because of his use of symbols. In this unit, we shall consider his poetry – its nature and style. But before this, we shall examine his background.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. summarize Blake's biography
2. highlight Blake's revolutionary poetry
3. compare and contrast Blake's poetry with at least two other Romantic poets.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Summary of William Blake's Life History

William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757 to James and Catherine Blake. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having some visions. His parents tried to discourage him from lying, but they observed that he was different from his peers and he was not forced to attend conventional school. He learned to read and write at home. At age ten, Blake

expressed a wish to become a painter, so his parents sent him to a drawing school. Two years later, Blake began writing poetry. When he turned fourteen, he was an apprentice to an engraver because he could not afford the cost of an art school. One of his assignments during his apprenticeship was to draw the Westminster Abbey which actually exposed him to Gothic styles from which he drew his inspiration throughout his career. After his seven-year term ended, he studied briefly at the Royal Academy.

In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and to write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. Later, she helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today. In 1784, Blake set up a print shop with a friend and former fellow apprentice, James Parker, but the business failed. For the remainder of his life, Blake made a meager living as an engraver and illustrator for books and magazines. Blake's first printed work, Poetical Sketches (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III's treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it in 1794 with *Songs of Experience*.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18^{th} – century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. In his final years, he was cohered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients". In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. Linnell also in 1825 commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

3.2 William Blake's Poetry

William Blake's poetry addresses a lot of issues. Being a nonconformist, Blake's poetry radically examines some ideas and feelings which are a result of intense probing into the springs of his own being and character. For instance, Blake wrote against transatlantic slave trade. Blake's "Little Black Boy" from his *Songs of Innocence* raises issues about the representation of slaves and the limits of the abolitionists' sympathy. His black boy accepts hierarchies of colour which the poem's readership affirms despite their humanitarian feelings:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,

And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child.
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

Blackness, rather than having any positive associations, is equated with bereavement in the traditional Christian semiotics of Evangelical abolitionist writing. The boy has imbibed this view of colour from his mother who ascribes their shared blackness to the action of the sun, a kind of degeneration from an original and untarnished white. The poem concludes with a vision of interracial fraternity round the "tent of God" with the black boy shading the white English boy from the searing radiance of God's love:

I'll shade him from the heat ill he can bear
To learn in joy upon our father's knee.
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

The boy has assimilated a Eurocentric view of the world, accepting the Christian notion of a white male father as God, whom he desires to resemble, to "be like him" and be loved by him. Blake's poem represents a speaker in a state of innocence and the poem may function, as other poems in the series, as an ironic rebuttal of the hypocritical Christian evangelicalism the poet so despised.

Innocence and Experience are "contrary states of the human soul" as claimed by Blake. Here is a poem "Chimney Sweeper" from the *Songs of Innocence*.

When my mother died I was very young.
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry, "weep! Weep! Weep! Weep!
So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said
'Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot sport your white hair

And so he was quite, and that very night,
As Tom was a – sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in Coffins of Black.

And by came an Angel who had a Bright key,
And he open'd the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

This is a poem about injustice and cruelty which bears some resemblance in general tone. It appears to offer a trite and comforting moral, and might be taken for a kind of tract reconciling the poor to their lot. Yet the poem is enough tinged with Blake's peculiar vision to make such an account seem crude. Blake is really celebrating and romanticizing the indestructibility of the state of innocence, even in the midst of misery.

Next, the chimney sweep in the world of experience.

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying 'weep!, Weep!' in notes of woe!
'Where are thy father and mother? Say?'
'They are both gone up to the church to pray.

'Because I was happy upon the health,
'And smil'd among the winter's snow,
'They clothed me in the clothes of death,
'And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
'And because I am happy and dance and sing,
'They think they have done me no injury,
'And are gone to praise God and his priest and king
'Who make up a heaven of our misery'.

Here is a directed, dynamic indictment of the society which exploits such cruelty, and the religion which condones it. The orthodox conception of the Jealous God, the legalistic, sterile, negative morality of organized religion, supporter and justifier of the state's cruel power, all combined to oppress the poor. And perhaps the worst thing about them is their insensitiveness. The child is still in the world of innocence; he can laugh and sing; therefore they persuade themselves they have done him no injury.

3.3 William Blake's Style of Poetry

Blake is perhaps no more subversive of inertly conventional morality than are the majority of significant writers, but with his startling forms and methods he seemed to his contemporaries all the more dangerous. Blake's insights are often embodied in poetry of great force and beauty; sometimes his visionary narratives and his paradoxes seem confused and are certainly obscure. In his successful poems he is vividly illuminating, and his symbols among them - chains, blossoms, garden, lamb, tiger, trees, churches, the village green, gold, rose, thorns – are wonderfully used in what we cannot but call an expression of wisdom and spiritual health. Most of his poems are a kind of narrative in firm regular rhythm, lines end-stopped, and the statements direct and explicit. He usually relies on the use of couplets and quatrains.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Enumerate and substantiate with illustrations, some of the societal ills addressed by Blake in two of his poems.

4.0 CONCLUSION

William Blake is arguably a romantic poet. Most of his poems address the societal ills in England during his time. He kicks against slavery, industrialization and religion. His poetry has been critiqued negatively by many critics. Yet, Blake romanticizes most of the things he talks about in his poetry.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have been able to talk about the poetry of William Blake. The unit traces the life of Blake to his death as we discussed some of his major ideas and also looked at his style of poetry.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How is Blake's poetry different from or similar to John Keats' and William Wordsworth's poetry?

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MODULE 5 THE VICTORIAN AND THE 20TH CENTURY

ENGLISH POETRY

This module examines the Victorian Poetry and the 20th century Poetry. The module looks at the historical and literary overviews of the Victorian and the 20th century periods. The study includes the works of Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold and also the works of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats all of whom belong to the Victorian and the 20th century respectively. The module consists of four units.

The first unit examines the background to the Victorian Poetry. In this unit, an attempt is made to look at the Victorian period, its history, its government, its religion, and its literature.

The second unit examines the works of Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold, respectively. In this unit, the major poems of both poets are examined.

The third unit examines the background of the 20th century in England. Both the historical and literary overviews of the period are well discussed.

The fourth unit examines the works of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats respectively. Their styles of poetry are well discussed.

Unit 1: Background to the Victorian Poetry
Unit 2: Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold: The Examples of Victorian Poets
Unit 3: The 20th Century English Poetry
Unit 4: T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats: The Examples of 20th Century English Poets

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE VICTORIAN POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Victorian period was a significant era in English literature. The Victorian period is associated with the English monarch, Queen Victoria. Several features characterized this period. Perhaps most important was the shift from a way of life based on ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing. By the beginning of the Victorian period, the Industrial Revolution had created profound economic and social changes, including a mass migration of workers to industrial towns where they lived in new urban slums. We shall see how various poets reacted to this in the main content.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Give a historical overview of the Victorian era;
2. Identify the features of the Victorian period;

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

Given the dramatic changes that occurred throughout the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901), it is fitting that 1832, the year that the first Reform Act passed, is often taken to mark the beginning of the period. Although the French Revolution was long over the time before the Victorian era began, the revolution still

influenced the period. Confidence in the Tories abated as frustration with their ability to ensure economic prosperity increased. The alternative party, the Whigs, was able to unite various groups dissatisfied with the status quo.

There were various calls for reform of an electoral system that had been in place since the 1680s. While industrial cities such as Manchester, now home to the factories on which the British economy increasingly depended, had no political representation, small towns with few inhabitants might benefit from the representation of two MPs in the House of Commons. Only landowners who comprised about 5 percent of the population could vote.

First presented in March 1831, the Reform Bill was defeated in the House of Commons. After a general election increased the Whigs majority, a revised bill was submitted to and passed by the House of Commons in October of the same year. Its defeat in the House of Lords spawned riots throughout the country. A further revised bill was passed in March of the following year and, after a series of dramatic measures that included Earl Grey resigning, the Great Reform Act became Law in 1832. The Reform Act successfully eliminated small constituencies and gave more appropriate representation to a variety of countries and cities that represented national strengths and interests. The number of men eligible to vote doubled to include many more of the middle class. More significantly, the passage of the Act seemed to demonstrate the capacity of the House of Commons and of voting people generally to take precedence over the desire of the House of Lords and even the sovereign. Aristocrats lost politically and economically, and the Whigs retained a majority in the House of Commons for most of the elections held until 1874.

Religion played a key role in many of the reform initiatives undertaken in Victorian Britain. An Evangelical wing within the Church of England supported such organizations as the society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and the society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign lands. Bible, religious tracts and missionary societies prospered under the influence of an Evangelical revival inherited from the eighteenth century. One noteworthy leader was Lord Ashley, the Earl of Shaftburg, a vocal critic of slavery in the colonies who also worked to improve conditions of factory work, to provide education for poor children, and to treat the mentally incompetent humanely.

3.2 Literary Overview

Victorian literary history provides many examples of innovative appropriation of both forms and themes inherited from the eighteenth century and the Romantic era. In her introduction to *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics,* Isobel

Armstrong warns of the danger of seeing Victorian poetry as "on the way to somewhere". "Whether on the way from Romantic poetry, or on the way to modernism", she writes, "it is situated between two kinds of excitement, in which it appears not to participate". Armstrong may be right, for Victorian poets engaged in complicated and innovative ways with the same issues of subjectivity and individuality that preoccupied generations both before and after them.

Tennyson's poetry is instructive in this regard. His poems, *Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) attracted the attention of Henry Hallam. Hallam recognized Tennyson's striking ability to convey intense emotion and to render the distinctive character of various poetic personas. At the same time, he warned the poet against indulgence in melancholic mood, against too-ready acceptance of Romantic poetry of sensation. Certainly, Tennyson's early poetry justified Hallam's critique. Poems like 'Mariana' and 'The Lotos – Eaters' seem positively antithetical to the embrace of work and the duties of the everyday that by mid-century would seem central to the ethos of Victorian culture. Ernest Jone's "The Silent Cell". For example, strongly endorses commitment to everyday struggle:

> But never a wish for base retreat
> Or thought of a recreant part,
> While yet in a single pulse shall beat
> Proud marches in my heart.
> (Chartistpoetry.html).

During the course of his career, Tennyson garnered a reputation and audience comparable to that of Dickens, and his poetry offers special insight into the complicated and sometimes paradoxical tastes and sensibilities of the Victorian reading public. *In Memoriam*, a poem that Queen Victoria compared to the Bible in its consolatory powers, is actually far more expressive of doubt than of faith. In its relentless representation of emotional and intellectual ambiguity, it offers our best evidence of Tennyson's appeal.

Almost all Victorian literature concerns itself with the troubled relationship of the public and the private and in this too, Tennyson's poetry is representative. The long, almost novel-length narrative poems of the Victorian Age evidence the era's prosperity especially after mid-century, to experiment with poetic form. Three prominent examples of this sub-genre of Victorian poetry can be found in Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1869), Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1862) and Elizabeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

Browning's more crucial legacy lies with the dramatic monologue, though he did not invent the form. Writing of the Victorian love affair with the dramatic monologue, E. Warwick Slinn notes that "from its inception in the 1830s and 1840s, its use spread rapidly, flooding the literary market and requiring puzzled

reviewers to learn to describe its idiosyncrasies and implications" ('Poetry' in Tucker, Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture, p. 313). The form is especially interesting in the way it reflects an emerging understanding of the nature of identity. Browning gravitated to disturbed psyches and in poems included in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Men and Women* (1855) readers are invited to reckon with their hidden histories, sordid secrets and immoral thoughts.

Where Browning's poetry conveys energy and enthusiasm, Matthew Arnold's projects what he called in "The Study of Poetry" a "high seriousness". Arnold was well known for his emphasis on "the dialogue of the mind with itself". Arnold would seem to share with Browning, and, indeed with almost every other Victorian poet, an interest in exploring and representing subjective states of mind.

3.3 Science, Nature and Crises of Faith

At the beginning of Victorian reign, tenets of natural theology, most especially the belief that nature reveals evidence of God's design, continued to enable many to accept that their religious beliefs and the scientific study of natural phenomena could peacefully co-exist. The Earl of Bridgewater Commissioned William Whitwell's three Bridgewater Treatises (1833 – 40) to illustrate the goodness of God as manifested in the Creation, Scholars disagree on just how much advances in the study of geology, which undermine the biblical timescale, came also to undermine confidence in natural theology, with some seeing it as the foundation of a widespread crisis of faith and others emphasizing the many people who were able to refashion the story of the creation so that their faith remained intact. Even without the new understanding of time and space emerging from the fields of geology and astronomy, mid Victorians had to contend with an array of other challenges of their faith, among them utilitarian philosophies that questioned the usefulness and rationality of religion and the insights of scholars who advocated the historical and essentially secular approach to the Bible known as Higher Criticism.

Darwin's evolutionary idea of "Natural Selection" made it difficult to embrace the idea of God at the helm of creation and in control of the processes by which man and animals adapted to their environments. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) provides intriguing evidence of the influence of emerging scientific knowledge before either *The Origin of Species* or *Essays and Reviews* arrived on the scene. Tennyson is known to have read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-3) and Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and the influence of these and other scientific studies can be seen in his famous elegy. Some scholars point to Tennyson's *Lyrics* 56 and 123 as illustrative of the poet attempting to come to terms with Lyell's theory of the way fossil records and rock

strata revealed steady physical change in the earth that resulted in the extinction of entire species. At times, the poet conveys only his sense of awe and wonder, as when in Lyric number 123 he writes.

There rolls the deep where grew the tree,
O earth, what changes has thou seen!
There where the long street roars hath been
The stillness of the central sea.
(In Memoriam. P. 91).

In this particular section of *In Memoriam,* Tennyson adapts his understanding of the changing earth to a more personal apprehension of relationships transformed into memory; other portions of the poem reveal a struggle to accept a scientific understanding of the world. Lyric number 56 begins:

So careful of the type? but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.
(In Memoriam, P. 41)

The lyric goes on to post Man as heroically trusting in a beneficent God whose law is love. Throughout *In Memoriam,* Tennyson makes deliberate use of punctuation to emphasize emotions, raise questions, and express resignation. He evokes the resignation of having to live without answers to desperate questions:

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.

Though many critics find in the poem evidence that religious faith is in conflict with scientific understanding, such an interpretation fails to capture Tennyson's nuanced representation of the kaleidoscopic relationship between faith, belief, knowledge, the unknown, feeling, trust, proof, understanding, truth and wisdom in human experience.

To acknowledge the significance of religious language in Victorian literature, and to attend to manifestations of religious belief in a writer who embraced scientific understanding or methodology, is not to downplay the very real ways that literature of the period records crises of faith. Loss of faith is the central theme of Mathew Arnold's mid-century poem, "Dover Beach" (1851), in which he writes that "The sea of faith".

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar.
(Gunningham, Victorians, 533)

Carlyle, Tennyson, John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, Ruskin, Swinburne, Samuel Butler and Edmund Gosse, and many others, each experienced a distinctive version of what is now often considered a classic Victorian paradigm for the loss of belief in religious certainties and authority.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain the significance of religion in the Victorian era.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Victorian period indeed witnessed a lot of changes which also influenced the literature of that period. The colonial extension of Britain in Africa, Australia and the Caribbeans to Asia brought a lot of wealth to Britain. Corruption – physical, social, political and religious – became rampant. A lot of people had begun to lose their faith. The loss of faith is well captured in the works of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson and Mathew Arnold. The Victorian Age was also known to have been hypocritical about its immoral affairs.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been introduced to the Victorian Age, most especially its influence on English poetry. You have been told that, the Victorian period began from 1832, the year the first Reform Act was passed. We also informed you that several writers and poets emerged during this period and their writings contributed to English literature up till today.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“The Victorian period was a period of innovation, wealth and crises of faith”. Discuss.

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UNIT 2 ROBERT BROWNING AND MATHEW ARNOLD: THE EXAMPLES OF VICTORIAN POETS

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold are important Victorian poets. Robert Browning may have started writing poetry before Mathew Arnold and Mathew Arnold may have been more of a critic than a poet; both poets' works dominated the Victorian era. In the course of this unit, we shall then examine the lives of the poets, the contents and forms of their works.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the poetry of Robert Browning as a Victorian literary production;
2. Assess Mathew Arnold's contribution to Victorian poetry.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Short Biography of Robert Browning

Robert Browning was born May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was also an artist scholars, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. His rare book collection of more than 6,000 volumes included

works in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Much of Browning's education came from his well-read father. It is believed that he was already proficient at reading and writing by the age of five. A bright and anxious student, browning learned Latin, Greek, and French by the time he was fourteen. From fourteen to sixteen he was educated at home, attended to by various tutors in music, drawing, dancing, and horsemanship. At the age of twelve he wrote a volume of Byronic verse entitled "Incondite", which his parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published. In 1825, he got a collection of Shelley's poetry from his cousin which he liked so much that he asked for more of Shelley's works for his thirteenth the birthday, and declared himself a vegetarian and an atheist in emulation of the poet. In 1828, Browning enrolled at the University of London, but he soon left, anxious to read and learn at his own pace. The random nature of his education later surfaced in his writing, leading to criticism of his poems' obscurities.

In 1833, Browning anonymously published his first major work, *Pauline*, and in 1840 he published *Sordello*, which was widely regarded as a failure. He also tried his hand at drama, but his plays, including Strafford, ran for five nights in 1837. The techniques he developed through his dramatic monologues, especially his use of diction, rhythm, and symbol, are regarded as his most important contribution to poetry, influencing such major poets of the twentieth century as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Robert Frost.

After reading Elizabeth Barrett's Poems (1844) and corresponding with her for a few months, Browning met her in 1845. They were married in 1846 against the wishes of Barrett's father. The couple moved to Pisa and then Florence, where they continued to write. The Browning society was founded while he still lived, in 1881, and he was awarded honorary degree by Oxford University in 1882 and the University of Edinburgh in 1884. Robert Browning died on the same day that his final volume of verse, Asolando, was published, in 1889.

3.2 The Poetry and Style of Robert Browning

Of the works of Robert Browning, we need to consider one aspect. He attempted, notably in the volumes entitled *Men and Women* (1855) and *Dramatis Personae* (1864), to use in his verse the rhythms of spoken language and to convey character by means of the dramatic monologue; but these rhythms are rarely convincing. The 'speech' is too often a jerky jumble of archaisms, distorted syntax and romantic clichés. Let see this in his well-known poem, *My Last Duchess.* An

Italian renaissance duke is showing the portrait of his late wife to the emissary who is arranging his next marriage.

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask me thus, Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
'Over my lady's wrist too much', or 'Paint
'Must never hope to reproduce the faint
'Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that sport of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere
Sir, 'twas one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! But thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred – years- old name
With anybody's gift…

The poem has a roughness of surface which gives it at least the appearance of vigour. It is ingeniously arranged to make the reader work out for himself the implications of the story; the duke's pride, his treatment of his wife as one of his possessions, his jealousy, his cruelty, her death of a broken heart and his proposing to add another unfortunate young woman to his collection are the issues in the poem. Nevertheless, Browning has more in mind than simply creating a colourful

character and placing him in a picturesque historical scene. Rather, the specific historical setting of the poem harbours much significance: the Italian Renaissance held a particular fascination for Browning and his contemporaries, for it represented the flowering of the aesthetic and the human alongside, or in some cases in the place of, the religious and the moral. Thus the temporal setting allows Browning to again explore sex, violence, and aesthetics as all entangled, complicating and confusing each other: the lushness of the language belies the fact that the Duchess was punished for her natural sexuality. The Duke's ravings suggest that most of the supposed transgressions took place only in his mind. Like some of Browning's fellow Victorians, the Duke sees sin lurking in every corner. The reason the speaker here gives for killing the Duchess ostensibly differs from that given by the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" for murder Porphyria; however, both women are nevertheless victims of a male desire to inscribe and fix female sexuality.

3.3 A Brief Account of Mathew Arnold's Life

Mathew Arnold is popularly known for his critical essays. He was born in 1822 and began his career as a poet, winning early recognition as a student at the Rugby School where his father. Thomas Arnold had earned national acclaim as a strict and innovative headmaster. Arnold also studied at Balliot College, Oxford University. In 1844, after completing his undergraduate degree at Oxford, he returned to Rugby as a teacher of classics. After marrying in 1951, Arnold began work as a government school inspector, a position which afforded him the opportunity to travel throughout England and the continent. Throughout his thirty-five years in this position, Arnold developed an interest in education, an interest which fed into both his critical works and his poetry. *Empedocles on Etna* (1852) and *Poems* (1853) established Arnold's reputation as a poet and in 1857 he was offered a position, which he accepted and held until 1867, as professor of poetry at Oxford. Arnold became the first professor to lecture in English rather than Latin. During this time Arnold wrote the bulk of his most famous critical works, *Essays in Criticism* (1865) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which he sets forth idea that greatly reflect the predominant values of the Victorian era.

3.4 The Poetry and Style of Mathew Arnold

Discussing the poetry and style of Mathew Arnold may not be so difficult. We need to reckon with most of his essays on criticism. Arnold wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, religion, and education. Let us examine his most popular poem "Dover Beach".

The sea is calm to-night.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the
French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; there
Cliffs of England stand.
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and flings,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again began,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegan, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Pf the nigh-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The poem is about the human misery. Nature is used to draw a comparison between the fights of nature and the human misery. The poem consists of four stanzas which have a different amount of lines. The first stanza consists of 14 lines, the second of six, the third of eight and the last line contains nine lines. The rhyme is irregular. Arnold expresses shock on the crisis of faith during the Victorian period. In the beginning of the poem, he expresses how calm everything is just like any other night. However, as the poem progresses, he mentions how Sophocles heard the sadness on the Aegean Sea. Arnold mentions the "Sea of Faith", this metaphor actually stands for the church. In mentioning the "Sea of Faith", he reveals what while it looks calm and normal on the surface, the sea is singing a song of sadness and despair. During this time, people began questioning religion and turning to Darwinism. Arnold now posits that love should replace the darkness that has overtaken the world.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Do you think it is appropriate to categorize Mathew Arnold as a Victorian poet? Support your response with a discussion of one of his poems.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have explained how Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning both contributed immensely to English Poetry during the Victorian period. Browning's "My Last Duchess" and Mathew Arnold's "Dover Beach" remain part of the best British poetry collections. Both Browning and Arnold influenced the writings of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and many of the modern poets.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to the backgrounds of Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning, how they wrote poetry and their styles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss Robert Browning and Mathew Arnold as Victorian poets, using two of their poems, one of each, as examples.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY

Content

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century in Britain has a lot of phases. The first forty years of the twentieth century saw both the consolidation of a century- and-a-half's industrial growth and development, and a decisive transition towards the now-familiar modernity of our own technologically advanced, mass-democratic and mass-consumerist society. New innovations in science and technology such as motor car, cinema, wireless telegraph, the aeroplane and electric power gave the twentieth century a new look. Nevertheless, the First World War was a severe blow on the century.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

1. Highlight the major historical events of the twentieth century;
2. Explicate the forms and styles of the twentieth century.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Historical Overview

After the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, things started to change gradually. The new century saw a continuing reaction against what were perceived as deeply entrenched Victorian values and attitudes, especially in religion and morality. Although there were no major upheavals organized, institutional religion in this period in Britain, the profound impact of nineteenth century science, philosophy and thought continued to be widely felt and there was certainly a spreading and deepening crisis of faith among artists and intellectuals, whose questioning and search for alternative systems of belief were now also increasingly influenced by the recently established fields of anthropology and comparative religion.

Several features are known to have dotted the twentieth century. First is the global war. This global war was the First World War which broke out in 1918. Masses of dead bodies littered the streets, plumes of poison gas drifting through the air, hundreds of miles of trenches infested with rats; these are some of the indelible images that have come to be associated with World War I (1914–1918). It was a war that unleashed death, loss, and suffering on an unprecedented scale.

Another crucial feature of the twentieth century is radical artistic experiment. The boundary breaking art, literature, and music of the first decades of the century are the subject of the topic, "Modernist Experiment". Among the leading aesthetic innovations of this era were the composer Igor Stravinsky, the cubist Pablo Picasso, and the Futurist F.T. Marinetti. The waves of artistic energy in the avant-garde European arts soon crossed the English Channel, as instanced by the abstraction and dynamism of Red Stone Dancer (1913–14) by the London-based vorticists, and modernists include such English writers as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot who also responded to the stimulus and challenge of the European avant-garde with manifestos, poems, plays, and other writings. This topic explores the links between continental experiment and the modernist innovations of English language poets and writers during a period of extraordinary ferment in literature and the arts.

The twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of new nations out of European colonial rule. Ireland was the oldest of Britain's colonies and the first in modern times to fight for independence. Politically and ideologically, too, society continued to become more pluralistic and democratic, and the Victorian trend towards a more diverse social – class structure and looser, less deterministic social networks continued apace.

3.2 Literary Overview

The literature of the first third or so of the twentieth century is usually defined in terms of its rejection of the values, attitudes and practices of the immediately preceding Victorian age – or at least of those aspects of the age that had come to stand for a 'Victorianism' defined, among other things, by hypocrisy and puritanical narrow-mindedness. Reaction against such Victorianism had been gathering pace since at least the 1880s, but after Queen Victoria's death reaction became outright rebellion as a new age of skepticism and searching critique began to assert itself and all the assumed Victorian verities were challenged and questioned. Indeed, this questioning spirit is perhaps the outstanding characteristic of early twentieth- century literature.

The wars of the period inevitably added impetus and edge to anti-Victorian critique, and if the experience and consciousness of war, with all the ramifications

of its newly realized potential for destruction, was an all-pervasive feature of the literature of the period. Especially after 1914, war itself supplied the direct and indirect subject matter for innumerable literary texts. The resulting literary experiments and debates gave rise to an extra-ordinarily rich and diverse range of writings, and this has meant that there is still no entirely settled 'map' of the literature of the period. For some writers, even towards the end of the period, it was effectively 'business as usual' where, although issues may well have changed, the tried and tested techniques of the Victorians would still more or less suffice. In the second half of the twentieth century, the standard model of literary critical classification for these years, especially in the field of fiction, has been one which identifies two major trends or modes of writing, defined principally by their different stylistic and technical features.

3.3 Forms, Genres and Styles

Modernism and realism have always been identified as the two main lines of stylistic development within this period. Modernist writing has been seen as the genuinely new, original and authentic art of the century while realist art has been considered as simply a continuation of worthy but outmoded nineteenth-century forms. From another point of view, modernist art has been considered obscure, elitist and out of touch with everyday experience, while realist art has been embraced for its direct relevance to people's lives in striving to present an accurate and truthful representation of historical and political actuality. As a broad categorization of stylistic tendencies at least, it can be helpful still to distinguish between these two modes of modern writing.

David Lodge helpfully elaborates on the distinction between modernism and realism as follows:

> Modernism turned its back on the traditional idea of art as imitation and substituted the idea of art as an autonomous activity. One of its most characteristics slogans was Walter Pater's assertion, "All art constantly aspires to the condition of music" – music being, of all arts, the most purely formal, the least referential… the fundamental principle of aesthetics before the modern era was that art imitates life… but by the end of that (nineteenth) century it had been turned on its head. 'Life imitates art', declared Oscar Wilde, meaning that we compose the reality we perceive by mental structures that are cultural, not natural in origin, and that it is art which is most likely to change and renew those structures when they become inadequate or unsatisfying… (T)raditional realism… does not aspire to the condition of music; rather it aspires to the condition of history… it regards literature as the communication of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the act of communication.
>
> ('Modernism, Anti-Modernism and PostModernism" PP. 5 – 6).

In the work of archetypal modernists such as Yeats, Eliot and Pound, modernism produced a 'poetry that distinguishes itself from ordinary referential discourse by violently dislocated syntax and bewildering shifts of register… in which there are no narrative or logical climaxes but instead vibrant, suggestive, ambiguous images and symbols' (Lodge, P. 6).

Meanwhile, poets like Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, Robert Bridges, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare and John Masefield stand out most strongly in contrast to the modernist for largely continuing to use metrical verse forms rather than free verse.

Self-Assessment Exercise
Explore five events that characterized the twentieth century.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The twentieth century seems the most interesting mainly because it was the most debatable century. The wars, economic recession, widespread corruption, disillusionment all made the twentieth century poetry in England something worth of attention. Both Yeats and Eliot became foremost poets of the period.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to the factors which made the twentieth century writers wrote the way they wrote. We traced the background of that period from the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. We concluded that the major schools of writers then were the modernists and the realists.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What factors influenced the twentieth-century writing in Britain?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land (1922). In The Norton anthology of poetry.* Ed. Alexander W. Allison et al. 4th edn. New York and London: Norton Anthology, 1996, PP. 1344 – 56.

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UNIT 4 T.S. ELIOT AND W.B. YEATS: THE EXAMPLES OF 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH POETS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The two poets, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats contributed a lot to what is known as modernist poetry. Their works contain some fragments of the World War and the disillusionment that followed. Their biographies are briefly given and then their works are explicated.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. relate the accounts of Eliot and Yeats lives;
2. analyze the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats as modernist works.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Brief Biography of T.S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888. He lived in St. Louis during the first eighteen years of his life and attended Harvard University. In 1910, he left the United States for the Sorbonne, having earned both undergraduate and master degrees and having contributed several poems to the Harvard Advocate.

After a year in Paris, he returned to Harvard to pursue a doctorate in philosophy, but returned to Europe and settled in England in 1914. The following year, he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and began working in London, first as a teacher and later for Lloyd's Bank. It was in London that Eliot came under the influence of his contemporary Ezra Pound who recognized his poetic genius at once, and assisted in the publication of his work in a number of magazines, most notably "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1915. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917, and immediately established him

as a leading poet of the avant-garde. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Eliot's reputation began to grow to nearly mythic proportions; by 1930, and for the next thirty years, he was the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism in the English-speaking world. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948, and died in London in 1965.

3.2 The Poetry and Style of T.S. Eliot

Eliot is well known for two of his poems, The *Waste Land,* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.* We are going to examine *The Waste land*. With its bewilderingly fragmented, imagistic evocation of a sterile and broken civilization, Eliot's *The Waste Land* has long been considered an archetypal text of literary modernism, providing a conveniently concentrated example of almost all the major features associated with that label. Although the poem's wide range of cultural reference suggests many other relevant contexts too (urbanization, popular culture and entertainment, and the developing fields of anthropology and comparative religion), the First World War is perhaps its most obvious shaping context.

The war is explicitly alluded to in the semi-comic repartee of the women in the pub in Part II of the poem, and literal echoes of the war can be head in lines like 'Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air' (Part V, 1, 373); but the impact and aftermath of the war is deeply embedded in the poem's all-pervasive and many-faceted sense of death and loss, fracture and disorientation. The imagery of death and desolation is everywhere, from the very first section sub-title, 'The Burial of the Dead', through to the fourth, 'Death by Water'. The land is dead, trees are dead, the bones of dead men lie in garrets and alleys, 'Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year' (Part III, 1.195):

> He who was living is now dead
> We who are living are now dying
> (Part V, II. 328-9).

As this last line suggests, though, the poem is not in any simple way a memorial to the men who literally died in the war. It is also, if not more so, a lament for the living death that the war symbolically bequeathed to the world in marking the end of a cultural cycle and the shattering of its fundamental values, beliefs and aspirations. The city of modernity is now an "Unreal City', a hellish ghostly waste land, full of 'Falling towers' and the walking undead –

> 'A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death and undone so many'.
> (Part I, II. 62-3)

As the recurrent imagery of dryness and sterility makes clear, the poem is in this sense actually about the spiritual death of western civilization, and the poem's fragmented web of allusions to Christianity and to various other religions, myths and rituals is intended to evoke the anguished modern search for new sources of faith and meaning in the world.

The narrative disjunctions and the sudden shifts of location and language in the poem are clearly functional to this sense of profound spiritual disorientation in the modern world. Eliot's waste land may probably be a spiritual one, nevertheless, it captures the meaninglessness and fragmentations of the twentieth century.

3.3 A Brief Account of W.B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1865. His father, John Yeats was a painter. He spent his childhood in country Sligo, where his parents were raised, and in London. He returned to Dublin at the age of fifteen to continue his education and study painting, but quickly discovered he preferred poetry. Yeats became involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period, which sought to promote the spirit of Ireland's native heritage. Though Yeats never learned Gaelic, his writing at the turn of the century drew extensively from sources in Irish mythology and folklore. Also a potent influence on his poetry was the Irish revolutionary Mewed Gonne, whom he met in 1889, a woman equally famous for her passionate nationalist politics and her beauty.

Yeats was deeply involved in politics in Ireland, and in the twenties, despite Irish Independence from England, his verse reflected pessimism about the political situation in his country and the rest of Europe, paralleling the increasing conservatism of his American counterparts in London, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. His work after 1910 was strongly influenced by Pound, becoming more modern in its concision and imagery, but Yeats never abandoned his strict adherence to traditional verse forms. W.B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and died in 1939 at the age of 73.

3.4 The Poetry and Style of W.B. Yeats

Yeats wrote a lot. Some of his best poems are "Byzantium" and "Among the School Children". His poems reflect on modernity using powerful images and symbols. In "Byzantium", Yeats imagines himself within the symbol city towards which he was sailing. Yeats' symbols change their significance. Most of his poems have common meanings, associations, themes, but in any poem these are part of a whole and their range of reference is controlled by the structure of the poem itself.

"Byzantium"

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walker's song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades bobbin bound in mummy – cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman:
I call it death – in – life and life – in – death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can lime the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.
At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit.
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave.
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot single a sleeve.

If one ponders the superbly modulated first line of this poem, one will discover that of its five stresses, three come together on the second, third and fourth syllables; the last two are regularly spaced. Such an arrangement gives a calm, solid conclusive feeling to the second half of the line.

In the first stanza, the drunken soldiery and the night – walkers are silenced by the great cathedral gong, the curfew that ends day and ushers in night, symbol, like the dome of the sky, 'the artifice of eternity', all describe the serenity of the city. In

"Sailing to Byzantium" the speaker stated his desire to be 'out of nature' and to assume the form of a golden bird. In "Byzantium", the bird, appears, and scores of dead spirits arrive on the backs of dolphins, to be forged into "the artifice of eternity" – ghostlike images with no physical presence ("a flame that cannot single a sleeve"). The narrative and imagistic arrangement of this poem is highly ambiguous and complicated; it is unclear whether Yeats intends the poem to be a register of symbols.

The speaker's demonstrated preoccupation with "French images" has led some critics to conclude that the poem is really an allegory of the process by which fantasies are rendered into art.

Self-Assessment Exercise
"The poetry of W. B. Yeats and T.S. are perfect examples of modernist poetry". Expatiate.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The two poems discussed in this unit seem to be very difficult to interpret. But you should understand that it is part of the features of twentieth century poetry to use images and symbols. The two poems by Eliot and Yeats are full of mythical symbols which may better be understood by the people of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, we tried to interpret and analyze these poems as simple as possible for you to understand.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have discussed the poetry of Eliot and Yeats. We also highlighted their literary and cultural backgrounds. We tried as much as possible to familiarize you with the styles of their writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How modernist is T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* or W.B. Yeats' "Among the School Children"?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land (1922). In The Norton anthology of poetry.* Ed. Alexander W. Allison et al. 4th edn. New York and London: Norton Anthology, 1996, PP. 1344 – 56.

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