



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 1 - Poetry II – SHS1203

My Last Duchess

- Robert Browning

“*My Last Duchess*” is probably Browning’s most popular and most anthologized poem. The poem first appeared in 1842 in *Dramatic Lyrics*, which is contained in *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841-1846). Perhaps the major reason for the fame of “My Last Duchess” is that it is probably the finest example of Browning’s dramatic monologue. In it, he paints a devastating self-portrait of royalty, a portrait that doubtless reveals more of the duke’s personality than Ferrara intends. In fact, the irony is profound, for with each word spoken in an attempt to criticize his last duchess, the duke ironically reveals his utterly detestable nature and how far he is from seeing it himself.

Before the subtleties of “My Last Duchess” can be grasped, the basic elements of this dramatic monologue must be understood. The only speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The listener, who, offstage, asks about the smile of the last duchess in the portrait, is silent during the entire poem. The listener is the emissary of a count and is helping to negotiate a marriage between the count’s daughter and the duke. The time is probably the Italian Renaissance, though Browning does not so specify. The location is the duke’s palace, probably upstairs in some art gallery, since the duke points to two nearby art objects. The two men are about to join the “company below” (line 47), so the fifty-six lines of the poem represent the end of the duke’s negotiating, his final terms.

Since the thrust of a Browning dramatic monologue is psychological self-characterization, what kind of man does the duke reveal himself to be? Surely, he is a very jealous man. He brags that he has had the duchess’s portrait made by Fra Pandolf. Why would he hire a monk, obviously noted for his sacred art, to paint a secular portrait? The duke admits, “’twas not/ Her husband’s presence only, called that spot/ Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek” (lines 13-15). Then he notes that “perhaps/ Fra Pandolf chanced to say” (lines 15-16) and provides two exact quotations. The suggestion is strong that he observed the whole enterprise. He gave Fra Pandolf only a day to finish the expensive commissioned art. Pandolf is a painter so notable that the duke drops the artist’s name. Probably, he chose Pandolf because, as a man of the cloth, the good brother would have taken a vow of chastity. Yet the duke’s jealousy was so powerful that he observed this chaste painter with his wife

in order to be sure. Later, the duke implies that the duchess was the kind of woman who had to be watched, for she had a heart “too easily impressed” (line 23), and “her looks went everywhere” (line 24). Yet the evidence that he uses to corroborate this charge—her love of sunsets, the cherry bough with which she was presented, her pet white mule—suggests only that she was a natural woman who preferred the simple pleasures.

The duke’s pride and selfishness are also revealed. He is very proud of his family name, for, as he describes his marriage to his last duchess, he states that he gave her “My gift of a nine-hundredyears-old name” (line 33). Yet he never once mentions love or his willingness to emerge from his own ego. Instead, he emphasizes that it is his curtain, his portrait, his name, his “commands” (line 45), and his sculpture. Tellingly, within fifty-six lines he uses seventeen first-person pronouns.

Undoubtedly, though, the most dominant feature of the duke’s personality is a godlike desire for total control of his environment: “I said/ ’Fra Pandolf’ by design” (lines 5-6). Browning reveals this trait by bracketing the poem with artistic images of control. As noted above, the painting of Fra Pandolf portrait reveals how the duke orchestrates the situation. Moreover, even now the duke controls the emissary’s perception of the last duchess. Everything that the listener hears about her is filtered through the mind and voice of the duke. The emissary cannot even look at her portrait without the duke opening a curtain that he has had placed in front of the painting.

The final artistic image is most revealing. The last word in the duke’s negotiations is further evidence of his desire for control. He compels the emissary to focus attention on another commissioned objet d’art: “Notice Neptune, though,/ Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity/ Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!” (lines 54-56). Once again, the commissioned art is a sort of Rorschach test—it reveals a great deal about the personality of the commissioner. The thrust of the art object is dominance—the duke desires to be Neptune, god of the sea, taming a small, beautiful sea creature in what would obviously be no contest. In other words, the duke sees himself as a god who has tamed/will tame his duchess.

As earlier indicated, the duke has always associated his last duchess with beautiful things of nature. Like Neptune, the duke rules his kingdom, Ferrara, with an iron fist. When he grew tired of his last duchess, he says, “I gave commands” (line 45), and her smiles “stopped together” (line 46).

Since the duke says that in her portrait the last duchess is “looking as if she were alive” (line 2), the suggestion is strong that, like the god that he would be, the duke has exercised the power over life and death.

The key critical question in “My Last Duchess” focuses on the duke’s motivation. Why would a man so obviously desiring marriage to the count’s daughter reveal himself in such negative terms? Critics take opposing views: Some characterize him as “shrewd”; others, as “witless.” A related critical question considers the duke’s impending marriage: Why would a man who has had so much trouble with his first duchess want a second wife?

The answers to both questions seem to lie in the duke’s godlike self-image. Interestingly, for a man preoccupied with his nine-hundred-year-old name, nowhere does he mention progeny, and without children there will be no one to carry on the family name. Importantly, he uses a series of terminative images, all emphasizing the end of the cycle of life, to describe his last duchess—the sunset ends the day, the breaking of the bough ends the life of the cherry (also a sexual reference), the white mule is the end of its line (mules then could not reproduce within the breed), and whiteness as a color associated with sterility. Could it be that the duke, since he uses these images, employs his last duchess as a scapegoat and that he is the one who is sterile? Thus, his object in procuring the “fair daughter’s self” (line 52) is children. No doubt, for a man who likes commissioned artwork, the “dowry” (line 51) will help defray his expenses. Perhaps the duke, like another Renaissance figure, Henry VIII, will run through a series of brides because he is unable to see the flaws in his own personality.

Stylistically, Browning has written a tour de force. The fifty-six lines are all in iambic pentameter couplets. The couplet form is quite formal in English poetry, and this pattern suggests the formal nature of the duke and control. Interestingly, unlike the traditional neoclassic heroic couplet, where lines are end-stopped, Browning favors enjambment, and the run-on line suggests the duke’s inability to control everything—his inability to be a god.

Historically, readers have wondered about two things. Is the duke based on a real person? Some have suggested Vespasiano Gonzaga, duke of Sabbioneta, while others favor Alfonso II, fifth and last duke of Ferrara. Second, in his lifetime Browning was often asked what really happened to the duke's last duchess. Finally, Browning was forced to say, "the commands were that she should be put to death . . . or he might have had her shut up in a convent."

The Darkling Thrush

- *Thomas Hardy*

The title of a poem speaks volumes about it, because through it, the poem must convey the mood and tone of the poem in a very precise and economic way. For *The Darkling Thrush*, Thomas Hardy chose a word with tremendous history in poetry. ‘Darkling’ means in darkness, or becoming dark, for Hardy can still see the landscape, and the sun is ‘weakening’ but not completely set. The word itself goes back to the mid fifteenth century. Milton, in *Paradise Lost* Book III describes the nightingale: ‘the wakeful Bird / Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid / Tunes her nocturnal Note ...’ Keats famously uses the word in his ‘*Ode to a Nightingale*’: ‘Darkling, I listen ...’. Matthew Arnold, in ‘*Dover Beach*’ writes about the ‘darkling plain’. In other words, this title gives the poem a resonance of past poets and their thoughts and feelings on a similar subject; it makes specific allusions to these poets and poems; their echoes become a part of its tradition.

Stanza 1: The opening lines of “*The Darkling Thrush*” establish the tone and the setting of the poem. Hardy underscores the speaker’s meditative mood by describing him leaning upon a “coppice gate,” meaning a gate that opens onto the woods. The presence of frost tells readers it is winter, and the adjective “spectre-grey,” a word Hardy coined, suggests a haunted landscape. The word “dregs” means the last of something, but here the dregs act upon the “weakening eye of day,” making the twilight “desolate.”

In the fifth and sixth lines, the speaker uses a simile to compare “tangled bine-stems” to “strings of broken lyres.” Bine-stems are the stems of shrubs, and a lyre is a stringed musical instrument similar to a harp. Although “score” is a musical term, Hardy uses it to create an ominous visual image. While the speaker is outside contemplating a bleak landscape, the rest of the world is comfortably inside, warmed by “their household fires.”

Stanza 2: In this stanza, the speaker uses metaphor to describe the barren landscape as the corpse of the nineteenth century. The now personified century is entombed in the sky (“the cloudy canopy”), and the wind is its “death lament.” Lines 13–14 refer to the seeds of spring, which are

now “shrunken hard and dry.” The description literally depicts what happens to seeds during winter, but figuratively the speaker implies that the very processes of nature are at a standstill and that the next spring might not come. In the last two lines, the speaker compares himself with “every spirit upon earth,” projecting his despondency onto the world.

Stanza 3: This stanza marks a break in the tone and action of the poem, as the speaker hears an old thrush break out in song. Thrushes are fairly common songbirds and usually have a brownish upper plumage and a spotted breast. “Evensong” means a song sung in the evening, significant here both for an “aged” bird and because it is the last day of a century. The image of the bird “choosing” to “fling his soul / Upon the growing gloom” suggests both hope and desperation and resonates with the speaker’s own emotions. The image also evokes the phoenix, a mythological bird with a beautiful song that self-reincarnates from its own ashes.

Stanza 4: In this stanza, the speaker expresses incredulity at the bird’s singing (“carolings”), literally wondering what on Earth (“terrestrial things”) could make it so happy. The incongruity of a joyful bird amidst such a stark landscape is striking, and it puzzles the speaker who, though he can recognize joy, cannot experience it himself. However, the word “blessed,” the capitalization of “Hope,” and the limiting phrase “terrestrial things” open the possibility that there might be religious or spiritual reasons for the thrush’s behavior. The speaker’s acknowledgement that he is “unaware” of the cause of the bird’s singing also suggests the possibility that there may indeed be a cause for it and that the speaker might in time come to know that cause.

THEMES

i. Search for Meaning:

The speaker’s despair echoes Hardy’s own world-weariness and loss of hope for humanity’s future. Isolated from those who have “sought their household fires,” the speaker sees a deathhaunted landscape and a “growing gloom.” Hardy himself mourned the passing of agricultural society and saw little cause to celebrate England’s rapid industrialization, which helped destroy the customs and traditions of rural life. The speaker’s connection to the past has been severed, and he cannot find meaning in the present, and the dawning century, symbolized by the thrush’s song, offers little

in the way of meaning. The bird is “frail, gaunt, and small,” and his “carolings,” though joyful and “fullhearted,” are an evensong and about to end. Any meaning that a new beginning might bring with it is nowhere to be found, not in the landscape and not in the speaker’s heart. **ii. Nature:**

In Hardy’s poem, nature is not a pretty place where flowers bloom and fuzzy animals frolic in the sun waiting to be petted. It is governed by the cycle of life and death and is largely indifferent to human needs or desires. “The Darkling Thrush” deromanticizes nature by taking even the capacity for renewal away: “The ancient pulse of germ and birth, / Was shrunken hard and dry.” Romantics such as William Wordsworth often depicted nature as awe-inspiring, simultaneously inscrutable and full of meaning. Hardy’s speaker, however, finds no inspiration in the processes of the natural world. Though he has meditated on the nature of life, he has found no life in nature. Even the thrush, the harbinger of hope, is “aged” and on its last song. By using the exhausted landscape as a symbolic projection of the speaker’s own interior life, Hardy makes a bleak comment on the potential of human nature as well.

iii. Chaos and Order:

The form of Hardy’s poem is traditional in meter and rhyme and acts as a container of sorts for the chaos of the landscape he describes. Other structural parallels similarly give the poem a coherence that the poem’s themes work against. The speaker’s posture leaning “upon a coppice gate,” for example, is like the “Century’s corpse outleant.” By juxtaposing the chaos of a dying world with the order of its description, Hardy illustrates and underscores his own status as a poet with one foot in Victorian England and the other in the modern world.

The Windhover

- Gerard Manley Hopkins

Dedicated “To Christ Our Lord,” this sonnet in the Italian form was composed in 1877. While diction, image, and metaphor are central technical elements in the poem’s success and meaning, “*The Windhover*” nicely illustrates Hopkins’s more radical experiments with meter and sound.

In the octave, the poet says that while walking in the morning he saw and admired a falcon in its flight. In the first three lines of the sestet, he recounts a visionary experience, his narration shifting into present tense. The vision comes upon him as he watches the bird dive in pursuit of its prey, and several levels of meaning “burst” forth from this motion. The vision begins with the word “buckle.” When the bird buckles, it collapses, pulling back its wings for a swift, controlled descent. Yet this verb also means to put on armor, to prepare for action as in a battle, and it also means to fasten together, as in buckling the ends of a belt. Furthermore, collapse can mean at least two things, the drawing in of the bird as it dives or the folding up of one who experiences pain or momentary weakness. These are only a few of the many interesting meanings critics have found in nineteenth century uses of this word.

Fire bursts forth from the bird when it dives, and this fire makes the bird “a billion/ Times told lovelier, more dangerous.” This vision leads the poet to address the bird: “Oh my chevalier!” A chevalier is a knight, one who serves a king in battle and who is often represented as rescuing the weak and oppressed from evils both natural and supernatural. One key suggestion of the knight image is the idea of putting on armor to enter into a battle. This image connects with the divinity to whom the poem is addressed, Christ. The knight putting on his armor is parallel to Christ’s incarnation, the son of God entering a physical body to become Jesus, thereby entering the world to do battle with human sin.

This suggestion of incarnation is one way in which God descends to human beings and in which God is like the falcon that descends to grasp its prey, except that God’s intention is benevolent. For this reason, among others, the falcon’s dive may be seen as a billion times lovelier, but why a billion times more dangerous? Perhaps the poet there reflects upon the human experience of grace.

Trapped in sin as humans are, in the smudged world of “God’s Grandeur,” they are unlikely to welcome the radical changes that God’s “dive” requires of them. This negative aspect of grace is reflected in another descent suggested by the bird’s dive, the descent into the grave, by which Christ’s incarnation is completed as he shares death with humankind and by means of which Christ’s “prey” is figuratively snatched up from the earth, as Christ makes possible the human ascent into heaven that completes the act of divine grace. Just as the bird will rise after its dive, so Christ arose after his death, and humans who accept this graciousness may rise after their deaths.

In the last three lines of the poem, the poet asserts almost humorously that his vision really is not a wonder. After all, a mere plow shines as a result of its plowing the earth, and almost burnt coals, when they fall and break, flash forth red-gold fire. While he may appear to retreat from the intensity of the vision of the diving bird, he cannot really reduce his own or the reader’s impression of the profundity of that vision. Though he chooses an ordinary plow as his next image of comparison, that image evokes the idea of a descent into the earth in order to prepare a new resurrection, and its shining evokes the fire that broke from the windhover. When he turns to the burnt coals, he cannot avoid an exclamation of affection—“ah, my dear”—addressed to the bird and to Christ as they reveal themselves in the coals. In breaking to reveal flames within, they remind him of the breaking of Jesus’ body on the cross, the fall that sent forth the gleams of resurrection and Pentecost.

When Hopkins composed “The Windhover,” he had been thinking about altering the rhythmic patterns of contemporary poetry. In Old English poetry he noticed metrical arrangements that he came to call “sprung rhythm.” Much of the poetry written before Hopkins in modern English made use of fairly strict syllable counts to determine basic poetic forms. For example, a sonnet would contain as close as possible to 140 syllables, fourteen lines of ten syllables each, and the rhythm of each line would be made of five iambic feet (iambic pentameter), as can be illustrated in the first line of this poem: “I caught this mórning mórning’s mínion, kíng-” (the accented syllables are marked). Though it does not make grammatical sense presented this way, this line shows the pattern of iambic pentameter, five pairs of syllables, the first in each pair unaccented, the second in each pair accented. In “The Windhover,” there are no more line that follow strict iambic pentameter so closely. Yet a carefully studied and prepared oral reading will reveal that each line

has five heavily accented syllables. For the main rhythmic pattern of Hopkins's poem, unaccented syllables are not counted, though how they are accented is important to preparing a performance of the poem. Sometimes, as in line 12, Hopkins marked some syllables he intended to have accented; otherwise, the reader must make judgments about which five syllables should receive the major accents in reading. The result of careful thought and analysis, however, is usually an exciting and provocative performance of the poem.

That Hopkins gave so much attention to his rhythm and that he modified, without abandoning, the basic sonnet form underscores the degree to which he thought of his poems as intended for oral performance. When one studies the poem, it becomes clear that one of the many functions of Hopkins's frequent alliteration, especially the repetition of consonant sounds, is to control or at least suggest where accents should fall within the lines.

It is sometimes difficult to believe that a poet would give so much attention to what might seem the minor aspects of a poem, such as its rhythm and sounds. Yet even if one did not have the evidence of his correspondence, the sheer quantity of alliteration and the stress marks in this poem would indicate that Hopkins must have thought about these things. Hopkins not only thought deeply about how he would organize the sound and rhythm in his poems but also worked to integrate those aspects with the overall meaning and experience he hoped to convey. This effort can be seen, for example, in the opening of the poem, where no line has an end-stop—a final punctuation mark—until the exclamation point after “ecstasy.” To perform this opening is to realize that it is designed to make speaker and listener feel breathless and, thereby, to convey the wonder of seeing and of almost feeling the flight of the windhover. That this breathless line ends in ecstasy suggests even deeper thought in Hopkins, whether intuitive or conscious, which may have whispered to him that, in a poem about a visionary experience, a good first place to pause is on the word “ecstasy.”

CHRISTIAN THEMES:

“The Windhover” exemplifies much that is both spiritual and explicitly Christian in Hopkins's work: that all reality is interconnected; that God, humanity, and the universe are inseparable; that

each person and each object in the world is unique and glorifies God in its uniqueness; and that the revelation of individual uniqueness is found in the energy that each person or object emits.

The bird was one of Hopkins's favorite images. In "The Windhover," the hawk gives glory to God by being fully itself, but in the poem the image also suggests Christ as well as one who would use Christ as a model for life, probably the narrator of the poem. The bird is a Christlike image of self-sacrifice and in being true to itself is shown as part of the great unity of the cosmos. Everything is connected with everything, and the incorporating energy for this is signified in the concept of *inscape*, which reconciles the individuated creature with the rest of the universe.

The poet experimented in how exactly to present his thoughts and moods, frequently having to invent words ("wimpling," "achieve" as a noun), unique verbal combinations ("gash goldvermilion"), and hyphenations ("dapple-dawn-drawn") and to revive words long out of use (*sillion*). Influenced by both Welsh and medieval verse traditions, Hopkins was determined to render meaning and feeling through his highly personalized view of poetic language.

The music of his poems was developed through use of alliteration, internal rhyme, and repeated syllables as well as words. The first two lines of "The Windhover" illustrate this:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn
Falcon, in his riding

It has been noted by critics that the arrangement of Hopkins's words is not based on that of ordinary speech but is rather for the effect of communicating meaning and tone. This tends to give a high energy level to his poetry when read aloud. It has further been said that the priest's interest in painting contributed to his concern for beauty and the form that establishes it. This is reinforced by his attraction to John Duns Scotus's philosophy, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual person and object. It is not difficult, then, to see how Hopkins came to develop his theories of *inscape* and *instress*.

It should not be thought, however, that Hopkins wrote from a spiritually comfortable soul. His poetry often exhibited the tension he experienced between his religious faith and his poetic skills.

His work reflects pain and joy, excitement and agonized interpretation. Critics have found that Hopkins, living in the era of Victorian literature in England, was separated from the literary and religious mainstream in England, and at least one critic has argued that the introverted nature of his poetry is in part a reflection of this. His poetry has also been seen as offering a kind of meeting place for orthodox Catholic theology and secular poetry—an inestimable feat, perhaps on the level of achievement in verse of what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin accomplished in science. The work of the Jesuit is clearly self-conscious; he appears continually to be asking questions such as “Who am I?” “What is the world?” “What is my place in the world?”

In spite of all of his inventiveness, Hopkins may have entrapped himself in forms; this is possibly why his later poems seem to lose the energy apparent in earlier ones. Personal illness may have contributed to a certain decline as well. One writer has considered Hopkins as self-victimized in a symbol of his own making, that of a restricted bird. Christianity is a religion of constant struggle for Hopkins, and his poetry clearly reflects his ongoing attempt to discover meaning in that struggle.

The Scholar-Gipsy

- Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold's "*The Scholar-Gipsy*," the major British Victorian poet's central poem, anticipates the crisis of the modernist period. The poem is testament to Arnold's preoccupation as a poet and a cultural critic: "this strange disease of modern life." Arnold returns to this theme throughout his work, including in his poetic masterpieces *Thyrsis* (1866) and "Dover Beach" (1867) and in his major work of prose criticism, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). "The Scholar-Gipsy" serves as a template for Arnold's poetic and intellectual career and epitomizes his paradoxical combination of Victorian vigor and social progressivism with a protomodernist sense of dissociation arising from religious doubt, social fragmentation, and ennui.

Written in a ten-line stanzaic pattern for a total of 250 lines, the poem is a major English pastoral elegy in the tradition of John Milton's "Lycidas" (1637) and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). It bears the imprint of Arnold's classicism, with allusions to Vergil's *Aeneid* (c. 29-19 b.c.e.; English translation, 1553) and its masterful conclusion in the form of an epic simile. At the same time, however, Arnold seems to undermine the sense of tradition, poetic or cultural, that he is seeking to maintain. The traditional pastoral elegy seeks to reaffirm a continuity between past and present and between the person who has died and the still-existing values that he or she had embodied.

The subject of Arnold's elegy is a legendary, poor Oxford University student of the seventeenth century who has abandoned his studies to learn the occult ways of the nomadic Roma, or gypsy, people. The Scholar-Gipsy is portrayed not as dead but as existing in an immortal twilight of the Romantic imagination. Moreover, rather than reinforce a sense of cultural continuity, Arnold is at pains to warn his elegiac "subject" away from deadening contact with the modern world, which is portrayed as radically alien in form and values from those he inhabits.

Arnold's unusual pastoral elegy begins well within the expectations of the genre. The poem's speaker addresses an unnamed shepherd and describes the timeless pastoral duties involved in the

care and feeding of his flock. However, even the first stanza suggests something is amiss, as the speaker pictures the sheep at night on a “moon-blanced green” and then urges the symbolic shepherd to “again begin the quest.” The moon becomes a symbol for the power of the imagination, and “quest” seems like a strong word for a simple shepherd’s job of rounding up sheep. The speaker interjects himself into the poem in the second stanza, portraying himself seated in a field high in the Cumnor Hills overlooking his alma mater, Oxford University. The speaker becomes both participant and observer of the setting: He catalogs the flowers in the field but also mentions a decidedly unnatural object that he has brought with him: Joseph Glanvill’s *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), which contains the original account of the Scholar-Gipsy.

In the subsequent four stanzas the natural world and pastoral convention disappear, as the speaker recounts the legend of the Scholar-Gipsy. Unsuccessful in knocking at “Preferment’s door,” the Scholar-Gipsy abandons Oxford University on a seeming whim “to learn the Gipsy lore.” Though the Scholar-Gipsy is a product of the seventeenth century, his quest for a natural philosophy or mystic connection with the spirit manifest in nature seems more in accordance with the British Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Scholar-Gipsy seeks a power of imagination capable of creating and not simply reflecting reality. Like the prophetwizard at the conclusion of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan” (1816), the ScholarGipsy wants to learn the gypsy “arts to rule as they desired/ The Workings of men’s brains” and, moreover, “the secret of their art,/ When fully learn’d, . . . to the world impart.” The Scholar-Gipsy is a Romantic revolutionary who seeks to improve the world not through the industrial innovations of Victorian materialism but through a spiritual purification and reunification of humans with the universal spirit within nature.

The next seven stanzas continue the narrative of the Scholar-Gipsy’s quest for a divine knowledge that could reconcile human and divine, matter and spirit. However, the Scholar-Gipsy is both present and absent in the passage. The poem recalls various sightings of its subject from the time he left Oxford to the poem’s present. He appears on the banks of “the stripling Thames [River] at Bablock-hithe,” with peasant children at play among the Cumnor Hills, amid the gypsy camps of Bagley Wood, and finally upon a “causeway chill” in the dead of winter. The Scholar-Gipsy—both a seemingly real person and figure of myth—appears and disappears in all seasons.

Significantly, neither Arnold nor his speaker seem capable of imagining the Scholar-Gipsy's quest "for the spark from heaven to fall" from the Scholar-Gipsy's interior point of view. The subject of the poem remains oddly absent. The poem's major break comes with the line "But what—I dream!" His imaginative reverie broken, the speaker at first acknowledges in accordance with nineteenth century realism that the Scholar-Gipsy must be long since dead and, in an allusion to Thomas Gray, "in some quiet churchyard laid." However, like Romantic poet John Keats, who endows a common bird with the immortality of the imagination in "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819), Arnold's speaker suddenly declares that the Scholar-Gipsy, too, lives on and has achieved his quest for immortality because he has remained untainted by contact with ennui and the spiritual desolation of the modern world:

"O Life unlike to ours?/ Who fluctuate idly without term or scope." Arnold's speaker can imagine the possibility of imaginative transcendence and the validity of waiting for the "spark from Heaven"; however, he resolutely denies the possibility for his contemporaries, "Vague halfbelievers of our casual creeds," including even "our wisest," limited to mere lamentation for "the dying spark of hope."

The final five stanzas complete the break with the pastoral elegy and almost subvert literary tradition itself. In self-disgust, Arnold's speaker urges the Scholar-Gipsy to maintain his immortal spirit of transcendent imagination, which can only be accomplished by fleeing contact with the modern world, which is "feverish" and infected with "mental strife." The final two stanzas provide an epic simile for a modern world no longer capable of epic thought or in tune with the wisdom of classical tradition. The passage compares the modern audience in the antique garb of a "Tyrian trader," who has mastered the waves and commerce of material goods. However, the ScholarGipsy must maintain his distance to avoid the infection of modern life—like Iberian "[s]hy traffickers" of antiquity who traded with a more technologically advanced Tyrian culture but shunned actual contact with it to maintain their unity of culture—leaving their goods on the shore for Tyrian traders to pick up and leave their own trade-goods in return.

References:

Lou Thompson (1983) Browning's My Last Duchess, *The Explicator*, 42:1, 23-25, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1983.9939379

Adrian Tait (2011) 'The Mother Mourns': The Ecocentric Impulse in The Poetry Of Thomas Hardy, *Green Letters*, 14:1, 57-71, DOI: 10.1080/14688417.2011.10589081

R. M. Gay (1944) 28. Arnold's the Scholar-Gipsy, *The Explicator*, 2:4, 30, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1944.11481097



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 2 - Poetry II – SHS1203

Easter 1916

-William Butler Yeats

Although written within a few months of the event that it commemorates, and privately printed later in the year of its composition, "*Easter 1916*" did not receive general publication until 1920. It was first collected in the volume *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1920). It is Yeats's bestknown poem. Its title refers to the Irish rebellion of Easter, 1916, when a small group of rebels in Dublin unexpectedly proclaimed the establishment of an Irish Republic. The rebellion was in defiance of the British rule under which Ireland was then governed.

The refrain of "*Easter 1916*" has frequently been thought to refer to the new political arrangements initiated by the rebels. Yet such a reading is not necessarily what Yeats had in mind, as awareness of the poem's publication history will confirm. "Easter 1916" is not a political poem in the sense that it takes one side or the other in the rebellion. Nevertheless, the poem's renown is, to some extent, the result of a narrow, one-sided interpretation of the line "A terrible beauty is born." It is important to note, however, that Yeats carefully refrains from providing a facile understanding of the momentous event in Irish history that has taken place. On the contrary, the poem is notable for the questioning manner in which it expresses awe and bewilderment at the rebels. The difficulty in reaching an immediate understanding of what "A terrible beauty is born" means crystallizes the poet's own stunned reaction to the rebellion. Therefore, the most striking feature of "Easter 1916" is its honesty.

The basis for the poet's reaction is contained in the poem's opening stanza. The reader is informed that, although the poet and his cronies were aware that republican militants existed, nobody took them seriously. They were unassuming, had little social status, and provided occasions of trivial conversation. In addition, the anonymous "them," which the poet later names, were considered laughingstocks by their social superiors. The poet includes himself among those superiors, members of the "club." Yet social superiority in itself is said to count for nothing, since both the ridiculers and the ridiculed live in a land fit for clowns ("motley" being a reference to the traditional dress of the jester). The suggestion is that the rebel's subsequent heroism and selfsacrifice were unimaginable.

The second stanza presents some of the rebels in a different light. All but the first of those mentioned were executed for their part in the rebellion. Two of those mentioned were well known to the poet. "That woman" is Constance Markievicz, born Constance Gore-Booth, an Anglo-Irish aristocrat whose involvement with the rebels Yeats views as a fall from grace. The other person with whom Yeats was acquainted is Major John MacBride, "A drunken, vainglorious lout" and the estranged husband of Maud Gonne. Yet even MacBride can no longer be considered simply a clown. Mention of these two personal associations, neither of them particularly attractive, provides a frame within which Yeats portrays two of the rebel leaders. "This man" is Patrick Pearse, a poet and teacher who led the rebellion. "This other" is Thomas MacDonough, poet and academic. Although Yeats was not very well acquainted with either of them, he presents them in a favorable light, which adjusts the force of "motley" in the opening stanza.

The first two stanzas' emphasis on personality and society is replaced in the third stanza. There, a more fundamental conception of life, the natural order, is considered. According to this conception, life may be compared to a stream: Living things continually change as they grow and mature. The rebels differ from this order in the way that a stone is the opposite of a stream. Not only is a stone the stream's opposite; it also deflects or "troubles" the stream's free and direct flow. Similarly, there seems to be something unnatural about those who do not participate spontaneously and naturally in life. Yet by the opening of the fourth stanza, this view of the rebels is itself challenged, just as the original view of them as clowns was both acknowledged and corrected in the opening two stanzas.

It is impossible, the poem argues, to know how much must be given in the name of a cause. One's human nature, "the heart," may turn to stone, but only a higher power, "Heaven's part," can determine how great a sacrifice is necessary in order to redeem a given situation, in this case the Irish nation. Meanwhile, all that can be done is to ensure that the magnitude of the sacrifice is recognized for what it is. Yeats conveys this sentiment through an appeal to language. Poetic fancy, such as the metaphor of mother and child, is inadequate to register what has taken place, as the stark, "No, no, not night but death" makes clear. Even the fact that "England may keep faith" does not diminish the rebels' impact.

England is mentioned because a version of Irish independence had been passed into law in 1914. Its application was suspended, however, until the end of World War I. According to Yeats, however, one must bear in mind that not only did the rebels take action, but their activism also cost them their lives. This inescapable and shocking fact is the poem's inspiration and the birth of what it calls "a terrible beauty." The rebels' sacrifice is that terrible beauty, an act as awe-inspiring and overwhelming as the greatest art.

THEMES:

There are two interrelated themes in "*Easter 1916*," one political and public, the other personal and private. The poem is based on a historic event: A small group of Irish rebels, under the leadership of Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, led an armed uprising against British rule despite the fact that even the rebels themselves knew they would fail. In spite of the rebellion being crushed by British troops within a week, "a terrible beauty [was] born"; the executions of the leaders made them martyrs and unified the nation in the fight for independence. The poem also explores Yeats's personal response to the failed rebellion and to the costs of such sacrifice.

Yeats was pessimistic about the character of his countrymen. In "September 1913" he complained that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone," replaced by greed and superficial piety. The first stanza of "Easter 1916" makes the same charges, accusing the rebels—who lead safe lives behind "counter or desk"—of lacking the stature to restore Ireland's revolutionary drive. In proving themselves willing to die for their beliefs, however, the rebels succeeded in reuniting the nation, and Yeats had to grant them grudging admiration for their commitment to their dreams.

Their common lives became heroic inspiration.

If MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly, and Pearse had been "transformed utterly," Yeats's own feelings were more ambivalent. The rebels had become martyrs for Ireland; their courage was not in doubt, and the poem recognizes their accomplishments. Nor did Yeats dismiss their impact on the future. He does question the costs of the Easter rebellion, however, wondering if the same results could have been achieved without the bloodshed. The rebels, in their Easter rising, as symbolic as it is in a Christian sense, paid a price that was perhaps too great. Death is final— "No,

no, not night but death”—and Yeats laments what was lost by those deaths in his discussion of one of the rebels: “He might have won fame in the end,/ So sensitive his nature seemed/ So daring and sweet his thought.” The poem’s refrain, the “terrible beauty” of the uprising, is made even more moving by Yeats’s refusal to resolve its ambiguity; one never knows whether it is the beauty or the terror that is triumphant. In “Easter 1916,” one feels Yeats’s own awe and trembling in the face of this event.

A Prayer for My Daughter

- **W.B. Yeats**

This poem *A Prayer for My Daughter* was written by William Butler Yeats for his infant daughter, Anne. He worries about her. Maud Gonne was a radical, opinionated intelligent woman he had loved, but who had rejected his proposals. In this poem he vents his thoughts on her.

The poem exposes the typical modernist sentiment of the poet. The poet has portrayed a way of life and would like his daughter to adopt it. The kind of philosophy, he formulates in the poem is oriented towards an emphasis on the importance of tradition, custom and culture in the modern world which is dominated by chaos. The tradition, custom, culture is certainly aristocracy.

He is of the opinion that aristocracy is the only culture which can redeem the modern world of chaos and anarchy. For him, aristocracy is the source of aesthetic, intellectual and cultural beauty. Therefore, probably because of Nietzsche's influence upon him, he expresses his hatred for commoners and wishes his daughter to be trained in the school of aristocracy. He considers it an ideal way of life. This is a leisurely, well-reasoned ideal, based not only on mythology and history, but also on his own experience.

The poet advocates an essentially non-Christian order, the keynote of which is a man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency. The poet has left sentiments and pathos behind and has cultivated an almost tragic outlook. He can now combine the appreciation of beauty with a sense of the tragic rather than a pathetic element of life. He can now impart meaning to the ordinary events of life which his earlier poetry did not attempt. In the process his poetry becomes a vehicle of public speech. The poem is strikingly flexible. The poem can move through description of the place we are beginning to recognize the tower; it can freely describe the poet's mood of gloom and then move to the idea of beauty in women from there to symbols of great love found disappointing, to Helen, Aphrodite and by implication to Maud Gonne.

The poem is decorated with a number of phrases and images that are suggestive and evocative. Much is implied, and more is meant than strikes the ear. The poem is a mixture of symbols; its richness of texture is remarkable; and its easy flow of ideas. The storm howling symbolizes

destruction, recalls the "mere anarchy loosed upon the world" of the poem *The Second Coming*. The flooded streams also recall the havoc to be wrought in *The Second Coming*. "The murderous innocence of the sea" also recalls the images of "blood-dimmed tide". The bandy-legged smith is McBride and Helen is Maud Gonne by implication. Yeats has Maud Gonne in his mind when he says that "It's certain that fine women eat a crazy salad". "The rich Horn of Plenty" is suggestive of courtesy, aristocracy, and ceremony. The "hidden laurel tree" can provide through custom the innocence of soul. So the images follow one after another in succession. The image of Helen evokes another figure Aphrodite, who rose out of the spray. The union of Aphrodite with Hephaestus bandy legged Smith, brings to mind the Maud Gonne-McBride episode. Thus the image cluster becomes increasingly complex.

In this poem, the poet praises courtesy, charm, wisdom and the glad kindness that Yeats had found in marriage. His main outburst is against hatred, and especially the 'intellectual hatred'. The idea is that a beautiful woman should despoil the subjectivity of her nature by the politics of objectivity, or sacrifice the unity of her being to a cause outside itself. Because of his showing of hatred in the poem some critics have pointed out that the poem is snobbish. The poem has a ring of optimism about it in thinking that mere anarchy cannot harm the child if she is innocent and is nicely bred.

The poem has also been criticized as based on triviality, for the poet has not desired for his daughter a way of life consistent with the highest religious or moral ideals. He has not prayed for any Christian virtues for her. Reverent as he is, he does not convey any religion. Instead, we are offered in the poem an aristocratic faith. However, all such criticism is irrelevant. The poet desires for her organic innocence and freedom from hatred. The ideals which he upholds are not theoretical but practical, and they can be easily adopted into practice and a state of grace attained. The poet has formulated an essentially non-Christian order, the keynote of which is man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency. The poet has been true to his convictions and so the poem is another expression of his artistic honesty.

On *A Prayer for my Daughter* the coming of ruin upon civilization still preoccupies Yeats: "Imagining in excited reverie/ That the future years had come, / Dancing to a frenzied drum, / Out of the murderous innocence of the sea". But the poem does move from the personal to the general and somehow philosophical issues. It moves through description of the place; we also recognize the symbolic ideals of a good culture: the tower, the laurel tree and custom and ceremony. The

poem moves from the real concern of violence of the times; it describes the poet's mood of gloom; and then it moves to the ideal of beauty in women; and from there it moves to symbols of great love found disappointing, to Helen, Aphrodite and by implication to Maud Gonne. There is a praise of courtesy, charm, wisdom and the glad kindness (that Yeats had found in marriage) as well as a hope for merriment. Then comes the terrible denunciation of intellectual hatred and of Maud Gonne, the loveliest woman born, (whose opinionated mind is savagely attacked). The last stanzas praise innocence, and custom and ceremony. It is both relevant and meaningful in the context of the terrible violence caused by "intellectual hatred" in early twentieth century Europe, though it might sound a little 'chauvinistic' to modern readers.

Andrea del Sarto

- *Robert Browning*

“*Andrea del Sarto*” is a meandering poem of 267 lines in blank verse, broken unevenly into three stanzas of 243, 23, and 1 line(s). The title identifies the subject of the poem, Andrea del Sarto, a distinguished artist of the Florentine School of painting. The poem is written in the first person, the speaker being Andrea, not Robert Browning. Andrea, conversing with his silent wife, Lucrezia, reflects on his life and art, thereby dramatically revealing his moral and aesthetic failure.

The poem begins with Andrea’s placative request to Lucrezia to sit with him and not “quarrel any more.” The failure of the marriage quickly becomes evident as Andrea acknowledges that her physical presence affords no guarantee of intimacy or rapport. His wife’s consent to sit is rewarded with a promise that he will accede to her wishes, permitting Lucrezia’s friends to dictate the circumference and price of his art. His most persuasive ploy for the pleasure of her company—even for a few evening hours—is his pledge to “shut the money” from his work in her hand.

As Andrea muses over the state of his life and his art, detailing his experiences and implying his dreams, he becomes an unconscious study in the complexity of failure: an artist possessing an uncommon aptitude for perfection in execution, but lacking the personal character traits to achieve success. Andrea views in all that he has touched—his life, his marriage, and his paintings—a “common greyness.” He gropes desultorily for the cause of this diminution of his promise.

He first speculates that his failure is attributable to determinism; an authoritative, controlling god predestines individual accomplishments. Such rationale, however, is too simplistic for the sensitive, intelligent artist. He reflects on his potential. Self-confident, he affirms his innate genius: Unlike others, he does not have to struggle for perfection in line and color; for him, process is facile. Michelangelo has even identified him as a serious Renaissance contender—that is, he would be if he were as motivated and dedicated as the masters are.

Momentarily elated at his recollection and seeking to demonstrate this ability to his wife, Andrea almost presumes to correct a flawed line of a copy of a master painting; belatedly, however,

withdrawing his brush from the surface of the painting, he surmises that technique is not the critical factor determining greatness. More significant is the soul of the artist. Andrea ponders over Lucrezia's influence on his work: If she "had a mind," if she were spiritual rather than carnal, he might have triumphed. He concludes, however, that incentive is not an external, but an internal phenomenon.

Nostalgically, Andrea reflects on his year of prominence, basking in the favor of King Francis I and his royal court. Those golden years had ended abruptly at his decision to return to Italy and Lucrezia (at her request) and his embezzlement of money intrusted to him by the king for art purchases. Now, alienated from that glory, cuckolded—and aware of it—he prostitutes his art to delight Lucrezia and even to pay the debts of her lover.

The dispassionate Andrea seems resigned to the diminished state of his life and art as the second stanza begins. Experiencing guilt over his neglect of his aged, impoverished parents and his betrayal of the king, he purports consolation at "having" Lucrezia. His sense of frustration, however, continues; in one last effort at consolation, he speculates on the afterlife. He will compete successfully with Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo in the New Jerusalem. His obsession with Lucrezia and his resignation, however, surface once more: Even in heaven—at his choice—his wife will take precedence, negating any change in his performance.

The extent of Andrea's decadence is further emphasized in the concluding, one-line stanza: The effete husband, with seeming nonchalance, releases his wife to her lover at his casual whistle.

THEMES

"*Andrea del Sarto*" is a poem about success and failure in life and art, as expressed through the unconscious self-analysis of a sensitive, intelligent artist.

Andrea's mediocrity stresses the truth of a common Browning motif: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp." Unfortunately, such a premise negates success for Andrea (known in history as

the “faultless painter”), for he possesses an ability for technique that others “agonize” to reach. Significantly, this excellence comes facily: “I can do with my pencil what I know,/ What I see, . . ./ Do easily, tooperfectly.” Yet, as Andrea theorizes, “In this world, who can do a thing will not;/ And who would do it, cannot, I perceive.” Therefore, since Andrea is one who “can,” he is ineffective.

His plaintive observation that others whose works lack precision “reach many a time a heaven” denied him reveals frustration; however, his very expertise, according to Browning’s credo, signifies baseness and superficiality. Andrea’s cognizance of his own ennui as, amoebalike, he is indifferent to criticism or praise, is indicative of a paralysis precluding an essential motivation, which would empower transcendence. Andrea should be “reaching that heaven might so replenish him/ Above and through his art.”

Inextricably intertwined with the preceding theme is another, focusing on the balance between mind (art) and heart (love). For Andrea, love takes preeminence, and he evaluates all experience by the light in Lucrezia’s eyes. In his art, Andrea’s efforts are not determined by his own imagination, they are subjugated to the whims of his wife, as he commercializes his art to buy her a “ruff” or pay her lover’s gambling debts. Even in France, his ultimate concern was not for selfrealization or for meeting the king’s expectations, it was for meriting Lucrezia’s approval. At Lucrezia’s request, he returned to Italy, forfeiting his promising career in France. Even Michelangelo’s generous words of recognition serve only to impress his wife rather than arouse joy in his soul. His obsession has corrupted his values and destroyed his reputation. For love he became an embezzler and failed his parents.

Sacrificed, too, for love is Andrea’s dignity. Servile, Andrea begs to hold his wife’s hand; humiliated, he condones his wife’s infidelity. His “moon” has become “everybody’s.” The epitomy of shamed manhood, he exercises an annoying forbearance as he releases his wife temporarily to the arms of her lover. The extent of Andrea’s demoralization is infinitely destructive, as shown by his final sacrifice: He forgoes his final opportunity for excellence. Even in eternity, he will “choose” Lucrezia and, therefore, deny his soul again. Andrea’s unhealthy skewing of his life

toward love has upset an essential balance between art and life, resulting in the betrayal of self and extinguishing the light of his soul.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- T. S. Eliot

J. Alfred Prufrock performs his "love song" in the form of a dramatic monologue in verse. At the beginning of the poem, he asks an unknown "you" to accompany him on a walk through the red light district.

- Prufrock and his friend ramble through the dirty roads and alleys of the red light district, walking by "sawdust restaurants" and cheap hotels on their way to get coffee.
- Prufrock listens to women "come and go, talking of Michelangelo." He grows self-conscious of his old age and his shabby clothes and never works up the courage to talk to the women.
- Prufrock thinks so little of himself that he won't even allow himself the simple joy of eating a peach. He doesn't dare. At the end of the poem, he hears "the mermaids singing, each to each." He does not think they will sing to him.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" marks the beginning of the modernist movement in Anglo-American poetry. It is the first English-language poem in the twentieth century to employ free verse, startling juxtapositions of allusion and situation, an intensely self-conscious speaker (or "persona"), and a truly urban setting. The initial quotation is from Dante's *La divina commedia* (c. 1320; *The Divine Comedy*, 1802), the great fourteenth century epic describing the author's descent into the Inferno and eventual ascent into Paradise. The lines (in Italian) are spoken by one of the damned souls to Dante as he journeys through Hell. Like souls in the Inferno, Prufrock exists in a kind of living death.

In the poem's opening lines, Prufrock invites the reader to accompany him as he walks through a modern city making his social rounds. Perhaps he assumes that they share his comfortable wealth and socially active lifestyle. As his proper, even prissy, name implies, Prufrock is neurotic, fearful,

sensitive, and bored. His upper-class friends—the women who “come and go”—apparently lead arid and pointless lives. At any rate, what is evident right from the outset of the poem is that Prufrock is unhappy with his life. His unhappiness, he suspects, has something to do with the society in which he lives: There is, for example, the jarring clash between the grim cityscape through which he walks and the mindless tea-party conversation of his friends.

One important way in which this poem is different from the poetry of the century before it is the way in which the speaker describes nature. In the nineteenth century, poets described the natural world as the real home of God, as the fountain at which weary human beings could refresh themselves. A nineteenth century poet, such as William Wordsworth, might have described the coming of evening as being “gentle, like a nun.” In contrast, Prufrock’s evening is like a very sick person awaiting an operation; the dusk over the city is anesthetized and spread-eagled on an operating table. The urban images that follow this one are just as grim: Prufrock’s city, which is perhaps Eliot’s London, is a town of cheap hotels and bad restaurants. The streets appear sinister; they seem to threaten the people walking in them, bullying them with pointed questions. The urban landscape is made even more ominous by a “yellow fog” that, catlike, “rubs” against windows and “licks” the “corners of the evening.”

As night falls and the fog settles in, Prufrock describes another landscape—this time, a temporal one where time stretches to infinity. He knows, however, that he will not be able to use this time to advantage; as usual, he will be indecisive. “There will be time” enough, he says, but only for “a hundred indecisions.”

Like the limitless streets outside his window, infinite time also threatens Prufrock. The more life he has left to live, the more he is left to wonder and to question. Wondering and questioning frighten him because the answers that they provoke might challenge the perfect, unchanging regularity of his tidy existence. He knows that time is dangerous, that “In a minute there is time/ For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.” Nothing, in other words, is as settled as it seems. Nothing that has happened to Prufrock in his life is particularly comforting: He would like his life to change, but at the same time he fears change and the unexpected events that change might bring. He feels as though he already knows everything that is bound to happen to him. He

especially knows the kinds of people whom he is likely to continue meeting—socialites who pin him down with their critical scrutiny.

Yet something besides these general, abstract worries bothers Prufrock. His chronic indecision blocks him from some important action. The reader never learns specifically what this thwarted act might be, but Prufrock seems to address a woman, perhaps one he loves. Their friends appear to gossip about them “among the porcelain” teacups. Prufrock implies, however, that the woman would reject him if he could ever gather his courage and tell her how he feels. He pictures her sitting in her genteel drawing room, explaining that she had not meant to encourage him: “That is not what I meant at all,” she tells him.

Prufrock knows, in any case, that he cannot be the hero of anyone’s story; he cannot be Hamlet (despite Hamlet’s similar bouts of indecision)—instead, he is only a bit player, even a Fool. He imagines himself growing old, unchanged, worrying about his health and the “risks” of eating a peach. Still, he faintly hears the mermaids of romance singing in his imagination, even though they are not singing to him. In a final imagined vision, he sees these nymphs of the sea, free and beautiful, calling him. Reality, however, intrudes in the form of “human voices,” perhaps those of the art-chattering women, and he is “drowned” in his empty life.

References:

Thomas Dilworth (2009) The Hidden Date in Yeats's *EASTER* 1916, *The Explicator*, 67:4, 236-237, DOI: 10.1080/00144940903250136

McCulloch, Andrew. *The use of allusion in the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. *The English Review*(Vol. 12, Issue 2) Nov. 2001, Philip Allan Updates

Kathleen A. Sherfick (1987) Eliot's the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, 83, I, *The Explicator*, 46:1, 43, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1987.9935278



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 3 - Poetry II – SHS1203

Break, Break, Break

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

Break, Break, Break is an elegy by Alfred Lord Tennyson on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. The author imagines to be standing near the cliff on the seashore and addressing to the sea waves which are lashing the rocks repeatedly. The poet finds an analogy and expresses it implicitly.

He wishes that the ‘waves’ of his grief would break the inarticulateness (inability to speak out) in his heart, so that he also expresses his grief easily. The speaker emotionally commands the sea to “break”. He wants the sea waves to break on the cliffs; but it is also possible to interpret the lines as demanding to ‘break’ the cold gray stones of the cliff. The ‘cold gray stones’ are symbolic of the hardened heart of his inexpressible grief.

In the first stanza the poet says that the torment of his heart as the death of his friend is tremendous. There is a struggle like the struggle of the sea waves on the stormy shores. The question before him is how he can express adequately the thoughts which are rushing into his mind. In the second stanza the poet says that life is full of joy for the fisherman’s son and daughter who are laughing and shouting merrily. The poet, on the other hand, is entirely in a different mood. He is restless and grief-stricken at the death of his friend. The poet admires the innocent joy of these youngsters but he is sorry because he cannot share it.

The lad of the sailor is also happy and sings in his boat face to face with the magnificence of the sea. But such joy is not for the poet. In the third stanza the poet says that the majestic ships ply on their destination under the hill. The poet however has no definite plan about his life and he misses his friend Hallam whose voice and touch were so soft and tender. The grief of the poet is terribly intense. In the two lines:

*But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand And
the sound of a voice that is still!*

The speaker turns aside seas and a very different picture of life. Unlike himself (grief-ridden) and the cold grey stones, the fisherman’s boy who is playing with his sister looks gay. So does the sailor’s lad singing in his boat on the bay. They're also the “stately” ships going ‘on’ to their

destinations. They all contrast with the speaker's plight. They put the speaker's grief-stricken situation on a contrastive prominence. He remembers the touch of his friend's "vanished hand", and the sound of his voice. The friendly voice has become still.

The speaker looks at the sea again and addresses to it once more. By this time he realizes that even if he manages to express his grief, the grace of his friend will never come back to him. The wish to express is itself no solution to the problem.

The poem is remarkable for the sound symbolism in it. The refrain "Break, Break, Break" that consists of one word repeated thrice parallels the waves that repeatedly beat the cliffs. Syntactically (structure of sentence) the line is a broken sentence. Economically empathic, the idea is further reinforced by the nature of the very sound the word is made of. The sentence of b-r-k makes a cracking sound; 'b' explodes; 'r' is harsh and 'k' stops before the pause of comma, 'gray', 'stone', 'utter', 'crag', 'dead' and even 'tender' (ironically) reiterate the same plosive, harsh and heavy sounds. They go together with the ideas of grief and the wish of breaking wherever they occur. We can also draw a neat distinction of these features with the absence of such sounds in the second and third stanza, which draw a picture of carefree children's life and the ships.

The poem is written in four stanzas of four lines each: the first four and the last six are about grief, and the third stanza falls short of giving happy life. The rhyming scheme is abcb but with the harmony of the children's life the rhyme also adds up to aaba. Master of technical and musical perfection, Tennyson seems to carve each word carefully into perfect form. Our understanding of the real incident of his friend's death strikes us the more with the heartrending appeal to the 'sea' – a vast image of sorrow of the sad!

Themes:

Death:

The speaker of "Break, Break, Break" never comes out and says that his friend is dead, but his complaints about wishing to "touch" the "vanish'd hand" and to hear "the voice that is still" make us suspect that he has passed away. The only thing that is described as explicitly "dead" in the poem is time: the speaker says that the time that he spent with his friend is like a "day that is dead" – it will never return.

Sadness:

In "Break, Break, Break," the speaker seems to worry about how much sadness is too much – when is he allowed to get over his grief and enjoy the sights and sounds by the sea again? Is it disrespectful to the memory of his friend to enjoy things? Does he need to be melancholy all the time? At what point does his sorrow just turn into empty, meaningless repetition?

Time:

The repetition in "Break, Break, Break" both suggests the consistency of the speaker's grief and also its slow-but-steady evolution. The second line of the final stanza sounds like the second line of the first stanza, but with a slight difference. The speaker seems to argue that time keeps progressing without change, in spite of his great loss, and yet there are lots of little changes, like in the phrasing of those lines.

And Death Shall Have No Dominion

- Dylan Thomas

“*And Death Shall Have No Dominion*” is a poem in three nine-line stanzas of sprung rhythm. Each of the stanzas begins and ends with the title line, which echoes Romans 6:9 from the King

James translation of the Christian New Testament: “Death hath no more dominion.” The title and the refrain give the theme of the poem—resurrection—and introduce its characteristic rhythm and solemn tone.

The poem is built on repetition, and not merely of the title. Once the meaning of the first line is grasped, the entire poem is understood. Each of the intervening lines and images is simply another way of saying that the life force is immortal—that people’s bodies may die but their spirits live on in the world.

The speaker of the poem is a grand and disembodied voice. There is no particular representative intended; there is no character whose words these are taken to be. The poem is an oratory; it is truth spoken out of the air.

The first stanza deals with the dead, who shall be made whole again at the end of time. The unity and wholeness of the universe is hinted at by an arresting rearrangement of elements that Dylan Thomas creates in the third line: “the man in the wind and the west moon.” Man in the moon, man in the wind, west wind, west moon—it does not matter how the parts are arranged because all is one.

When dead men reach the final reckoning, therefore, even though their bodies are gone, “they shall have stars at elbow and foot.” The paradox of having elbows and feet and yet no body reiterates the poem’s theme of resurrection. More important than the body is the spirit or the life force.

“Though lovers be lost,” the poet says, “love shall not.” It is not people but people’s spiritual force that shall endure.

There is much religious-sounding language in the first stanza, particularly many echoes of the language of the King James Bible: “naked they shall be one,” “stars at elbow and foot,” and “they shall rise again.” There is no Christianity here, however. God is never mentioned, there is no talk of souls or of salvation, and the moment at which all shall or shall not happen is not specified as any sort of Judgment Day. Whatever happens to people happens because that is the nature of things, not because a supreme being has ordained it.

In the second stanza, Thomas treats the pain of life and death. Even if the pain should be bad enough for people’s faith to “snap in two,” they will still not suffer a final death. It is nature, not faith, that determines one’s ultimate fate.

The last stanza connects one’s life force to that of other natural beings—the birds and flowers. When people die, their life force may enter a daisy or the sun, but it will not simply end. Death shall have no dominion.

Forms and Devices

As is often the case with Thomas’s poetry, much of the power of this poem comes from the sound of it. It should be read aloud to be fully appreciated. “*And Death Shall Have No Dominion*” is one of his poems that Thomas himself chose to record. When one listens to the poem, one is immediately struck by its rhythm. Gerard Manley Hopkins coined the term “sprung rhythm” to describe his own poetry in which the rhythm is based not on metrical feet, but simply on the number of stressed syllables in a line. The term is apt here. Two different readers reciting this poem are likely to stress different syllables within any given line, yet both readers will create the same effect of wavelike rhythm—strong, regular, and insistent.

Thomas creates this powerful rhythm by the careful selection of words and the crafting of lines. Nearly all of the words in the poem are monosyllabic and contain explosive consonants that create a sharp separation between words.

One line from the first stanza demonstrates this: “When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone.” The combinations of consonants make it nearly impossible to elide words in this line.

In “picked clean,” the two hard *k* sounds demand to be sounded separately; in “clean bones gone,” each of the three words begins with an explosive consonant, and the repetition of the *n* creates the effect of stress and echo. The line must be read slowly, distinctly, and rhythmically.

Most of the lines in the poem are punctuated at the end, and much of this punctuation is in the form of periods and semicolons. Again, this forces the reader to pause at regular intervals, enhancing the rhythm.

Repetition also aids rhythm in this poem. The most obvious example of this is the title line, which occurs six times in the poem, creating a rhythm of larger units that recede and echo back.

Repetition operates on a smaller scale as well. In the first stanza, three lines are structured to echo one another: “Though they go mad they shall be sane,/ Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;/ Though lovers be lost love shall not.” In the first two lines, repetition of the word “they” helps to create the wavelike effect, as do the words “lovers” and “love” in the third line.

Thomas has not created rhythm for its own sake, although his body of work clearly demonstrates that he was much taken by the beauty inherent in spoken language. This poem’s rhythm, reminiscent of a Christian prayer or sermon, reinforces the solemnity and importance of its theme.

Thomas chooses to echo religious oratory, not to deliver a Christian message, but to offer his idea of resurrection in a ritual style that Christians will understand.

Themes

The central issue in this poem is the nature of resurrection and, therefore, the essential nature of the life force being resurrected. By using echoes of the Christian Bible throughout the poem, Thomas demands that his views be seen in contrast to the Christian tradition in which he was reared.

Thomas has often been referred to as a pantheist. The word “pantheism” comes from the Greek *pan*, meaning all, and *theos*, meaning God. In other words, God and the universe are one, or God

and nature are one. Although it is unlikely that Thomas ever used the term to describe himself, pantheism does seem to capture much of his system of belief. This idea is demonstrated in this poem as well as others, including “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London” and “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower.”

When Saint Paul said in his letter to the Romans that “death hath no more dominion,” he meant that those who had chosen salvation would not suffer eternal damnation and spiritual death. Instead, they would be resurrected on the Day of Judgment and given new spiritual bodies.

Thomas makes it clear from the beginning that he sees things differently. When he states (and restates) that “death shall have no dominion,” he carefully and deliberately leaves out the word “more.” For Thomas, it is not a matter of death ceasing to have power—death has never been the end of life.

When people die, the poem says, their spirits live on. The issue of bodies is moot. When people die their spirits may next inhabit a flower (“Heads of the characters hammer through daisies”) or something else, but their spirits will continue to live. Faith, Thomas says in stanza 2, has nothing to do with it. Some may lose their faith (“Faith in their hands shall snap in two”) as a result of the suffering inherent in life. Perhaps like Thomas they might turn away from the traditional faith of their childhood toward something else. Whatever they decide about God and the universe, their life force will not die because it is not the nature of this force to die.

Thomas does not use biblical echoes in “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,” even though its theme is similar to “*And Death Shall Have No Dominion.*” If the essential message of the former poem is that human life and death are simply part of the natural cycle, then “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” takes this message one step further.

The use of biblical language forces the reader to juxtapose the two systems of belief. “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” is not only an oratory celebrating a pantheistic view—it is also an overt rejection of Christian beliefs.

The Unknown Citizen

- W. H. Auden

Twentieth century Western authors and poets have often examined the alienation and silence of modern life and the loss of personal identity and autonomy, accelerated by the advent of technology. Sometimes these works, particularly novels and films, project the loss of a total civilization and political system that leaves individuals helpless. Other works, such as poet W. H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen," are less dramatic but no less telling about the path of the twentieth century, particularly after the introduction of computer-age technology.

The title of the poem itself, "The Unknown Citizen," reminds the reader of the unknown soldiers who followed their countries' calls, who gave their lives in defense of their countries, who died to ensure the continuity of the society for which they fought, and who stood for the bravery of all soldiers. They are honored for their deeds; only their deeds, not their names, remain as silent witness that they lived. The "Unknown Citizen," though not a warrior, also represents the life his society values and records in his "metaphorical" Bureau of Statistics files, files that hold facts but tell only a partial story, leaving much else in silence.

"The Unknown Citizen" is dedicated "To JS/07/M/378. This Marble Monument is erected by the State." Instead of being a monument to a named citizen, the monument is dedicated to the citizen, known to the state by numbers and statistics, not by name; he is a kind of Everyman in general, who is no man in particular. The poem then details all the supposed characteristics that the state finds important to identify JS/07/M/378 and to remember him.

JS/07/M/378 was by all accounts a model, middle-class citizen; he is even labeled "a saint" for his exemplary life, at least according to the state's definition of "exemplary." He "worked in a [car] factory and never got fired," except for the war years when he served his country as expected. He was a union man who followed the rules. He was popular and never expressed "odd" views; he had an occasional drink with his friends. He subscribed to his local paper and bought the products advertised in it, as the paper and advertisers expected. He had health insurance and a normal illness.

He bought modern necessities on “the Installment Plan.” He had the usual necessities for his time: “A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.” He held opinions that he was supposed to hold when he was supposed to hold them. He was married and produced the expected number of children and sent them to school. As recorded by the state, he was a stereotypical model for the middle of the twentieth century.

Auden uses terms from this first wave of mass consumption for the middle class; for example, “Frigidaire,” a brand name, came to mean refrigerator for the first generation of users. Formerly, citizens may have had iceboxes for food, which looked similar to modern refrigerators, but which used daily delivered ice for food storage. The Unknown Citizen owned a phonograph, or record player, not the compact-disc players of today’s age. For him to have a car was a real consumer step-up, but because JS/07/M/378 worked in an auto factory and belonged to a union, he was probably one of the best-paid workers of his day, with all the necessities that his neighbors had or wished they had. He is remembered for what he owned and that he paid for what he owned over time.

He is no longer alive, so the state “Erected” a monument to him, celebrating the aspects of his life that the state values and that keep the state going. These aspects that the state tracks are supplied by various institutions that supposedly tell who an individual citizen is: the Bureau of Statistics, the War Department (now the Defense Department), the corporate employer, the union, the psychologists, the media, the insurance company, the product and public opinion researchers, the population experts, and the educators. Nowhere in the poem does the Unknown Citizen speak; nowhere does he define himself. He is silent.

Forms and Devices

Auden’s word choices to describe the unknown citizen—“popular,” “normal,” “sensible,” “proper,” “right”—seem appropriate for a man who is considered by the state to be a “saint,” a man who lived as the powers wanted him to live, a man whose life spoke of his adherence to his society’s values. However, Auden also uses a rhyme scheme that suggests a possible glitch in the state’s assessment of the citizen’s life. Perhaps the Unknown Citizen is not in exact harmony with the state, as the statistics suggest.

For example, Auden uses rhyming lines, but he varies the rhyme so that the reader is just slightly off-balance. The first few lines begin an *abab* pattern, but by the sixth line Auden fails to supply a *b* rhyme to complement the *arhyme* in the fifth line. From then on, Auden rhymes in short spurts, such as “retired” and “fired” in lines 6 and 7, “views” and “dues” in lines 9 and 10, and “Plan” in line 19 and “Man” in line 20, yet he interrupts patterns, such as having lines 8 and 13 rhyme rather than 8 and 9 and lines 18 and 21 rhyme, not 18 and 20. Just as the reader is expecting rhymes, Auden puts off the rhyme for a couple of lines. Then he inserts three lines, 25, 26, and 27, that rhyme.

This scheme points to an undercurrent of meaning that is not accounted for in the states’ facts that define this model citizen. This undercurrent becomes a flood in the last rhyming couplet, which asks two important questions that go beyond statistical information and are not addressed elsewhere in the poem: “Was he free? Was he happy?” These questions are answered in an official, statistical way: “The question is absurd:/ Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.”

Themes

In a mild satirical tone, Auden is critiquing the state’s determination to define the meaning of a citizen’s life in just a few facts collected by technology. He is suggesting that much more important information about a human life is left uncollected and, therefore, unconsidered by the state and society. This determination is made possible by modern technology that can amass this information and by statisticians who can analyze this information. The result of this accumulation of facts is an incomplete picture. These statistics do not get to the essence of the man. Auden, in fact, might well agree with Mark Twain, who is reported to have categorized the various kinds of lies: “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.” This factual picture lacks the human voice, the flesh and blood person. The statistics lie; they separate the facts and possessions of the man from the essence of the man.

Originally, keeping detailed records of citizens such as these was a cumbersome process because of the amount of information to be gathered, the logistics of gathering, and the storage requirements

for the information. This whole information-gathering has been aided by computer technology. Many more facts can be gathered, stored, and shared. The computer seems quite normal to today's citizens, at least those under a certain age. It is a technology that can transport its user anywhere to get any information. All this expansion, including personal uses of computers, however, requires user names and passwords that can replace real names and identities. That there was a time when individuals were known by their names rather than by their social security numbers, user names, and passwords seems almost incomprehensible, particularly to students at large universities and to workers in large corporations, confined to cubicles.

All this information storage and transfer that citizens take for granted now began with small punch cards about the size of an airline ticket and extremely large computers. It is this penchant for gathering and storing information on twentieth century citizens that Auden uses for his comments on twentieth century infatuation with facts and its loss of meaning; this profiling offers facts that together add up to nothing. Neither Auden nor the reader has any sense of who this modern man is. He is truly unknown to both poet and reader.

Since Auden wrote this poem about the nameless, middle-class man in the middle of the twentieth century, technology has strengthened its hold on society. No longer are names and faces needed to conduct the normal business of society. Technology can now store even more information, all of the information about the Unknown Citizen that the poem shares and more. Technology can transmit most of what happens every day without people ever meeting. Technology is even now part of the industry where the Unknown Citizen worked; robots perform many of the tasks that he did. Auden's brilliant, yet simply constructed, twenty-nine-line poem rings even truer now than it did when it described life in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, as technology has become louder and more prominent, the human voice has grown quieter; it is true that society has more facts about its citizens, but it does not recognize the silence that accompanies those facts because it cannot compute anything but facts. Citizens remain unknown.

The Blessed Damozel

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

There are four versions of “The Blessed Damozel,” which was written in 1847, when Dante Gabriel Rossetti was eighteen years old. The first version was published in *The Germ* in 1850, the second in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in 1856, the third in 1870 in Rossetti’s collection *Poems*, the fourth in *Poems*, 1881. The changes appearing in the second and third versions are generally regarded as improvements.

Many years after the poem was written, Rossetti is said to have attributed it to his admiration of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” (1845). Rossetti is reported to have said that Poe had done the most that was possible to do with the grief of a lover on earth longing for a lover in heaven and that he (Rossetti) was determined to reverse the conditions in “The Blessed Damozel.”

Both a poet and a painter, in 1848 Rossetti, along with Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, established the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The term “Pre-Raphaelite” was first used to describe a group of German artists who early in the nineteenth century formed a brotherhood in Rome to restore Christian art to the medieval purity of the great Italian masters preceding Raphael. The German group was short-lived, and the term was later used to designate the English school founded by Rossetti and his followers. In general, the English Pre-Raphaelites reacted against the neoclassic tendencies and low standards of the art of their day. Both their painting and their literature are characterized by an interest in the medieval and the supernatural, simplicity of style, love of sensuous beauty, exactness of detail, and much symbolism.

Not only is “The Blessed Damozel” Rossetti’s best-known work, but it also epitomizes the Pre-Raphaelite school. He used the medieval form of damsel, “damozel”—a young, unmarried woman of noble birth—in the title to emphasize the medieval setting and visionary aspects of the poem. He was commissioned in 1871 to do a painting of the poem and by 1879 had given it a *predella* showing an earthly lover (wearing a cloak and a sword) lying under a tree in the forest looking up at his beloved. The poem is presented as his reverie. He dreams that she leans out from the golden bar of heaven. Although she has been in heaven ten years, to her it scarcely seems a day. In the

forest, the lover imagines that the autumn leaves are her hair falling on his face. Around her, lovers, met again in heaven, speak among themselves, and souls ascending to God go by “like thin flames.”

Her gaze pierces the abyss between heaven and earth, and she speaks. (Her lover imagines that he hears her voice in the birds’ song.) She wishes that he would come to her, for when he does they will lie together in paradise and she herself will teach him the songs of heaven. She will ask Jesus that they be allowed to live and love as they once did on earth—but for eternity. She sees a flight of angels pass by and lays her head on the golden barrier of heaven and weeps. The lover asserts that he has heard the tears.

Analysis:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was only 18 when he wrote "*The Blessed Damozel*." Although Rossetti was still young, the images and themes in his poem have caught the attention of many critics throughout the years. "*The Blessed Damozel*" is a beautiful story of how two lovers are separated by the death of the Damozel and how she wishes to enter paradise, but only if she can do so in the company of her beloved.

"The Blessed Damozel" is one of Rossetti's most famous poems and has been dissected and explicated many times by many different people. Even so, they all revolve around the same ideas and themes. The theme of Rossetti's poem is said to have been taken from *Vita Nuova*, separated lovers are to be rejoined in heaven, by [Dante](#). Many people say his young vision of idealized love was very picturesque and that the heavens Rossetti so often painted and those which were in his poems were much like Dante. The heaven that Rossetti painted in "The Blessed Damozel" was warm with physical bodies and beautiful angels full of love. This kind of description of heaven was said to have been taken from Dante's ideas. Others said that Rossetti's heaven was described so in "The Blessed Damozel" because he was still young and immature about such matters. In other words, he had not yet seen the ugliness and despair that love can bring, which he experienced later in his life after the death of his true love Elizabeth Siddal.

"*The Blessed Damozel*" is beautiful in that it flows so easily from one line to the next and it seems, although it is not very apparent, that Rossetti filled it with symbolism and references to his own personal feelings and future life. The first few stanzas tell of how the Damozel is in heaven overlooking earth and thinking of her lover. Rossetti writes in stanza three of how time to the Damozel seemed to last forever because she was without her love. "To one it is ten years of years..." There are a few stanzas in the poem where the narrative jumps to her lover. In stanza four, it is the lover on earth talking about his beloved. The next few stanzas describe heaven, where it lies, and other lovers reuniting around her as she sits and watches...alone. In stanzas ten and eleven, her earthbound lover describes the sound of her voice like a bird's song which tells the reader that not only is he thinking of her, but it hints he can hear her and feel her about him. Of course, she can not understand why she must be miserable in heaven when all others are with their loves, after all, "Are not two prayers a perfect strength?" (stanza 12). In stanza thirteen, she dreams of the day that they will be together and present themselves in the beauty and glory of God. It is also in this stanza that Rossetti lets the reader know that she has not yet entered heaven. She is at the outer gates of the kingdom of heaven.

Through the second half of the poem, the Damozel refers to herself and her lover as "we two" and describes how they will be together again someday in heaven. The Damozel even says she will teach him the songs that she sings...and she dreams of them together. It is in the next stanza, (stanza 17), that the narrative changes again back to the lover. He says that she keeps on saying "we two" but when and will they ever really be together like they used to be. Rossetti is using the Damozel in these few stanzas to describe how the Damozel would want her ideal and perfect love to be, but could that really be with her in heaven and him on earth? The two worlds separating them doesn't keep them apart in thought, but it is not possible to be together. In stanza twenty-two, she once again says that she will want their love to be as it was on earth with the approval of Christ the Lord.

Near the end of the poem, in the last couple of stanzas, the Damozel finally realizes that she can have none of this until the time comes. The Damozel suddenly becomes peaceful and lets the light take her in stanza twenty-three. It is there that the reader also realizes that she will enter heaven without her love. Her lover on earth, of course, knows this and it is there in the last stanza that "I

saw her smile...I hear her tears." Apart, but together in hearts, the two are separated by two worlds so great that there is nothing that can be done but hope and pray. And that is why the Damozel "laid her face between her hands, And wept."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti used the ideas of Christian belief in order to write his poem. His poem explores if two lovers, or anyone will be reunited once again in heaven. In many ways this poem is both optimistic and idealistic. That is why so many people said Rossetti was immature on the subject of love when he wrote this. To read Rossetti's poetry starting with some of his earliest, "The Blessed Damozel", and ending with his later, "The Orchard Pit", it is apparent how his feelings and ideas changed. As many times as "The Blessed Damozel" has been read and explicated, it is no wonder it has been said that so many ideas lie in his famous piece, but who doesn't want to believe, like Rossetti did in his younger years that love, no matter what, would always live in the spirit of soul and memory.

Themes :

The reader can see in "*The Blessed Damozel*" the expression of an ancient and well-known theme: the desire of an isolated, separated lover to achieve unity with the beloved. Rossetti has framed this vision as a reverie, a daydream, a wish-fulfilling dream in the mind of a lover. The heart of the poem is the ironic conflict between the earthly bodily desire and the tradition that heaven is a place of disembodied souls, comforted and joyful in the presence of God. This irony is emphasized by the poem's religious framework.

The earthly, fleshly dimension of the lover in heaven is unconsciously revealed in several places in the poem: Her bosom "warms" the bar of heaven (line 46); she imagines taking her lover's hand (line 75), lying together in the shadow of the mystic tree (lines 85 to 86), laying her cheek against his (line 116), and, finally, living in heaven "as once on earth" (line 129).

These are all images of touching in the earthly sense. Yet, by the standards of medieval theology—which the whole framework of the poem implies—she ought to be contemplating the joy of God

and exhorting her lover to lay aside grief and remember that she now enjoys the real reward of life: eternal life with God.

The Christian imagery, which is largely derived from Dante and other medieval Italian poets, is used decoratively and in this context does not support the sensuous desires of the lover. As much as Rossetti tried to emulate the austere spiritual idealization of Dante, his own sensuousness prevented him from achieving it.

The heavenly lover yearns passionately, intensely, for her earthly companion. In her yearning, she moves from a vision of their reunion, to hope of everlasting unity, and finally to doubt and despair. The void between heaven and earth is immense. What is emphasized is the separateness of the lovers: The wish is not the thing itself; the traditional Christian sops about being in heaven hold no comfort for the bereaved lover, for without the beloved, the heaven becomes a hell.

References:

Tirthankar Bose (1995) *Rossetti's the Blessed Damozel*, *The Explicator*, 53:3, 151-152, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1995.9937259

Roger S. Platizky (1991) *Auden's the Unknown Citizen*, *The Explicator*, 50:1, 48-49, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1991.9938710

Thomas E. Connolly (1956) 33. *Thomas' and Death Shall Have No Dominion*, *The Explicator*, 14:5, 74-77, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1956.11481852



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 4 - Poetry II – SHS1203

1914

- Wilfred Owen

Owen writes about the birth and growth of civilization in terms of the seasons of the year. The classical Greek roots of civilization he compares to spring, which finds its fulfillment in the blossoming summer of the Roman Empire. Modern history has been the autumn harvest of these seeds and now in 1914 the onset of the First World War, which he sees as emanating from the German Kaiser's dictates in Berlin (the capital city of Germany at the time), brings in the 'Winter of the world'. The seeds needed to replant for the new spring will come from the blood of those killed in the war.

"1914" is believed to be one of the first poems Wilfred Owen wrote about war. I think that this poem is being narrated by Wilfred Owen himself. This poem was originally addressed to his mother. In this poem, he is talking about the First World War that started in the year 1914. There is violence everywhere. It has a very sad tone, because it deals with the beginning of a war and all the deaths and horror is yet to come.

Imagery was used to help describe the war scene. Some abstract imagery from the poem: "foul tornado centered at Berlin" meaning Berlin was the center of all the violence and killing, since foul is usually used to describe something in a negative way, the fighting is shown as a bad thing. Another example would be: "Famines of thought and feeling ." people weren't thinking or realizing what they were doing (soldiers were programmed to kill the enemy without a second thought. An example of concrete imagery: "... perishing great darkness closes in.", because it is describing darkness as "great", meaning that the war is a form of evil and the adjective "great" makes it seem a lot more worse. Imagery in this poem helps the reader figure out that war is not a pleasant thing.

"1914" is written about the First World War that broke out in 1914. This poem basically talks about how war is taking over Europe and everyone's planned have been cancelled because of the war. Violence is everywhere. Wilfred Owen has a way of changing your thinking, just by presenting you with the emotions of the facts. For example: the fact is people die in a war, in his poems you can feel the pain and suffering of all the people in a war. His writing can play with our emotions,

and that gets us thinking wither or not war is acceptable. Should people just leave everything they planned to do, to go and murder innocent people, just to settle someone else's problems?

In this poem, words have a powerful impact. Some examples of connotations are "...Autumn softly fell", "...And Summer blazed", and "The grain of human". These words have dictionary definitions, but in these examples, they take on the suggested meaning instead. Some examples of denotations are "War broke:..." and "width of Europe...". There aren't many denotation words because, poetry isn't written in plain language. Abstract words can only be understood intellectually, like: "The foul tornado, centered at Berlin,", you can understand that it means the war is centered in Berlin, because "the foul tornado" is really describing world war one. War is a described to be a very horrible time. Metaphors are used to when comparing two different subjects that won't usually be compared. For example: "War broke: and now the Winter of the world", it is comparing seasons to war. "The foul tornado," it's comparing a natural disaster to war as well. There are no similes or personification in "1914". Instead of using the word "war", metonymy replaces that, for example: "The foul tornado" and "now the Winter of the world". These are all words that replace war. Words can very be very powerful in poetry.

If words can be powerful, imagine what sentences can do. There were longer sentences to explain more complicated ideas, for example: "For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece, And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome, An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home, A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.", it talks about how in different countries they were having new seasons arriving, meaning they had their very own plans. Shorter sentences like: "But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need." (meaning the war has cancelled all the plans they had), have more emphasis on ideas and less thoughts to show. Most of the poem was written in active form (subject before predict), like: "War broke: and now the Winter of the world with perishing great darkness closes in.", meaning war started and all over the world it become winter (winter is used because, it is a harsh season), but described to be extra harsh this time. The only passive sentence was: "Rending the sails of progress." (meaning tearing up the progress being made, in other words stopping peace from happening). "Rending" is a verb and it came before the noun "sails of progress". This poem uses longer, shorter, active and passive sentences to express the emotions of the year 1914.

"1914" shows what was happening in the year 1914. WW1 had just started. All these countries had their own agenda to follow and all of sudden, everyone is fighting each other without a single thought. Wilfred Owen uses abstract and concrete imagery to help display the scene. It becomes obvious that war is certainly not a situation that you would want to be in. His words are able to capture that picture and those words are put into a variety of sentences that help complete the painting. This is probably one the best poems that can truly express the grief felt in 1914.

Dover Beach

Matthew Arnold

At a Glance

In "Dover Beach," poet Matthew Arnold writes about the effect science has had on religion. Not long before the poem's publication, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, in which he documented his studies on evolution. Arnold's poem is read as a record of the clash between science and religion.

The poem opens on a naturalistic scene. The speaker stands on the cliffs of Dover Beach, gazing out at the majesty of nature.

Sadness creeps in, and the speaker is reminded of how recent scientific discoveries (like that of evolution) have forever changed how we think about nature and, thus, our place in it. This brings science and faith into conflict.

The poem ends on a dark note, stating that there is no joy or love or light and that all the theology and scientific theory in the world can't make life meaningful if there is no love.

Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" is a poem set near Dover, along the southeast coast of England, where Arnold and his new wife spent their honeymoon in 1851. It is believed that the poet wrote the early draft of "Dover Beach" while here, overlooking the English Channel toward the coast of France, about twenty-six miles away. Arnold and his wife are often considered the models for the speaker and listener in the poem, although any young man and woman could represent the two figures in the tale, caught in a moment of their early lives.

"Dover Beach" is most often classified as a dramatic monologue, a poetic form that Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and especially Robert Browning, found extremely attractive. The monologue, or poem spoken by a single voice, is made dramatic by the presence of a silent audience of one or more listeners, whose responses may be indicated by the speaker, or persona. In this way the poet may be empowered to express views using another person's voice, as William Shakespeare is known for doing.

This strategy may have been particularly attractive to Arnold, for the views of his speaker are diametrically opposed to his own education and upbringing. Matthew was six years old when he was moved into the Rugby School after his clergyman father Thomas Arnold became its headmaster, or principal. As headmaster, Thomas Arnold gained a reputation for educational reform, based on his commitment to the high seriousness of making students aware of the moral as well as the social issues that would make them responsible citizens.

The poem begins with a naturalistic scene, clearly within the Romantic tradition established by William Wordsworth. Like Wordsworth, Arnold understands the elegance and power of simple language: “The sea is calm tonight./ The tide is full, the moon lies fair/ Upon the straits.” As often noted, the first stanza contains fourteen lines and the second and third stanzas have six and eight lines, respectively, suggesting the sonnet form, but without its more complicated meter and rhyme systems. From its initial visual images, the first stanza and the subsequent two stanzas move toward the dominance of auditory images. The shift is justified by the obviously limited opportunity to see, even with moonlight, but also by the strong impact of the waves breaking on the beach. By the first stanza’s end, the persona, or speaker, has established the poem’s central metaphor of the waves’ “tremulous cadence slow” to represent an “eternal note of sadness.” Additionally, a mere five lines into the poem, the voice has introduced a listener in the scene—telling the reader to “Come to the window”—setting up a tension: Who is the listener? What will be the effect of the melancholy poetic statement on that listener?

This “eternal note” draws the persona further from the directly visualized opening scene with its simple but strong language. The allusion to the ancient Greek tragic dramatist Sophocles offers a context for the speaker’s growing “sadness.” (Arnold was among one of the last generations for whom a classical education entailed learning ancient Greek and Latin to read the classics in their original languages.) The allusion also draws the poem into the more didactic strategy of a statement—asserting rather than implying meaning—and the deployment of something like allegory—a “Sea of Faith” once at its “flow” but now at its “ebb.” This third stanza also reveals evidence of the poet’s effort at elevating the language, producing the difficult opening lines in which that sea once “round earth’s shore/ Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled,” a choice of

words guaranteed to confuse the modern reader. This “girdle” is appropriate to the classical context of Sophocles, but not to the modern world, where it denotes an article of intimate apparel.

However, attempts of academics to clarify that meaning have distracted attention from the figurative logic of a sea as a “girdle,” or belt, as well as from the unfortunate combination of sounds in “girdle furlled.” Another issue left unaddressed is the dominance of pessimism in the persona’s inability to attend to the logic of this “Sea of Faith”: Whatever ebbs will inevitably flow in the future.

The final stanza recalls the earlier reference to the listener—“Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another!”—to focus on the melancholy consequences of the weakening of faith. To the persona, and presumably the poet, the world truly is “a land of dreams,” pipe dreams with nothing to believe in, not just God and an afterlife but “joy,” “love,” and so on. This is Romantic love at its most radical. Without love between a man and a woman, the world is as confusing—and as lethal—as a night battle, fraught with friendly fire. In a sense, Arnold is announcing the big question for the modern world, intent on forcing love to bear the enormous weight of providing human lives with meaning: If love is all humans have, what do they do when they cannot find love, or keep it? It is a question that resonates through the novels, too, of Ernest Hemingway, such as in his *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), or in the contexts of wedding receptions, where some have to suppress the depressing thought, will this be the one of every two marriages that ends in divorce?

Analysis:

In *Dover Beach* Matthew Arnold is describing the slow and solemn rumbling sound made by the sea waves as they swing backward and forward on the pebbly shore. One can clearly hear this monotonous sound all the time. The withdrawing waves roll the pebbles back towards the sea, and then after a pause, the returning waves roll them up the shore.

There is a low tremulous sound swinging backward and forward all the time. The poet implies that this sound suggests the eternal note of sadness in human life. Arnold in 'Dover Beach' notes how the pebbles of the sea rolled by the sea-waves bring into the mind the “eternal note of sadness.” Here he points out that in ancient times Sophocles heard the same sound of the pebbles on the

shore, and it reminded him of the ebb and flow of human misery. In his *Antigone* Sophocles expressed this thought. Now this poet hears the sound of this Dover Beach, and he finds in it the same thought.

The poet explains the gradual loss of man's faith in a grand and suggestive simile. He compares faith in religion to a sea that surrounds the world. The sea has its full tide, and then it ebbs away with the mournful music over the pebbles and the grating of the pebbles brings the "eternal note of sadness in". The poet reminds the world in which there was full of faith and men believed in religion. But now that faith is gradually passing away and men's minds are like pebbles on the shore. The passing of faith causes the minds to be isolated in the border between belief and disbelief. It is a sad melancholy state. When the poet hears the grating roar of pebbles of the sea, he is reminded of the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of faith as it retreats from men's minds. It is a chilly prospect, like the breath of the night wind, and it brings into the mind a dreary feeling of helplessness, as though the mind is left stripped and bare on the vast and dreary edges of an unknown land.

The lines from 'Dover Beach' give bitter expression of Arnold's loss of faith, his growing pessimism. The world seemed to be strangely unreal, without anything real to cling to on grasp. It has variety, beauty and freshness. But it is all blind negation: there is in it neither love nor joy nor light nor peace. There is nothing certain in it. Therefore he compares men struggling in the world with armies struggling on a plain at night. There is a sound of confused alarms and struggles, but the soldiers are ignorant as to what they are fighting for and why.

'Dover Beach' is one of Arnold's typical poems. It expresses frequently the lack of faith and certitude which was the principal disease of the Victorian age. The first stanza opens with a calm, bright moonlit sea which reflects the serene, peaceful, receptive mood of the poet. He calls upon his companion to share the sweetness and tranquility of the night air and even as he does so, he is conscious of 'the grating roar' a harsh sound which disturbs the peace, the calm and the sweet music. The stanza ends on a 'note of eternal sadness', that 'still sad music of humanity' disturbs the calmness of mind and spirit as much as the calm bay. Here he points out that in ancient times Sophocles heard the same sound of the pebbles on the shore, and it reminded him of the ebb and flow of human misery. In his *Antigone*, Sophocles expressed this thought. Now Arnold hears the sound of this Dover Beach, and he finds in it the same thought.

In the second stanza the poet effectively uses a metaphor where the ebb and flow of human misery is compared to the tides of the sea. The fortunes of Oedipus are like the ebb and flow of the sea sand and the retreating tide is a symbol of the loss of faith. Arnold describes the slow and solemn rumbling sound made by the sea waves as they swing backward and forward on the pebbly shore. The poet implies that this sound suggests the eternal note of sadness in human life.

The poem falls into two parts. In the first part, Arnold speaks of the resonances of sea-waves on the pebbly shore. In the second he speaks of armies struggling ignorantly at night. There is perhaps not very clear connection between the earlier and the latter part. Yet the poem reads well because it is held together by a unity of sentiment. The two descriptive analogies are drawn from classical sources, but the unifying sentiment is romantic in its haunting pessimism and lack of faith.

Arnold through 'Dover Beach' describes the effects of industrialization of the 19th century England. Victorian world was changing very rapidly with the growth of science and technology. This poem condemns the loss of faith, religion and the meaning of life resulting from the industrialization and advancement in science and technology.

Arnold describes the difference between the appearance and reality of the Victorian world. It looks new and beautiful like a land of dreams but in reality this world does not really have joy, love, light, peace, certitude or any help for pain. He describes the world as a dark plain which is becoming even darker as the time passes. He compares the people struggling and running in their ambitions to the armies fighting at night, unknown of why and with whom they are fighting.

Although, this poem had shown the loss of faith, religion and love of 19th century it is similar in the context of the 21st century as well. People have lost their faith in God. They are engaged in commerce. They have become materialistic which has decreased their satisfaction in life. They are more isolated and lonely. Now, they have forgotten "us" and only remember "I". So, the poet wants to aware all the human being from this disaster created by the sufferings, sorrows and melancholy. The only way out of this disaster according to Arnold is to love and to have a faith in one another and do believe in God and live in reality rather than the land of dreams.

THEMES

Man and the Natural World:

"Dover Beach" is practically overflowing with deep philosophical thoughts, but they are all launched by and rooted in the natural world that the speaker sees all around him. As the speaker pays attention to the sights and sounds of a moonlight night by the ocean, he can't help but ponder Big Ideas about our world's history and its future.

Sadness:

"Dover Beach" isn't a total bummer. There are definitely moments of love and beauty and pleasure mixed in there, too. But Sadness with a capital S is threaded through everything, and it really builds at the end. We won't sugarcoat it for you: this poem has a pretty grim view of the world. On the other hand, Arnold does an amazing job of making that sadness memorable and moving, too.

Suffering:

"Dover Beach" doesn't give you a pretty Disney-fied view of life (although maybe that's not fair to Disney—we're still a little freaked out by the beginning of *Bambi*). The speaker confronts the pain and suffering in the world head-on, no holds barred. While the world might seem nice to look at sometimes (like on a moonlit night), it's really just an endless and confusing wilderness of pain.

Spirituality:

Maybe "Dover Beach" isn't so much about spirituality as it is about the feeling of losing it. The speaker looks back longingly to a time when people were more spiritual, when they had more faith in divine guidance. Now that's mostly gone, and the absence of faith has left the world "naked," vulnerable, and miserable. Maybe life has always been hard, but according to our speaker we're now more unprotected from that hardship than we've ever been.

Church Going

- Philip Larkin

Written the same summer as “*Toads*,” “*Church Going*” also first appeared in Larkin’s remarkable little book *The Less Deceived*. Each of the two much-admired poems illustrates the book’s emphatic focus on relative disillusionment. The punning title “Church Going” is typically Larkinesque, implying both “attending church” and “the vanishing church.” A further irony is that Larkin’s “church goer” is a sole drop-in to whom the empty edifice is alien and puzzling, not supportive or enlightening.

As sobriety varies from playfulness, the persona of “Church Going” varies from that of “Toads.” Yet the loneliness and dissociation from human company that one perceives in the speaker and the recognition that he contemplates an important modern dilemma tie him to the “toad-dominated” worker. One added strength of “Church Going” is its firm grounding in a concrete setting and situation, allowing Larkin’s skeptical preachment about the irrelevance of the church to occur without much offense, from the ironic opening phrase onward: “I am sure there’s nothing going on/ . . . inside.” Eventually the speaker wonders “who/ Will be the last, the very last, to seek/ This place for what it was.” Imagery of a church in ruins dominates the poem at its climax: “Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky.” (Conjured images of Tintern Abbey, or other stereotypically English ruins, here summarize the coming fate of churches in England that the speaker sees.) The balanced melancholy of the poem finds the church, though a “place . . . not worth stopping for,” to be nonetheless “A serious house on serious earth” that pulls people toward it, a place “proper to grow wise in,/ If only that so many dead lie round.” The imaginative range of the poem, moving as it does from the concrete to the abstract and universal, from “disbelief” to a future time when even that may be a forgotten human stage, gives it distinction and significance.

Formally “*Church Going*” is like an ode, a stanzaic lyric poem that develops and explores a serious topic at some length. Each of its seven stanzas comprises nine iambic pentameter lines—the numerology seeming, like religion itself, to tap into the prerational. A complex stanzaic rhyme

scheme, *ababcdcd*, employs full and approximate (half or slant) rhymes freely. Skill with subtle metrical variations—trochaic substitutions, caesuras, enjambments, feminine endings—keeps the lines flowing like talk, much in the manner to which readers of Robert Browning’s monologues, or of Larkin’s lyrics, are accustomed. As usual Larkin’s speaker is syntactic, at once colloquial and formal in his assertions. His sharp imagery draws the church interior in the first two stanzas: “sprawlings of flowers, cut/ For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff/ Up at the holy end; the small neat organ.” The “musty, unignorable silence” has “Brewed God knows how long.”

When the man reads “Here endeth” to an empty sanctuary, “The echoes snigger briefly.”

As in “Toads”—and following the lead of his disavowed mentor Yeats—Larkin has his speaker engage in questions, a useful device for exploring alternatives: “Shall we avoid [churches] as unlucky places?” “And what remains when disbelief has gone?” and “I wonder who/ Will be the last . . . to seek/ This place for what it was?” “Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,/ Or Christmasaddict?” In such an inquisitive context, the speaker’s varied assertions hold their ground: “Power of some sort or other will go on,” “It pleases me to stand in silence here,” or “someone will forever be surprising/ A hunger in himself to be more serious,/ And gravitating with it to this ground.”

In this serious meditation on the post-Christian age, Larkin’s witty glints lighten the tone. As the persona, for example, wonders if in future eras “we shall keep/ A few cathedrals chronically on show” and “let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep,” his word “chronically” plays on “perpetually” while suggesting something like a lingering illness, and “let” as “lease” introduces a playful figurative situation, with sheep as renters. The “crew” of cathedral-hounds who “tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were” are mildly satirized as the eventual last “church goers,” just as the phrases “this accoutred frowsty barn” (where “frowsty” means unkempt and musty), “randy for antique,” and “Christmas-addict” all trigger weak smiles. The mild self-denigration that occurs in various details, hinting that the biker is a bit of a perplexed bumblehead, likewise entertains.

The speaker’s “serious” view is clearly that the church is irrelevant and “obsolete,” appeals to superstition, plays a riddling power game, and is destined to fade into vague memory, even as so many church structures in England already have. Nonetheless, nostalgia for inaccessible certainties

remains. In that tangential respect, the speakers in “Church Going” and “Toads” are alike: Each looks wistfully at a pattern of living that he seems constitutionally unsuited to embracing and suffers an emotional isolation that seems to be his fate. As in Hardy’s poems and novels, there is no possibility that by strength of will the persona can remake himself into something he is not. The final lines hint bleakly that one “grows wise” only in the company of the dead.

Themes

“*Church Going*” records the spiritual longings of a man who has lost religious faith. It may be seen as representing the spiritual longings of a generation of British citizens for whom the church has ceased to be important.

That religion has lost its central position is assumed. After all, the narrator would have observed the serious decline in church attendance in England since the nineteenth century. He would also, perhaps, think of Stonehenge, a religious site whose purpose has been forgotten. The narrator does not wonder *if* churches will fall out of use. Instead, he wonders what will happen *when* they do. Understanding the rest of the poem requires the recognition of that assumption.

The discussion about what will become of the unused church buildings is, in fact, an exploration of what has caused religion to be so important to so many for so long. Uncovering those reasons also reveals the needs that must still be met in the secular world.

The church, the narrator discovers, “held unspilt/ So long and equably what since is found/ Only in separation—marriage, and birth,/ And death, and thoughts of these.” People have always turned to the church for these major life events. Weddings, baptisms, and funerals are conducted in churches (or at least by ministers), and even in an age that lacks religious faith, people need to affirm the special significance of these events. They want God to take notice of them, even if, paradoxically, they don’t believe in God. Love, birth, and death all transcend the ordinary and must be “recognised/ And robed as destinies.”

Finally, the church is a place that is “proper to grow wise in.” The secular world, the world of work, bicycling holidays, suburbs, and sheep, can do very well without the influence of the church, but “someone will forever be surprising/ A hunger in himself to be more serious.” That hunger, a spiritual longing, can be met only by going to a place where it is valued, where it has been valued for centuries.

Snake

- D. H. Lawrence

“Snake” can be understood on two levels, as narrative and as symbol. On the simpler level, a Lawrence-like speaker encounters a snake at “his” water trough. Rapt by nearly hypnotic fascination, he allows the snake to drink, without taking action. Soliloquizing like Hamlet, the speaker wonders whether he is a coward not to kill the snake, because in Sicily the gold snakes are venomous. The snake continues to drink until, satisfied, it climbs the broken bank of the wall face, puts its head into “that dreadful hole,” and withdraws “going into blackness.” At this point, the speaker throws a log at the water trough yet fails to hit the snake. Immediately, he regrets his “pettiness” and wishes that the snake would come back, for it seemed to be like a king. The speaker has missed his chance with “one of the lords of life.”

On the narrative level, the poem is perplexing because a reader cannot fathom why the speaker expresses his internal debate with such vehemence over the question of killing the snake. One is not necessarily a “coward” in avoiding a poisonous snake, nor is one “perverse” in longing to talk to one. What “voices” of his education demand that he kill the snake? Are they the voices of Judaic-Christian tradition concerning the serpent in the Garden of Eden? Are they the voices of scientific rationalism that define a venomous snake as dangerous? Moreover, why should the speaker feel such regret at the act of throwing a log at the snake? After all, the snake had escaped the blow.

Why should the snake seem to the speaker to be “like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld”? To be sure, in non-Western cultures the snake (or, in ancient Egypt, the crocodile)

is often worshiped as a divine symbol of fertility. In India and in Mexico among the ancient Aztecs, the snake has been revered as a god of sexuality and life. Yet why should a twentieth century European speaker suppose that the snake is “due to be crowned again” as a lord of life?

Answers to these questions can best be determined by analyzing the symbolic structure of the poem. The snake is clearly a phallic image—at least to the speaker. When the snake first emerges, reaching down from “a fissure in the earth-wall,” the speaker perceives, on a subconscious level, the male organ emerging from the female. Lawrence uses the vulva image of “fissure” or “earthlipped fissure” deliberately. When the speaker, almost trancelike, stares at the snake “withdrawing into that horrid black hole,” he imagines on a symbolic level the act of sexual intercourse. As a result of his “education,” he has repressed his sexuality; his fears of the woman are expressed by the word “horrid.” By throwing a phallic-shaped log at the disappearing snake, he has suddenly snapped the tension. Now he regrets the voices of his “accursed human education.” Even as the Ancient Mariner in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem suffered guilt after slaying the albatross, so the speaker feels guilt at his “mean” act. For the snake, in Lawrence’s symbolism, is indeed a lord of life. Like Pluto, who in Greek mythology ruled the underworld, the sexual force (phallus) rules the subconscious and is “due to be crowned again,” this time as king of the dark gods of the blood—of vitality. Because the snake inhabits two worlds—that of light and of darkness, of the consciousness and of the subconsciousness—it represents to Lawrence (as do “Bavarian Gentians”) a union or wedding of the opposing elements of the universe into a single symbol of the life force.

Themes

In “Snake,” as in many of the poems in the collection *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* (1923), Lawrence explores the otherness of the creature world, defined chiefly by its purity and innocence in contrast to the corrupt human world. The poem is a subtle celebration of nature in the Wordsworthian tradition of nature poetry, wherein the ordinary becomes an occasion for celebration and revelation.

Lawrence's intense contemplation reveals what he shares with the snake (that creature state within himself) and what divides him from it—human consciousness. His imagery reflects the distinction he often makes between two modes of consciousness, that of intuition or instinct (the blood self) represented by the snake and that of intellect (the nerve/brain self) evident in humans. As he asserts in "Fantasia of the Unconscious" (1922), the snake's consciousness "is *only* dynamic, and noncerebral," while a person is composed of warring elements of instinct and willful intellect. In the poem, this conflict is dramatized first in the poet's instinctive attraction to the snake and the educated voice which tells him to destroy it, and again in his banishment of the snake and subsequent longing for its return.

The liabilities of human education is a recurring theme in Lawrence's work. In "Fantasia of the Unconscious," he argues that established ideas that do not square with a human being's "dynamic nature" arrest his individuality and damage his psyche. Clearly, in "Snake," the ideas fostered by education outside the poet impede his submission to the creature he admires.

Rather than deny instinct, Lawrence would strive for an acceptance of duality and polarity in the world as well as in himself. In "Snake," polarity and struggle are reflected in the contrasting juxtaposed imagery, the flux of conflicting feelings, and the ordinary diction with its mythic overtones. They find balance or resolution in the closing epiphany, in which Lawrence realizes artistically a need expressed philosophically in "The Reality of Peace": "I must humble myself before the abhorred serpent and give him his dues as he lifts his flattened head from the secret grass of my soul."

In the wake of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), it is tempting to read "Snake" as an expression of Lawrence's ambivalence toward his literary precursors (Thomas Hardy, William Wordsworth, and Milton, among others) and his anxiety over the problem of originality. How can any poet writing after William Shakespeare and Milton escape being derivative?

Such a reading is inspired by Lawrence's imagery, which posits the poet as a "second comer" to the trough, the snake which figures throughout literature, and the allusion to Coleridge at the end of a poem wherein the poet ostensibly disavows his education. Such a reading is valuable and

justified inasmuch as Lawrence was steeped in literature of the past, and it adds a provocative dimension to the other themes and meanings of the poem.

1. The campaign of a crusader that man should not kill animals indiscriminately simply because he has control over them.
2. Live and let live. Good interpersonal relationship should exist between man and other animals.
3. Evil doers will not escape guilty conscience.
4. The dilemma of a social crusader whose crusade became inconclusive.

Poetic Devices:

- **Diction**

The language of the poem is smooth - flowing, straight - forward, simple, colorful, graphic, imaginative, narrative and even descriptive. It is also like the language of prose. However, there are still few words that can be problematic to the reader. They include: 'pettiness' (narrow - mindedness), "expiate" (make amends), "fissure" (hole), "perversity" (wilful wrongdoing), etc.

- **Style/Structure**

Descriptively, the poem has six parts in ascending order of events. These parts cannot translate to stanzas since they are not structurally demarcated. The first part expresses the poet's first encounter with the snake as he went to drink water while the second part tells us the snake's actions at the water trough. The third part shows the poet's double mind on what to do with the snake - to kill or spare it.

The fourth part highlights more of the snake's action at the water trough and how it finally escaped and the poet's attack and regret. Finally, his wish to make amends.

The poem has no metrical pattern or end - rhyme scheme.

- **Mood/Tone**

The poet's mood is that of awe and fascination and then regrets of the rare opportunity he misses. The tone is that of admiration and then blame.

- **Imagery**

In the poet's narration and description of events, he unconsciously uses images that create sensuous pictures in the mind of the reader. Some of them are the golden and brownish colors of the snake; its dreamy eyes and the black, two forked tongue; the Etna smoking; etc. These images make the environment of the poem picturesque.

References:

H. Wayne Schow (1998) *Arnold's Dover Beach, The Explicator*, 57:1, 26-27, DOI: 10.1080/00144949809596802

Andrew Foley (2015) *Poetry of Departures: The Endings of Philip Larkin's Poems, English Academy Review*, 32:1, 23-40, DOI: 10.1080/10131752.2015.1034943

J. Loiseau (1939) *A reading of Wilfred Owen's poems, English Studies*, 21:1-6, 97-108, DOI: 10.1080/00138383908596692

H. B. Kulkarni (1980) *Snake Imagery and the Concept of Self in the Selected Works of D. H. Lawrence, South Asian Review*, 4:1, 28-36, DOI: 10.1080/02759527.1980.11933078



SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

www.sathyabama.ac.in

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 5 - Poetry II – SHS1203

God's Grandeur

- Gerard Manley Hopkins

The sonnet *God's Grandeur* by Gerard Manley Hopkins stresses the immanence of God. The whole universe is an expression of God's greatness, but man fails to recognize it. Though the soil is bare and smeared with man's toil, there is a constant renewal or natural beauty because God continues to 'brood' over the world.

In this sonnet, Hopkins praises the magnificence and glory of God in the world, blending accurate observation with lofty imagination. The world is filled with the greatness of God. God's glory expresses itself in two ways. Sometimes it flames out with sudden brightness when a gold foil is shaken. At other times, the poet thinks of an olive press, with the oil oozing (flowing out) from the pressed fruit. It oozes from every part of the press in a fine film and then the trickles gathers together to form a jar of oil. In the same way, the grandeur of God is found everywhere, trickling from every simple thing in a created universe and accumulating to form greatness. The poet wonders why people do not care about God's rod. People pursue their worldly activities without any thought of God's will and without the fear of god's anger.

Generations of human beings have followed the same worldly path and have become so habituated to it that they don't know its uselessness. It has become monotonous due to lack of the divine will. The world has been degraded and made ugly by commercial activity and by hard work aimed at worldly gains. The world bears the marks of man's dirt and gives out man's bad smells. The beauty of nature is spoiled by man's industrial activity and the sweet smell of nature has been drowned in the bad smells that come from machines. The earth is now bare, having lost all living beauty. Man is insensitive to this bareness. Because of the shoes, he can't feel whether the earth is soft or hard. In spite of man's activities tending to destroy the beauty of Nature, it is inexhaustible. At the bottom of the world there is freshness. This freshness never disappears. When spring comes nature renews itself and thus shows underlying freshness. And although the sun goes down the western sky and the earth is plunged in darkness, the next day will dawn and the sun will be rising again in the eastern sky. Just as a dove with its warm breast broods over its young ones in its nest, so the Holy Ghost broods protectively over the world which is bent in sleep and forgetfulness.

The repetition of the words 'have trod' captures the mechanical forces in verse because of their heavy accents. What is sometimes called the 'daily grind' is the repetitive thump in which the feet of generation march on; and the 'trod... trod... trod' sets up the three beat rhythm of the next line: 'seared... bleared... smeared! 'Seared' means 'dried up' or it can mean 'rendered incapable of feeling'. 'Bleared' means 'blurred with inflammation of the eyes' and 'smeared' means 'rubbed over with dirt'. They suggest that there is no delicacy of feeling or perception in the world. The whole world has been degraded and made ugly by commercial activity and by toil aimed at monetary gains.

Themes:

Life, Consciousness, and Existence:

Among other things, "God's Grandeur" proposes that the meaning of life and the purpose of human existence can be discovered through nature. As an expression both of intense anxiety and of intense joy, this poem can seem to be on the serious side. But all the language play within the poem lightens the tone, and can give us a different perspective on life, whether we agree with the poem's ideas or not.

Religion:

"God's Grandeur" is probably a religious poem. The speaker is telling us about his or her religious visions. The speaker sees God as intimately connected to the earth. The exotic language of the poem moves us through this fascinating religious journey.

Transformation:

In the world of "God's Grandeur" everything is shifting and changing and moving. For better or worse, the potential for change runs through Gerard Manley Hopkins's verse. The speaker's vision is at once apocalyptic and full of bursting green life, as he or she both laments change and yearns for it.

Count That Day Lost

- George Eliot

“*Count That Day Lost*,” by the English writer George Eliot (the pen name of Mary Ann Evans), is a lyric poem consisting of two stanzas and offering straightforward moral advice of the sort often associated with literature of the Victorian period.

Unlike the titles of many works, the title of this poem is absolutely integral to the poem’s meaning, effects, and effectiveness. The title immediately creates suspense. What day (we wonder) does the title imply? In what ways will that unidentified day be “lost”? Answers to these questions are postponed until the very end of the poem, where the text achieves a final ironic symmetry. The poem’s last line (in other words) clearly echoes its title, but in a memorably different way than we may have expected.

The opening line of the text is typical of the poem as a whole. It uses direct address and very simple phrasing—phrasing that seems appropriate to a work that is designed to teach a lesson. By openly addressing the reader, the speaker catches our attention and makes the poem’s personal relevance seem immediately obvious.

The meter of line 1, like the meter of the rest of the work, is straightforwardly “iambic.” Iambic meter consists of unaccented odd syllables followed by accented even syllables. Thus, the first line “scans” as follows: “If *you* sit *down* at *set* of *sun*.” The rest of the poem conforms to this pattern in thoroughly predictable ways, perhaps because Eliot wanted the poem to sound as simple and direct as its message. Iambic meter is often thought to mimic the rhythms of most “normal” speech, and so the meter of this poem, like so many other aspects of the work, sounds colloquial and almost conversational. The speaker does not sound like a lofty prophet or an eloquent bard but instead like a “regular” person, or perhaps even a friend.

To say this, however, is not to say that the poem’s language is completely simple and unadorned. The first line, for instance, achieves added interest not only because of the way *set* echoes *sit* but also because of the speaker’s heavy use of alliteration involving the consonants *s*, *t*, and *n*: “If you

sit down at set of sun.” Even when using apparently simple language, then, this speaker often achieves subtle effects. The reference to “set of sun,” for instance, obviously refers to the end of any particular day, but it may also ultimately suggest the final conclusion of one’s life as a whole.

Line 2 is typical of the poem as a whole in its emphasis on practical deeds and actual behavior. The poem does not endorse virtue in the abstract; instead, it celebrates real virtuous conduct toward other people. In fact, the poem itself might be seen as an example of the very sort of behavior it counsels: it tries to do for the reader the kind of good deed that it encourages the reader to do for others. Virtue, in this poem, is less a state of mind or a kind of inclination; it consists, instead, of virtuous behavior.

The rest of stanza 1 displays many features typical of the poem as a whole, including heavy use of simple, monosyllabic words; abundant alliteration; and frequent, emphatic echoing of key terms, as *one* (lines 4 and 6), *count*(lines 2 and 8) and *counting* (line 3), and *you* (lines 1, 2, and 8). Such repetition adds to the poem’s rhetorical force, and the repetition of *you*, in particular, never lets us forget that the speaker is addressing each reader directly. The poem also seems forceful because of its heavy emphasis on verbs and also because of its use of highly efficiently listing. This is a work that wastes no words. It makes its point clearly (perhaps too clearly for anyone interested in poetic subtlety), and it uses imagery, metaphors, and similes in ways that are sparing and undemanding (as in the phrases “eased the heart,” line 5; and “fell like sunshine,” line 7). In short, the poem teaches simple lessons simply.

At the same time, however, some of the imagery is worth some thought. By comparing kind glances to “sunshine,” for example, the speaker associates such glances with light, warmth, nature, and perhaps even God. A friendly “glance”—which can sound slight and minor—can nevertheless help illuminate another person’s day and can help eliminate mental and emotional darkness. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the poem’s imagery, however, is the work’s paradoxical use of metaphors associated with materialism (such as “count” and “spent”) to describe idealistic, nonmaterialistic virtue.

Also effective is Eliot's decision to make each stanza consist of one long unfolding sentence and to save the crucial information of each sentence until the very closing line. She thus creates a strong sense of anticipation and suspense, so that it is not until the last two words of the opening stanza that we finally discover that stanza's "point." As we work our way toward that point, however, we notice various subtle effects, such as the ones already mentioned as well as the wordplay of "heart" and "heard" in line 5.

Stanza 2 deliberately contrasts with stanza 1, but the contrasts are of course emphasized by various similarities, including resemblances in structure, tactics, and diction. Thus, the two stanzas are very similar in organization, especially in the ways both of them delay the crucial point until the final line. Both stanzas also employ an if/then structure that emphasizes the crisp logic of the arguments the stanzas make. Both stanzas directly address the reader, and in doing so, both use the more familiar, contemporary, colloquial word *you* rather than the more elevated, archaic, and somewhat pretentious-sounding word *thou* (a word that can make many Victorian poems sound a bit affected and self-consciously "poetic"). This effect of spontaneous informality is further enhanced by the double use of the contraction *you've* rather than a more formal-sounding *you have* (lines 10 and 12).

Stanza 2 resembles stanza 1 in other ways as well, including the ways it echoes the imagery and phrasing of the first stanza. Thus, the word *heart* appears both in line 5 and in line 10, while *sunshine* is mentioned both in line 7 and in line 13. The word *acts* is first used in line 2 and then is echoed by *act* in line 14. And, of course, the final lines of each stanza are intriguing not only because of their similarities but also because of their differences. As even its appearance on the page suggests, this is a poem with a high degree of unity and coherence. It is a well-designed poem that also has very obvious designs on the reader. It is intended less to intrigue than to persuade and even, perhaps, to pressure.

The speaker's use of the word *soul* in line 15 to refer to another human being may suggest that the poem's initial readers (most of whom would have called themselves Christians) have an almost religious obligation to treat others with charity and kindness. Such phrasing may also suggest that in the final analysis, it will not be readers themselves, but rather God, who will be assessing their

conduct. Whatever Eliot's personal attitudes toward religion may have been, she knew the conventional religious beliefs of the audience she was addressing. The reference to other persons as "souls" would definitely have played on the religious consciences of many of her first readers. By calling other people "souls," the poem suggests that all persons are equal in the sight of God and that readers have two more reasons to treat others well: God expects them to do so, and someday they will face God's judgment.

The poem repeatedly suggests that moral behavior is not especially demanding: it doesn't cost much to bring a bit of cheer into another person's day. Thus readers should feel even more obliged to show concern for others, since doing so costs them very little. Yet the final line catches us a bit by surprise. If (the speaker says) we fail to treat others well during the course of a day, then we should "count that day as worse than lost" (line 16).

Both the poem's title, "*Count That Day Lost*," and its highly symmetrical structure had led us to expect that it might end with the identical phrase used in the title, thus giving the work a final effect of complete balance. Therefore the inclusion of the word *worse* ("Count that day worse than lost") comes as a slight shock. It briefly but noticeably subverts the symmetry that the speaker has thus far constructed. Why, we wonder, is a day lacking in charitable behavior not simply "lost" but "worse than lost"?

Various possibilities present themselves. Does "worse than lost" imply that the failure to be kind is especially blameworthy? Does that phrase suggest that a lack of kindness should particularly trouble one's personal conscience, especially when kindness is so easy? Or does the phrase perhaps even suggest that ultimately the failure to be kind will be judged by God? Whatever the case, the shift from the expected "count that day lost" to the unexpected "count that day worse than lost" makes the final line especially memorable and emphatic.

The Thought-Fox

- Ted Hughes

“The Thought-Fox” appeared in Hughes’s first collection of poems, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), and is one of his most celebrated and anthologized poems. This poem contains many of the stylistic and thematic elements that have come to define Hughes’s poetry. In terms of Hughes’s poetic development, this poem was unmistakably his breakthrough, signaling his departure from the rhetorical and Metaphysical poetry and his movement toward mythmaking.

The poem comprises a reverie by immediately invoking the imagination in the first line: “I imagine this midnight moment’s forest.” The alliteration in this line suggests a casting of a spell. The first stanza of this twenty-four-line poem arranged in quatrains evokes solitude; plainly, the writer is working late at night alone, the only sound being “the clock’s loneliness.” Beyond the writer’s domain of time and the blank page exists the primordial force of the imagination.

The poet becomes actively aware of the approach of the nearness of the other or the imagination in the second stanza. The poet stands at literal and figurative thresholds: He stares at a blank page, which becomes the dark window, the starless sky, and then into the forest’s darkness. In the third stanza, the poet has crossed these various thresholds to make contact with this totem-figure of the unconscious or the imagination. Both the poet and the metaphorical fox are tentative in their approaches. The rhythm enacts the moment-by-moment movement of the reverie. The selection of simple words underscores the directness of the experience and the rhythm of the poem’s trancelike chant: “Two eyes serve a movement, that now/ And again now, and now, and now/ Sets neat prints into the snow.”

The fourth stanza traces the movement of the fox through the trees. Gradually the blank, snowy page fills with print, the tracks of the thought-fox. The poem is simultaneously depicting the transcription of a poem from the imagination onto the page and describing the moment of inspiration. The fifth stanza is the most abstract while also seeking to convey the fullness and

primordial magic of reverie as the poet is swept into the “deepening greenness,” or vitality, of the imagination. The force of the reverie overwhelms the poet, until the sudden physical presence and departure of the fox in the sixth stanza occurs: “Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox/ It enters the dark hole of the head.” The imagination at this moment shows its immediacy and power; the fox is no longer a shadow but dangerously close before vanishing and leaving the page printed, scented with its presence, its territory marked. The imagination, for Hughes, is a primordial force; its presence is both creative and predatory. The poem implies that it is necessary, however, to engage this archaic power if one is to write an authentic poetry.

A Birthday

- Christina Rossetti

The poem is structured like a hymn about love. The regular, alternate rhyme scheme adds to this. The two stanzas are in perfect balance, using the chorus-like refrain 'my heart is' and 'my love is come to me.' The first stanza lists a series of similes where Rossetti compares her feelings - 'my heart' to a series of images of the beauty of the natural world, increasing in rarity and beauty as the first stanza progresses.

The poet describes the intense feelings she experiences 'because my love is come to me'. The possessive pronoun 'my' appears frequently, as if love is a possession. As we see later, the poet shows it is richer than any of the most luxurious possessions in the world. The use of the pronoun 'me' shows that the poem is very self-focused. This poem is all about feelings - there are no real objects, only the rich sensations that her love conjures up in her imagination.

First, Rossetti compares her heart to a 'singing bird'. The verb 'singing' evokes joy as great as song, which she elaborates with imagery of the 'nest' - a place of safety and fertility, which links to the idea of the 'watered shoot' - something, which will grow. However, a watered shoot is small, and young. The next image is older and more substantial. The lush, fertile imagery continues in the motif of the 'apple tree' so full its 'boughs are bent with thickset fruit'. This extravagantly plush ripeness suggests that the love she feels is growing, ripe and perfectly natural, simple and pure. The imagery of nature suggests intensely innocent and artless feeling.

The image of a 'rainbow shell' becomes more mystical, linked to the idea of a 'halcyon' or idyllic sea: the rainbow is not tangible; it is symbolic of shimmering beauty and of God's promise to protect mankind. As the images increase in intensity, so does her feeling. In the last couplet of the stanza, her feeling increases even beyond these: as the use of the comparative 'my heart is gladder than all these' shows. This is an ecstatic, almost measureless joy at love: as if to say, her pleasure in her love is greater than anything she can put into words.

The mood in the second stanza shifts into a series of imperatives - commands: 'raise me' 'hang it', 'carve it', 'work it' as if she were an emperor. She demands exotic riches. 'purple', 'gold' and 'silver'

are precious colours suggesting material wealth, and the 'fleur de lys' is a symbol of kings. The fruits she asks for are exotic, rare and expensive consumables: 'pomegranates', 'grapes' and she asks for exotic birds 'peacocks' and 'doves' in contrast to the more homely images of the first stanza with birds, apples and rainbows. This continues the effect that her love is growing in intensity - shifting from the everyday to the exotic and rare. The images chosen look back to the Victorian ideal of the medieval period as a pure, romantic age. The opulent imagery suggests an intense, rich experience.

Rossetti's choice of the definite article over the indefinite emphasizes this is not just like a birthday, it is 'the birthday of her life'. We don't normally say 'the birthday' so it stands out as an unusual phrase. 'a' birthday is a special occasion that happens yearly, but is one of many. 'The' birthday of her life is something huge: it's the most important, special occasion of her life, and in the final line she uses both 'me' and 'my' to draw the focus of the feelings back into herself.

References:

Margaret Giovannini (1965) 36. *Hopkins' God's Grandeur*, *The Explicator*, 24:4, 56-59, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1965.11482569

Thomas L. Watson (1964) 47. *Hopkins' God's Grandeur*, *The Explicator*, 22:6, 92-95, DOI: 10.1080/00144940.1964.11482421

Bibhu Padhi (2014) Ted Hughes's "*The Thought-Fox*": *Object, Symbol, and Creativity*, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 27:2, 86-89, DOI: 10.1080/0895769X.2014.915721

Alexis Easley (1996) *Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s*, *Women's Writing*, 3:2, 145-160, DOI: 10.1080/0969908960030205
