Block-4

Unit 1 : Poetry in the Modern World

Unit 2 : W. B Yeats : "The Second Coming"

Unit 3 : Dylan Thomas :"A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London"

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Unit 1 : Poetry in the Modern World

Unit Structure :

1.1 Objectives

The present unit aims to familiarize you with the context of modern poetry in general, and *give* a brief introduction to the poets included in your syllabus and their particular themes. However, by the time you finish reading this unit you will have–

- *made* a comprehensive survey of modernism in modern poetry
- *read* about the representative modernist poets
- *grasped* the main ideas behind the kind of poetry they are involved with
- *understood* the significance of the various socio-historical elements which became instrumental in their inception

1.2 Introduction

J.M.Cohen, in *Poetry of This Age*(1960), quotes from T.S.Eliot's 'East Coker' to describe the situation of the modern poet:

"So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—

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Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling."

Cohen points out that "Eliot's verdict on his achievement is an excessively severe one. Every poet since Baudelaire has been conscious that the equipment he has inherited from the great poets of the past is shabby, if not worn out. But, . . .new measures have been invented and new resources of vocabulary explored by the poets of the last hundred years. It is not so much that the equipment has deteriorated, but that the demands upon it are very much greater than those made by Wordsworth and Keats, Hugo, Tennyson and Heine. For the poetry of the divided man needs to be psychologically far subtler than that of the outward-looking poets of the past. . . .The last fifty years of European poetry have seen several 'raids on the inarticulate' , attempts like that of the surrealists to tap inspiration at a deeper source than the waking consciousness can comprehend. But on the whole modern poets have probably kept up with the increasing demand on their powers of expression. "

Cohen makes the point that "One of the principal themes of the modern poet has therefore been the break up of a society from which he felt increasingly alien.

John Holloway marks out the importance of Thomas Hardy's poetry in the modern period: "Hardy, it must be remembered, was writing verse steadily from the 1860s; and, with its plain vernacular language, and its strong . . awareness of everyday life, his large body of verse forcibly invites us to see nineteenth-century poetry itself in other than 'dream-world' terms.

Hardy's long period of activity as a poet – from the 1860s to the 1920s – significantly bridges the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and does so not only in the matter of dates, but of outlook, technique and diction as well. In many of Hardy's best poems the dominance of folksong as a model, or of the street-ballad, is clear; this is another respect in which he parted company with the traditions of 'polite letters'. These qualities of language and of technique

are not surface qualities. These facts make Hardy a key figure in the whole development of later poetry; and one may note that the poetry of the middle and later twentieth century has probably followed him, consciously or unconsciously, more than anyone else."

Holloway makes the further observation that the poetry of Hardy (discussed above) and other poets like him at the turn of the century—Edward Thomas, and D. H. Lawrence, for instance—was based on experience that was "traditional and rural". In contrast, the "centre of life had moved away from what was rural. Thence, as we learn, the "new poetry which came into being from about 1910 did not modify the English tradition which has just been discussed, but departed sharply from it. Pound called for poetry at "such a degree of development . . . that it will vitally concern people who are accustomed, in prose, to Henry James, . . .and in music to Debussy" . . This new poetry looked not to the countryside, but to the great city." This new poetry, affiliated to the great city, felt the impress of the Continental poets like Laforgue, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Eliot remarked: "[Baudelaire] gave new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of images from contemporary life." London was a visible preoccupation of the poets of this new poetry. In Pound and Eliot, as Holloway continues, "the range of intellectual, cosmopolitan and culturally polyglot interests is far wider than in earlier poets like Henley, Dowson and the rest. Pound's interest in Far Eastern literatures, and Eliot's Sanskrit studies bear witness to that".

The new verse had strong links with Post-Impressionism and even Expressionism, a fact that becomes clear by virtue of "Pound's insistence, in the 1913 Imagist Manifesto, on the integrated image, stark and clear, and on a maximum economy of words in the poem".

The new poetry, Holloway makes clear, also repudiated the prosperous urban middle-class and its values. It adopted a decidedly cultural-elite stance. In its avoidance of bourgeois values, the new verse drew on its links with the poetry of the later nineteenth century. The same prosperous middle-class had, we should remember, disgusted Yeats when it had failed to respond to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Ireland). So, as Holloway notes, "That modern poetry started with this repudiation of the broad city middle class affords a link between the new poets of the 1910s and those of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1890s, and helps one to see how it was natural enough that Pound's earliest verse should have *fin-de siècle* qualities, or that like the nineties poets Pound should have had a special interest in Old French or Provençal."

We can see how the line of modern poetry drew upon a cosmopolitan

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culture that helped it to eschew bourgeois values and uphold aestheticism. These strains are clear in Yeats' essay of 1901, *What is Popular Poetry?* or even in his *The Symbolism of Poetry* (1900) which was written under the influence of Arthur Symons's book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which introduced English readers to the French Symbolists. Yeats sought to bring together (in the words of Holloway), "poet and peasant . . .but grocer and politician were in another world." The break with the old tendencies consisted thus in a "firm repudiation of what was seen by Yeats as the whole Tennysonian stance, the poet as public figure writing for the broad middle class and diluting his poetry until that class could take it in."

These new social affiliations of the new verse were to be seen reflected in its techniques – "in the demand that social respectability should not be allowed to impose restrictions of subject-matter upon the poet, nor literary convention impose restrictions of diction or emotion." Moreover, "this change in social orientation led to an insistence on the supreme virtue of economy and concentration: poetry was not to be made easy for the relaxed general reader."

In his early essays Yeats lay down these very reasons for refusing to conform to "a sequacious logic, a self-explaining easy-to-follow train of thought." This rejection of neatly logical exposition in poetry thus created in modern poetry one of its most striking characteristics—"a constant laconic *juxtaposition* of ideas" (Holloway) rather than "a banally lucid exposition".

1.3 The Socio-historical Context

Many of the revolutionary developments in nineteenth-century England actually had a far-reaching impact well into the twentieth century. First of all was the Industrial Revolution that reached its peak in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rapid industrialisation in England thereafter saw the end of the pre-industrial economy of Britain finally surrender to a newer way of life (urbanised and more modern) by the end of the century. The sense of community began to lose its ground rapidly, leaving behind a more fragmented society in which one could no longer hold on confidently to any fixed and stable sense of identity. Apart from this there was the impact of Darwin's evolutionary theory that questioned the existence of God; furthermore, there was Marx in the later part of the century whose socio-economic theories sought to interpret the class system emerging under industrialism and capitalism. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, there emerged yet another theorist who was to have a powerful impact (both positively and negatively) on the

entire scenario of Modernism: Freud. With Freud came his theory of the unconscious as determining human actions and thoughts through its deep and irrational force; with such a concept, it was no longer possible to hold on to the idea of a stable human subject, since it would always already be divided within itself. All these developments became more evident in the very forms and language adopted by the Modernist poets like T. S. Eliot, for example. Then again, the anthropological work of James Frazer was to have a profound impact on Modernist literature as a whole.

By the end of the nineteenth century the earlier stability of the British Empire in danger of disintegration chiefly from nationalist movements and rebellions against it in the various colonies. The first significant event in this was the Boer War (1899-1902) in South America which turned out to be a hollow victory for Britain. But the greatest event at this point was the First World War (1914-1918).

Modernism as a trend in twentieth-century English literature was already in evidence before the outbreak of World War. The avant-garde had already established its dominance over earlier developments in art and literature. It was accelerated by the fact that newer education laws and increased literacy brought about a tremendous change in the reading public. Although this resulted in a parallel rise of the press and 'popular' literature, it nevertheless also extended a hand towards the growth of newer media: the radio, the television, cinema and popular music. A section of the intelligentsia saw this as the onslaught of the masses which would vulgarise the taste and appreciation of 'high' literature, and felt themselves alienated in this modern world. As a result the avant-garde, as mentioned earlier, rose with a small target audience of people having a superior education and taste who could identify with this sense of isolation. One has to only go through the poems of Yeats and Eliot and the novels and essays of E. M. Forster, for instance, to gauge this point of view.

With the First World War, however, all these preoccupations underwent a deep change as England, among other European nations, tried to grapple with its magnitude and destructiveness. This was manifested most strongly in the poetry produced during the time. The War gave rise to a group of young poets like Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and Siegfried Sassoon (many of whom died in action in the battlefield) who are collectively known as the War poets. Then there were Yeats, Pound and Eliot who were already writing during this time. All these poets echoed the starkness of death

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and the mood of anxiety and uncertainty that they encountered first-hand. England (as the rest of Europe) was seen in terms of a barren, dehumanised dystopia, not only literally (the battlefield images of the War poets), but metaphorically as well. The years after the end of the War saw the full development of Modernist poetry with one of the major texts, *The Waste Land*, being published in 1922.

The poets of the 1930s however, were more deeply affected by the Second World War (1939-45), the more so because many of these poets were at the formative stage of their careers. This war was more destructive than the earlier one and more importantly, had actually entered Britain through the Blitz in London. The most crucial event in this, however, was America's act of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan; this signalled the end of an era to most writers of the time with the advent of a new atomic age. Eliot's *Four Quartets* was a resonant articulation of this sense of ending and nostalgia, coupled with a stark emptiness. Dylan Thomas, on the other hand, tried to evolve, through the language of poetry, a counter to the deadening effect of war. While most of these poets wrote from a distance about the War and acted thereby as commentators and critics there were a few poets like Alun Lewis, Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes who had actually fought and were killed in action in the war (Henry Reed was another poet who survived the war). The poems of these, like the earlier War Poets, echoed the extreme nearness of death, though with pessimism. Unlike many of their predecessors (especially during the first two years of the First World War), who were patriotic and enthusiastic in their wartime experiences and descriptions, these poets talked more of the desolation and regret accompanying this war.

Another political event that touched the poetry of the Thirties specifically was the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) between the forces belonging to the Spanish dictator Franco and the Republican army which sought to bring democracy to the nation. Many poets, like Auden, for example, extended their support to the Republican army.

Finally, the Irish struggle for independence in the early twentieth century and the troubles in Northern Ireland during the second half of the century also forms the chief context for the poetry of Yeats and Heaney. Yeats was writing during the time of the Irish literary renaissance and actually was a part of it, though he was against the violence of the Irish revolutionaries. After Ireland secured its independence in 1923, however Northern Ireland still remained under the rule of Britain. For a number of decades during the mid-twentieth

century, sectarian violence (between supporters of the British Government and supporters of Irish autonomy) defined this region, and this becomes the major concern of Heaney.

This is a very brief account of certain key contexts of modern poetry which I have also discussed to some extent in the previous section with reference to individual poets.

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1.4 Poets of the Modern World

1.4.1 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

Yeats was not only a poet but a dramatist as well, and played an important part in the Irish Literary Revival. His volumes of poems include *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1920), *The Cat and the Moon* (1924), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair* (1929), and *Last Poems* (1939). Some of his best-known plays are *The Countess Kathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *The Player Queen* (1922), and *The Herne's Egg* (1938).

While talking of himself and his generation as the last of the Romantics, Yeats was, however, keenly aware of the cultural and political contexts of his own time, especially the Irish struggle for independence that manifested itself in a series of rebellions and uprisings in the early 20th century. Thus, in his poetic career, Yeats registers different phases, taking on, initially, the mantle of the Romantic poets with a visionary idea of poetry and the poet's vocation. His later poetry from the transitional *Responsibilities* onwards, takes on a bare style, self-consciously dispensing with romantic trimmings, using a half-colloquial diction, and often, a casual tone. Chris Baldick identifies some of the general and important themes and concerns of Yeats in his poetry as those of "permanence and impermanence ("Sailing to Byzantium", "Among Schoolchildren", "Byzantium"); of the cyclical patterns of world history ("The Second Coming", "Leda and the Swan", "Two Songs for a Play"); of contemplation and action ("An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", "A Dialogue of Self and Soul",

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"Long-legged Fly"); of body and soul ("Michael Robartes and the Dancer", "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop"); of art and the artist ("Ego Dominus Tuus", "The Circus Animals' Desertion"),the hostility of the philistine modern world to the Artist ("September 1913", "The Fisherman", "Under Ben Bulben"), the gracious patronage bestowed by the landed gentry and aristocracy ("At Galway Races", "Coole Park, 1929", "The Municipal Gallery Revisited"); and the violence, betrayals, and guilt of living Irish history ("Easter, 1916", "Meditations in the Time of Civil War", "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "Parnell's Funeral")" (Baldick 2004: 84-85). Finally Yeats is closely associated with the symbolist technique in modern English poetry, a tradition that goes back to the nineteenth-century French movement of the same name.

1.4.2 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)

A representative modern poet, T. S. Eliot also experimented with drama, reviving the English tradition of verse drama. He was also an important critic who was responsible for a renewed interest in many poets and writers of earlier ages, significantly, the Metaphysical poets. His major poetical works include *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), and *Four Quartets* (1943) which was a collection of four earlier works: *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), The *Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942). His dramas include *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

The poems in Eliot's first collection of poetry marked a radical change in English poetry from most models prevailing till the very early part of the twentieth century. In the title poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot adapted the model of the dramatic monologue in order to explore the intricate relationship of the modern subject with her/his self and the outside world. This resulted in a kind of poetry that "disintegrat[ed] character into mood", and combined "comedy and pathos" in the figure of Prufrock – the speaker of the monologue – who is "a painfully hesitant young man, emotionally paralysed by self-consciousness, his sense of self crumbling into

disconnected and overpowering images" (Baldick 2004: 97). Eliot also etches out the ennui and tedium of modern urban life in much of his poetry. His major poem, *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, registers the impact of one of the major events of the period: the First World War and the resultant crisis of empire, particularly, the British Empire. As a result, the waste land in the poem is not just a patch of uncultivated land laid waste by war (an image that figures so prominently in the poetry of that group of poets collectively referred to as the War Poets). Instead, it is a symbolic re-creation of a country swept by the annihilating effect and consequences of a pan-European war and a parallel economic dislocation as well as the image of a country having to come to terms with the potential disintegration of its imperial holdings, with rising opposition to imperial rule and colonisation both at home and abroad. The poem is a complex interweaving of a variety of poetic styles and forms from diverse periods as well as numerous motifs from classical and English literature. It is also an extremely polyphonic text with a number of voices from both past and present – from myth, folklore, and the real milieu of the real urban world – adding to the layers of meaning in the text. It is an evocative account of the cultural, emotional and spiritual desolation looming over Britain, and, by extension, over the European world after the First World War.

Eliot is noted for his extensive use of *vers libre* or free verse in his poetry. However, it is always accompanied by a strong sense of rhythm and metre. Moreover, he also carries on with the tradition of English poetry, particularly in his use of the dramatic monologue, thereby making a attempt to modify and re-create tradition in order to make the past relevant in the present. This is discussed by Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

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1.4.3 William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

A versatile author, Williams was at once a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist and dramatist. His works include: *Paterson* (1946-58, and a complete edition in 1963), *Collected Earlier Poems* (1951), *Collected Later Poems* (1950), *Journey to Love* (1955) and *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1963) [poetry]; *White Mule* (1937), *In the Morning* (1940) and *The Build-Up*

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(1952) [novels]; *The Knife of the Times and Other Stories* (1932), *Life Along the Passaic River* (1938), *Make Light of It* (1950), and *The Farers' Daughters* (1951) [short stories and documentaries]; *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1961) [drama]; and *Autobiography* (1951) [life writing].

Williams, along with other members of his group, such as Alfred Kreymborg, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Louise Bogan, attempted to create a poetry that would evoke a specifically American context rather than the Anglo-American modernism of Pound and Eliot, though the latter were undoubtedly influential presences in the formative years of American modernism. Their (Pound and Eliot's) impact was chiefly noticeable in their rejection of bourgeois society and its secular, material and egalitarian ideology. However, as Williams saw it, these poets, particularly Eliot, had ultimately to be rejected because the revolutionary and experimental techniques Eliot used in his poetry were explored ultimately as a means to facilitate the renewal of traditional and chiefly, English and European or Continental values. On the other hand, Williams tried consistently to locate himself and his work in America, primarily by employing the language as it was spoken by the Americans, capturing the flavour of American experience mediated through the consciousness of *being* an American. In this, Williams' career as a physician was of utmost importance to him since through it he gained access to the private and intimate domestic lives of people. As a result, his poetry permeates with a "matter-of-fact tenderness toward external nature that permeates his work" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320). It is, moreover, an experience that facilitated an exploration of the self through "an apprehension of the physical reality of people in their intrinsic locality" (Feder in Ford 1995: 320).

Some of the other influences on Williams' poetry were Imagism and, later, Dadaism. Under such influences, Williams conceptualised the theory of the poem as an object that, like a Cubist work of art, expresses its meaning through the medium of its form. The poet's role, thereby, is to create a new reality through language that has a consonance with its present and modern cultural and linguistic context (Feder 1995: 320).

In his emphasis on the significance of the local as a representative of the universal (evident in his willingness to incorporate even mundane,

ordinary and so-called trivial and everyday episodes or images in poetry shorn of all the embellishments of 'art') Williams also seems to present a return to that egalitarianism and secularism that Pound and, more vehemently, Eliot had rejected.

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1.4.4 Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Wallace Stevens, another major American Modernist poet, also took a position in partial opposition to T. S. Eliot and the modernism he represented, though many of his early poems bore the influence of Eliot. His collections of poems include *Harmonium* (1923), *Ideas of Order* (1935), *Owl's Clover* (1936), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction* (1942), *Parts of a World* (1942), *Transport to a Summer* (1947), *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) and *The Rock* (1955).

Like Williams, who was incidentally a friend of his, Stevens is also concerned with the constant dialogue and at times conflict between the real and the unreal that make the notion of reality itself precarious. However, the difference between the two poets lies in that "[f]or Williams, reality, affirmed by the imagination, is an end product, a 'new object'; for Stevens, it is process, subject, and method" (Feder in Ford 1995: 323). Stevens is more concerned about how one's imagination mediates between the external reality and the inner world of the mind and, by doing so, revises and re-creates one's perception of the real world. Poetry, for Stevens, becomes, again, a medium through which this process can be explored.

For Stevens, such an exploration, moreover, is possible only on the level of the individual, and not by affiliating oneself with any particular group. This leads him to avoid becoming a member of any particular Modernist movement and sharing a common ideology. This is accompanied by a comic sense in Stevens' poetry that counterbalanced the ironic tone of most Modernist poetry. Again, for Stevens, poetry and its forms and language serve to transform reality – whether of the external world or of the self itself – and explore the ways and factors that determine such transformation, so that a newly created poem is also a discovery of some new facet of this 'reality'. It is the mind which, through its conscious and unconscious processes makes the apprehension and re-creation of reality possible. At the

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same time, however, it itself is always vulnerable to "necessity, change and death"; it constantly invents and re-fashions myths in order to bring upon the "devious ways of self-creation" the "ultimate reality of extinction" that traditional myths themselves seek to evade (Feder in Ford 1995: 324, 325). There is, therefore, in Stevens a deliberately non-conventional attitude to myth that is reinvented in his poetry.

1.4.5 Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973)

Auden and his colleagues (in particular, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis MacNeice) became prominent as poets in the 1930s and registered a self-conscious divergence from the high modernist poets like Eliot and Pound. They did this by refusing to resort to exoticism and remoteness of their precursors and by bringing back established poetic forms both popular and literary like the ballad, the sonnet and the villanelle. At the same time, they retained the sense and experience of modernity in the subject matter, tone and diction of their poetry. They also favoured a simplicity of technique and diction in contrast to the earlier modernist thrust on experimentation with language and technique, "although their range of reference [was] more modernistic both in embracing the sights and sounds of contemporary urban and industrial life and in maintaining an intellectual detachment that owe[d] something to Eliot" (Baldick 2004: 103).

The Auden group initially published their poems in the anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933) and subsequently in the journal *New Verse* (1933-9). As Baldick points out, the 'new' was pertinent being born in the twentieth century, they were more at ease with a "post-Victorian culture of monopolized transport, aviation, and mass entertainment than any of their predecessors" and, therefore, unlike Yeats, Eliot and Pound, "were not inclined to bemoan the arrival of their century as a catastrophic Fall from the aristocratic glories of old into vulgar suburbanism" (Baldick 2004: 104). Their poetry possessed a social awareness especially of England and an acknowledgement of the inevitable presence of modern technology and science in contemporary urban life. Marx and Freud were the two great intellectual influences on the Auden group. For Auden, the crisis of modern existence manifested itself particularly in terms of illness and neurosis and "'psychosomatic' illness", a concept he borrowed from psychologists Homer Lane and Georg Groddeck

(Baldick 2004: 105-6). His poetry, unlike Eliot's which explored one's private and inner world of experience, tended to concentrate more on a public situation and experience. He wads of the view that the private could no longer remain insulated from the social and the political contexts. Therefore, instead of being obscure and difficult, Auden's poetry strives to become more accessible and popular since this entails a social perspective. However, the affinity of Auden with the preceding modernists lies in the fact that he shares "the same poetic quest for a meaning to life amidst images of a contemporary world which fail to form a coherent whole" (Carter and McRae 2001: 146). Some of the notable collections of Auden's poetry are *Poems* (1930), *The Orators* (1932), *Look, Stranger* (1936), *Nones* (1951), and *The Shield of Achilles* (1955). Auden also co-authored a few plays with Christopher Isherwood, of which the best-known is *The Ascent of F6* (1937).

Several comments have to be considered in relation to the kind of poetry that Auden wrote in the 1930s. A critic (Reed Way Dasenbrock) highlights the closeness of poetry to politics in the modern period. The case of W.B.Yeats comes to mind. He says, "Yeats is the central example of a twentieth-century poet whose life and work were caught up in political events from the very beginning." Further, "The Irish Revolution and the cultural revival which preceded it constituted the first important moment in the twentieth century in which poetry and politics are in significant relation and in which the work of a great poet responds to and actively shapes important political events. The political struggle of 1916 to 1923 which won Ireland independence was unthinkable without the cultural revival which came before." We are also reminded that "the Irish literature which created the Irish Renaissance was written in English and Irish was not … restored as the functional national language."

The same commentator goes on: " . .Anglo-American modernism is the second key moment in the literary history of the twentieth century when poetry and politics intersect fatefully. . . .Modernist writers became distinctly more interested in politics after the First World War, as should occasion little surprise, since it seemed only a matter of self-interest to analyse the causes of the war and see what could prevent its reoccurence. . . most modernists who survived the war were left convinced that substantial changes in the structure of European society were desirable, probably essential. In *Kangaroo*

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Lawrence wrote of the war-atmosphere in England, 'no man who really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy.' "

Thus, as we are told, "Inspired by the Irish example which showed that poets could have an effect on society, modernist writers sought to align themselves with forces of social change which left an important place for art and the artist". It could be stated that "If Yeats is unquestionably the greatest and most influential Irish poet of the twentieth century and Pound is arguably the greatest and unquestionably the most influential American poet of the twentieth century, then one can certainly draw the conclusion that some of the century's most important poetry stands in close relation to to the politics of its time." England must be mentioned because "in the work of the first generation of poets after modernism, the 'Auden generation', who constitute the third and in an important sense the last moment in which a central movement in the literary history of the twentieth century intersects with a central movement in political history." Also, the important fact is that, "It is the orientation towards Marxism, however, which most sharply differentiates the Auden generation from their modernist predecessors."

Check Your Progress:

1. Highlight the literary responses to the great Wars in poetic terms in the early twentieth century.
2. To what extent can 'modernism' be seen as a response to the larger social concerns in the twentieth century? Discuss with reference to the work of Eliot, Yeats and Auden.
3. Relate the work of the modernist poets to the question of perspective and identity. Make a particular reference to the work of Dylan Thomas and Eliot.
4. Attempt an analysis of Auden's *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* in the light of his views on the role of poetry in society and the life-world.
5. Highlight the main concerns of Anglo-American modernism with the reference to the work of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams paying particular attention to their responses to the difficulties of derived traditions.

1.4.6 Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

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Born at Swansea, Wales, Dylan Thomas brought into the poetry of the thirties till the early fifties a dissident voice that militated against the constraints of the socially and politically committed poetry of the Auden group. His poems were first published in collected form in *Eighteen Poems* (1934), which was subsequently followed by *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939), *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1952). Besides poetry, Thomas also wrote short stories, published in two collections, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) and *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1955), as well as the radio play *Under Milk Wood.*

Along with Yeats (as in "Easter, 1916"), Wilfred Owen ("Strange Meeting"), Louis MacNeice ("Bagpipe Music") and Auden ("Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love"), Thomas (in poems such as "And Death Shall Have No Dominion") was part of a revival of half-rhyme (partial consonance of end words in verse line without an accompanying assonance: *love/have*) and pararhyme (full consonance without assonance: *love/leave*) instead of full rhyme. Meanwhile, with Robert Bridges, who, in 1913, broke away from the traditional English metres based on accent or stressed syllables in favour of the French technique of counting only the number of syllables in each line, English poetry began the modern tradition of the English syllabic metre, one which was continued in the 1930s by poets such as Auden, Thomas and Thom Gunn. In fact, the first three collections of Thomas's poetry exhibited all techniques in all but one of the fifty-nine poems comprising these volumes.

In addition to an innovative technique, Thomas brought into his poetry an intensity and a vigour born out of an attempt to strain the limits of language in order to express very powerful feelings. This frequently made his poems (especially the early ones) dense in meaning while his images frequently earned the label 'surreal'. The "Romantic vigour and flamboyance" of Thomas was a strong divergence from "the anxious, uncertain tones of T. S. Eliot, the more cautious Romanticism of W. B. Yeats, and the social preoccupations of W. H. Auden" (Carter and McRae 2001: 146).

Thomas's poetry was also different in its deliberate avoidance of any notion of social or intellectual or rational life and experience in favour of a celebration of the organic processes governing the natural

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world (including human beings) and bodily functions. This is re-enacted for Thomas in language as well, whose workings and effects are autonomous and regenerative and as immune from rational rules as the entire creative process.

Childhood is one of the key motifs in Thomas's poetry. Poems like "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" celebrate the spontaneity of the child who is more organically involved with nature. These poems, therefore, are an adult poet's retrospective re-creation of and an accompanying awareness of the loss of what Walford Davies calls "the child's intimate sense of wonder" (Davies 2003: 51).

The Second World War also profoundly influenced Dylan Thomas, filling him with a deep shock and outrage. However Thomas's response was the affirmation of the cyclic processes of nature and ultimately, therefore, the telescoping of life and death, regeneration and decay into one another, that could hopefully provide a counter to such unnecessary and 'unnatural' destruction brought on by the war. This can be seen in his wartime poems like "Deaths and Entrances", "Ceremony after a Fire Raid", and "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London".

SAQ:

What constitutes the "modernist" elements of Thomas' poetry? Do you think there is any conflict between the "modern" and the "Romantic"? Does Thomas effect a reconciliation between these seemingly opposed tendencies? (50 + 50 + 60 words)

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1.4.7 Philip Larkin (1922-1985)

Philip Larkin's name is usually associated with the Movement, a short-lived group formed during the 1950s that took a strong anti-Modernist stand. The term "Movement" was coined by J. D. Scott, literary editor of *The Spectator*, in 1954 to describe the work of writers such as Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings and Robert Conquest. Most of its members came from a lower middle-class background and

consciously incorporated this factor in their works that include both prose and poetry. Movement poetry was primarily published in two anthologies: D. J. Enright's *Poets of the 1950's* (1955) and Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). It was characterised by the presence of an anti-romantic, witty, rational and sardonic observer and speaker. The Movement poets adopted an honest, unsentimental and unemotional approach; reality was by far mundane and ordinary for them, yet it concealed within itself a certain dignity. There was also an emphasis on the clarity of ideas and images, intellectual detachment and formal perfection. While these aspects retained their presence in the work of these writers, the group itself, however, had disintegrated by 1957.

Larkin's poetry is indicative of these attitudes though it nevertheless continues with the tradition of Romantic poets like Wordsworth and the late nineteenth-century poets like Arnold and Hardy in its exploration of the themes of death, change and private disillusionment. In addition, working with "established rhythms and syntax", and "conservative poetic forms", Larkin, like Hardy, "writes about what appears to be normal and everyday, while exploring the paradox that the mundane is both familiar and limited" (Carter and McRae 2001: 439). The influence of Hardy is noticeable in Larkin's later volumes like *The Less Deceived* (1955), *Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974), while his initial poetry (*The North Ship*, 1945, and *XX Poems*, 1951) shows the influence of Yeats.

Larkin's poetry has also been seen as a response to a perceived national and cultural decline. 'Englishness', thereby, like Thomas's 'Welshness', is a notion that becomes so pertinent in Larkin. In "Englands of the Mind" (published in *Preoccupations*, 1980), Seamus Heaney contrasts the post-War English sensibility in the poetry of Larkin and Ted Hughes in terms of the "Englands of the Mind" each imaginatively re-creates out of England's history (the third poet Heaney considers in this respect is Geoffrey Hill) and sees in both certain continuities of English ways of life and experience from its past history which, however, are disappearing fast in a modern, post-War England. However, while Hughes goes back to a pre-modern England in which Christian elements cohabit with pagan beliefs, Larkin goes back to Anglo-Norman England with its sophistications of manners and language. This is reflected in their specific poetic techniques: the

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alliterative mode of Old English poetry resonating in Hughes and the Norman cadence in Larkin. While Hughes invokes myth and the elemental presence of nature in order to root his English sensibility, for Larkin, the modern English way of life incorporates a retrospective, "nostalgic pessimism" brought on by several historical factors like Britain's decline as an imperial power and its decreasing political and economic influence (Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15). This leads to a renewed importance of the "native English experience", but at the same time, it is, in Larkin, detached and often disinterested:

"He sees England from train windows, fleeting past and away. He is the urban modern man, the insular Englishman, responding to the tones of his own clan, ill at ease when out of his environment. He is a poet, indeed, of a composed and tempered English nationalism, his voice is the not untrue, not unkind voice of post-War England...."

(Heaney, quoted in Regan 1997: 15)

Colin Falck points to the anti-romantic element of Larkin's poetry: "by identifying himself with the drab, fantasy-haunted world of the waste land Larkin has not only downgraded the whole of real existence against an impossible absolute standard, but has also cut the ground from under the poet's feet. The fantasy, which he has elected to share has little to do with romanticism, because it destroys the very bridge which romanticism would construct between the ideal and the world which actually exists: the poet can no longer do anything to bring our dreams into relation with reality. The ideal, for Larkin, has become inaccessible, and being inaccessible it can only throw the real world into shadow instead of lighting it up from within. In the typical landscape of Larkin's poems the whole chiaroscuro of meaning, all polarities of life and death, good and evil, are levelled away. Farms, canals, building-plots and dismantled cars jostle one another indiscriminately – the view from the train window, with its complete randomness and detachment, is at the heart of Larkin's vision –and all of them are bathed in the same general wistfulness. There are no epiphanies."

From here it becomes easy to see why Larkin is seen sometimes as a 'realist'. John Holloway includes Larkin's poetry in the literature of "minimal affirmation". Larkin's verse strategy in poem after seems to be to *insure* against anything that might come into his work on too easy terms, anything that could possibly be seen as a lapse into soft-centredness or sentimentality."

Thus it comes as no surprise that pessimism is another characteristic frequently attributed to Larkin's poetry. This is partly because of the apparent passivity of the poetic voice, an unwillingness to interfere with the course of things as they are (in contrast to the Romantic tradition of active involvement). But Larkin frequently invokes ritual and native tradition as a counter to the progressive decline of modern England. This can be seen in his use of certain symbols (like the ritual of going to church and buildings like the hospital and the church) that seem to preserve, in a world where religion has lost its potency, a certain source of faith that despite being secular is still powerful amidst the general disintegration of post-War English culture.

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1.4.8 Ted Hughes (1930-1998)

Ted Hughes was much influenced by D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas and, like them, focussed largely on nature and its forces. Some of his best-known volumes of poetry are *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), *Lupercal* (1960), *Wodwo* (1967), *Crow* (1970), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Gaudete* (1977), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Moortown* (1979), *Rivers* (1983), *Flowers and Insects* (1987), *Wolfwatching* (1989), *Tales from Ovid* (1997) and *Birthday Letters* (1998). In addition, Hughes also wrote stories and poems for children. Hughes was famously married to the American poet and novelist Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1961.

One of the key concerns of Hughes is the energy and violence existing in nature which he associates with the creative principle. The vigour and force of nature is most noticeable in the animal world for Hughes, as a result of which, many of his poems deal with animals like the hawk, the pike and the jaguar. He also focuses on the single-mindedness of these animals as they ensure their survival through the exercise of their sheer strength and power. Viewed without sentiment, the natural world becomes for Hughes not a symbol of human values or notions but a network that transcends the human – the human, in fact, becomes a mere part of it and is denied of any superior agency. It is in consequence of such a decentred gaze that even a little songbird, the thrush, is seen as a powerful, efficient, ad powerful predator, creating panic among the creatures it hunts. In his later works, Hughes shows a greater preoccupation with myth and legend as the artistic

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media between human existence and the powerful and uncontrollable forces of nature.

Hughes has also been seen by Terry Gifford as belonging to both the "anti-pastoral" and the "post-pastoral" traditions in English literature – two developments that form a critique of the traditional pastoral and its idealisations even as they emerge necessarily from the tradition itself.

As an anti-pastoral poet, Hughes shows the awareness that the natural world can no longer be considered as an Arcadia immune from the real world as it is, but is, instead, "a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose" (Gifford 1999: 120). This tradition of writing does not totally ignore the pastoral convention but is a more serious engagement with it and its tropes, as can be seen poets like Crabbe and Goldsmith in the eighteenth century, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Arnold in the nineteenth, and Lawrence, John Clare, Patrick Kavanaugh, Hughes and Seamus Heaney in the twentieth. Hughes attempts, like Blake, to cut through the "self-protective tendency" of the pastoral that selects elements that are comforting to one's perception of the world and therefore is self-deceiving (Gifford 1999: 135).

As a post-pastoral poet, Hughes work is aligned with authors like Blake, Wordsworth, John Muir, Thoreau, Lawrence, Ursula Le Guin, Gillian Clarke and Adrienne Rich (Gifford 1999: 169). This tradition takes into account the changing cultural context of the modern world and a corresponding change in one's attitudes towards nature that goes beyond the pastoral distinction between the urban and the rural. This, of course, is also a characteristic of the anti-pastoral position. However, along with this, the post-pastoral not only rereads the idealised assumptions of the pastoral but devises a language to sidestep such dangers and envisage a world in which human beings are not alienated from nature but become organically linked to it and to every other creature within it. It is, in other words, a more ecocentric approach that can "both celebrate *and* take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness" (Gifford 1999: 148).

Some of the characteristics accompanying this tradition are a respect for the natural world and its processes; an acknowledgement of the world as cyclic in its processes of birth and death, growth and decay, so that nature is seen employing a creative violence and destruction;

the realisation that since human beings are also part of this world, one's inner nature and workings of the mind and body are necessarily reflections of outer or external nature; seeing culture as inevitably determined by nature and, conversely, attitudes to nature as culturally constructed (so that the nature/culture, inner/outer, private/public binaries are considerably diminished); and the belief that one's consciousness can be transformed into conscience that takes responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions towards other species (as in Hughes's "The Otter" where there is an acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of the human consciousness as it creates a picture of humans hunting down the otter, who has now become a king in exile). In most of his poems, Hughes echoes these concerns that make him one of the most individual poets in twentieth-century English literature.

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1.4.9 Seamus Heaney (1939-2013)

Seamus Heaney voices, like Yeats and Thomas, preoccupations that are unique to the cultural background they come from, since all three are not 'English' but rather Irish and Welsh. This is reflected in Heaney who engages constantly with the violence and horror accompanying Northern Ireland's attempts to free itself from British rule. The 1960s Troubles, that forms the background to such poems as "Triptych", parallel the Troubles in the early decades of the twentieth century marking Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain. Consequently, Heaney's vision is not merely limited to Northern Ireland but stretches across the whole island, as can be seen, for example, in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *The Spirit Level* (1996). Apart from poetry, Heaney has earned much critical acclaim for his translation of *Beowulf* (1999).

Heaney uses memory, legend, myth, and elements from Irish history in order to evoke the picture of as it is lived and experienced not only in the context of contemporary violence but also in the context of poetry and the vocation of a poet. Digging and the peatbog are thus two key tropes in his poetry. Digging is significant because the poet "digs into his own memory, into the lives of his family, into the past of Irish history and into the deeper levels of legend and myth

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which shape the character of the people of his country" (Carter and McRae 2001: 446). On the other hand, the wild, undomesticated and deep nature of the bog that preserves traces of past life through countless periods of history is a potent site in which the ancient, primordial, pagan and even early-Christian elements come in contact with the present and the contemporary so that what is past (for example, ritualistic sacrifice as alluded to in "The Tollund Man" or the act of revenge) surface even in the present (as can be seen in "Triptych" in which the poet brings in ancient Christian customs centring round the idea of a 'Station' in order to emphasise its weak but still restorative pastoral power even in the midst of ceaseless violence).

In Heaney, as in Thomas, Larkin and Hughes, there is an engagement with place and identity, and consequently, on the use of language to evoke the sense of location and setting. While Thomas evokes a specific notion of Wales in his poetry, Hughes and Larkin both project different versions of England. In like manner, Heaney uses local (Irish) in conjunction with international (from places like Denmark, America, Africa, and ancient Greece) elements (in terms of archaeological discoveries, myths, religious customs or rituals and so on) in his poetry. He, moreover, shows a keen awareness of the English poetic tradition and language in order, however, to assert the Irishness of his poetry. This is accompanied by the precarious figure of the poet himself, "growing up a Catholic in a divided province, then becoming an emblematic exile in England and America" (Carter and McRae 2001: 447).

Heaney's *Preoccupations* (1980), his first volume of essays, is 'preoccupied' with the individual freedom of the poet on one hand and the demands made on one by tradition, history, place, religion, one's community or society, on the other, the tussle between which effectively denies the possibility of adhering to any fixed identity as either poet or Irishman, since these two aspects are frequently contradictory. Many of his poems (such as "Digging") express, therefore, this ambivalence in which the poet shows a "devotion to inheritance, asserting continuity with the past, family, community; the desire for attachment and experience; a sense of guilt for departing from tradition" (Andrews 1998: 41). Heaney's use of nature, and the form of the pastoral explored in a post-pastoral fashion can also, therefore, be read from this perspective.

1.5 Summing Up

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The period of modern poetry stretches from around the end of the nineteenth century to contemporary times, as the inclusion of later poets like Hughes and Heaney implies. This means that you have to read many of these poets in a frame of reference that goes beyond the tradition of modernist poetry and that brings in postmodern and postcolonial references as well. In this section, I will give a brief overview of this unit. The next section will give you a short introduction of some major modern poets and their particular styles and preoccupations. Section 1.4 will attempt to present some of the major events of the period that had a significant impact on literature, including poetry, produced during this time. The following section again goes over some of the key themes and concerns common to all the poets discussed in Section 1.3, while the final section will comprise a list of works cited in the unit as well as a few books for further reading.

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Unit 2 : W. B Yeats : "The Second Coming"

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

The aim of the unit is to introduce W.B. Yeats, one of the major and Nobel Prize winner modern poets. Yeats used Irish folklore as background material for his early poems. The emergence of Yeats as a poet and thinker can be understood in relation to his Irish background and he can be termed as the pioneer of Celtic revival in Ireland. And as modern poet, his modernity has also been very much connected with his nationality.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to —

- *place* Yeats in the English poetic tradition
- *identify* Yeats as pioneer of Celtic revival
- *have* more insights on Irish history and culture and Evaluate Yeats contribution to English poetry
- *appreciate* the poem The Second Coming

2.2 Introduction

W.B. Yeats was born on June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, a seaside suburb of Dublin. The family of Yeats's father was mercantile settlers. He spent his childhood alternately in London and Sligo. Yeats's father John Yeats was born

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in 1774 and was sent to the Dublin University, where after winning Bishop Berkley's gold medal for Greek, he took orders in the Church of Ireland. In 1803, he married Jane Taylor, the daughter of a Dublin Castle official, and two years later was appointed in county Sligo, where he remained until his death in 1846. As Joseph Hone says: "It was in this way that the long association of W.B Yeats's family with Sligo began." John Butler Yeats, artist, author and philosopher was born at Tullylish in 1863. Joseph Hone so says—"The married couple settled in a house at the head of Sandymount Avenue, Dublin and their house was called 'Georgeville'. At Georgeville late at night on June 13th, 1865, the poet, W.B Yeats was born. He was given the name of William Butler and baptized a month later at Donnybrook Church."

The first three years of infancy were passed in his birthplace Dublin. But in 1868, the family moved to London so that his father could study to become a professional painter. The family then settled at 23 Fitzory Road, Regent's Park and lived there until 1874.

Sligo, not London was the original home for all the children of John Butler Yeats. For W.B Yeats, the human being who first occupied a special place in his mind was not his father or mother but grandfather William Pollexfen of Sligo, the silent and fierce old man, as Yeats describes in his poem—'In memory of Alfred Pollexfen'.

In 1874, when Yeats was nine years old, the family moved from 3 Fitzory Road, Regent's park, London to 14 Edith villas, West Kensinglon. In 1875, Yeats began to attend the Godolphin School in Hammersmith. But throughout his school days, Yeats felt a yearning for the West of Ireland. The visits to Sligo had become very few, yet Yeats's great love for Sligo remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1880, when Yeats was fifteen, the family left London for Ireland. Their return to Ireland was mainly for financial reasons. During that period, Yeats's family employed a servant, a fisherman's wife, who was a mine of local lore and whose accounts of supernatural adventures provided Yeats with material for a whole chapter called 'Village Ghosts' in Celtic Twilight—his first published work which appeared in 1893.

Yeats died of heart failure on 28th January and wasburied in accordance with the wishes expressed by him in "Under Ben Bulben" with the inscription: "Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by."

Stop to Consider

Celtic Revival in Ireland

The term Celtic Revival applies to a group of writers who had been calling attention to a wealth of unused literary material in Ireland, as Kipling had done for India. The school probably originated in a lecture by Stopford Brroke, a famous historian, on "the need of getting Irish literature into the English language." Its changing centers have been the Irish literary Society, the National Literary Society of Dublin, the Irish Literary Theatre and later Abbey Theatre (1904) The original purpose of the revival was to awaken interest in what was called ancient bardic literature. The bardic tales were first recorded in Latin by missionary monks, who collected enough to fill over a thousand volumes, few of which have been printed.

Yeats is honoured as leader of the Celtic Revival, more so in other countries than in his own. To a certain extent, the literary pursuit of Ireland is reflected in Yeats's own career. The Gaelic period, before the Norman conquest, with all its strange beauty of legend and imagination the Anglo-Irish writings in English with the International outlook of eighteenth and nineteenth century culture; then the Revival blending the two strains, beginning with writings primarily concerned with matters of Irish interest and then becoming of more universal interest; all these have their parallels in Yeats's life. Yeats began to attempt the fusion of Gaelic nationalist and Anglo-Irish elements in Ireland.

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2.3 Works of the Poet

At the age of seventeen, Yeats first began to write verses. Although Yeats wanted to be an artist, but he continued to write poetry mostly on romantic subjects in the manner of Shelley. In 1885, Yeats verse appeared for the first time in 'Dublin University Review'. Many of his early ballads reappeared in *The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems'*. In 1887, his verse was published in England for the first time, when his 'The Madness of King Groll', appeared in the magazine *The Leisure Hour*. In the same year, he edited an anthology of poetry, which was published in Dublin under title *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland.*

In 1888, he compiled a volume entitled *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, which was published in London. Thus gradually Yeats'

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popularity began to grow wider. And he was beginning to be accepted by the public as an authority on Irish folklore and a poet of importance.

In George Pollexfen's house, in 1888, Yeats completed a long poem on a theme from Irish legend: *The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems*. The lyrics and Ballads contained in this Yeats's first published book of verse—were in due course reprinted under the title *Crossways*.

Yeats in his *Memoirs* wrote: "I was twenty- three years old when the troubling of my life began. I had heard from time to time in letters from Miss O'Leary, John O'Leary's old sister, of a beautiful girl who had left the society of the Vice regal Court for Dublin Nationalism. In after years I persuaded myself that I felt premonitory excitement at the first reading of her name. Presently she drove up to our house in Bedford Park with an introduction from John O'Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in a living woman of such a beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past."

Of course, Maud Gonne became his chief interest. From the moment of their meeting all life for Yeats was changed, changed utterly. But, Maud Gonne did not respond to his passion. She accepted him with delight as a friend and she was obsessed by a burning desire to free Ireland from its seven hundred year's dominion by England.

In 1891, the Rhymer's club was formed and in that year also, Yeats founded, in London, the Irish Literary Society. During that year he returned to Ireland on a visit, in the course of which he asked Maud Gonne to marry him. She refused but begged him for his friendship. Obsessed by her thought he wrote in that year a play—*The CountessCathleen,* whose heroine was no one but Maud Gonne. The theme of the play was that Cathleen is a beautiful noble woman who, having sold her soul to the Devil so that her people may be saved from starvation, eventually goes to Heaven.

In 1894, Yeats wrote a play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In 1899, Yeats's third volume of verse, *The Wind among the Reeds* appeared. For a long time, it was widely believed that all the love poems in this book, and in the books which followed it, was addressed to Maud Gonne. Yet there are some poems, which point to another woman, perhaps to more than one. There was a beautiful dark woman to whom Yeats refers in his unpublished autobiography, by the name 'Diana Vernon'.

In 1908 Yeats's *Collected Works* in verse and prose was published in 8 volumes. Then in 1910, Yeats another new volume *The Green Helmet and*

Other Poems was published. The most striking fact to be mentioned here is that now Yeats had changed his style of writing his verse. John Unterecker in his book *A Reader's Guide to W.B. Yeats* said-"The romantic wistfulness, the dreamy, decorative quality of much of his earlier verse now gave way to a manner at once more terse, astringent and masculine, which becomes apparent in this volume." This trend is evident in his next volume *Responsibilities* (1914). In 1919, Yeats's new collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* was published.

From the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 up to the civil War of 1922, Yeats was more affected by public events. His violent romance was replaced then by the bitter realities and that can be ascertained from his *Michael Robertes and theDancers* (1921), which reflected the clashes of those events. On Easter Monday 1916 the Irish rose in rebellion against the English, and between 1916 and 1921 they fought the English in a guerrilla war. Even after 1921, rival Irish factions fought a civil war about whether to accept the peace Treaty which gave independence to the Irish Free state but separated it from the six counties known as Northern Island.

In 1918, Yeats published a volume of essays on mystical subjects, Per AmicaSilentia Luna, which showed his interest in hidden world and mystical things. In 1922, Yeats became Senator of Irish Free State and during that period he delivered several important lectures in Senate. But, before publishing Yeats's most powerful verse collection *The Tower*, Yeats wrote another verse collection *A Women Young and Old*, and all these poems were written during in 1926 or 1927. In 1923, the King of Sweden awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, which was presented to him and two years later he published his appreciation in a short work-The Bounty of Sweden. In 1925, Yeats published his *A Vision*. It is an elaborate book on prose and it records Yeats's astrological, mystical and historical theories. In 1926, Yeats made a translation of Sophocles' Oedipus the King. Yeats presented it at Abbey Theatre. In the same year he wrote a book or a long essay on the death of Synge entitled *The Death of Synge* and other passages from an old Diary.

In 1927, Yeats *The Winding Stair* appeared and in 1928, he completed his other prose work, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*. In 1930, Yeats wrote a play entitled *The Words upon theWindow Pan* and in 1933, his new collection of poems *TheWinding Stair and OtherPoems* and a new edition of his *Collected Poems* were published and in1934 his Collected Plays appeared. In 1938, Yeats wrote Purgatory, a One Act play and on 28th January, 1939 Yeats died of heart failure.

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2.4 Critical Reception

Yeats's poetry falls roughly into three divisions—the romantic, the realistic and the mystical. In the poetry of the first period, he dwells on love, beauty, nature and Irish mythology and tales of the supernatural, which he weaves into lovely dreams. In the second period, his attention was on the grim reality of the Irish struggle for freedom. In the final period, both the dreams of early youth and realities of the Irish situation are replaced by a mystic contemplation of life, developed from various sources like native, eastern and western. Yeats's poems belonging to his early period dealt with Irish fairies, peasants and materials taken from Irish folklore. His *The Rose* (1893) reflects his use of Irish folk materials. And some of the poems in this collection deal with the legend of ancient pre-Christian Ireland: Cuchulain, the heroic fighter and lover; Furges, the king who abandoned his kingdom to become a poet. According to John Unterecker-"Yeats made ultimately Cuchulain's battle with sea a structure designed to express man's anguish maddened by the complexities of warring emotions."

Stop to Consider

Yeats's Concept of Mask:

Yeats discovered a technique by which the personal utterances could be given the impersonal appearance. In this connection Yeats used masks of Beggar man, Crazy Jane, Tom the Lunatic, the wild old wicked man and the lovers of the Last poems and so on. Yeats's early poems reflect his use of Irish materials and Gaelic legends, but his style changed in poems of the middle period. In *Responsibilities,* his Irishness became connected with real people.

Although Yeats was a lyricist and symbolist, in his *The Wind Among the Reeds* he tried to help his readers understand the difficult Celtic and Occult material he was working with. Most of the poems of this collection, were written for Mrs Shakespeare or Maud Gonne to such characters as Hanrahan or Michael Roberts, Yeats could sort out his several selves. Using his feeling of multiple personality, he created poems. Most of the poems here, Yeats assigned to Aed, a character he explained in magical terms as "fire burning by itself". He described Michael Robertes as "fire reflected in water", Hanrahan was "fire blown by the wind." Yeats returned to his earlier method of using Irish materials. His two later volumes *The wild Swan At Coole* and *Michael*

Robert and His Dancers show "the reblossoming of his poetry after the cold winter rages of *Responsibilities*," as A. Norman Jeffares says-"The use of Irish materials helps originality and makes one's verses sincere and gives one less numerous competitors. Besides, one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life."

The Nobel award and the Senatorship crowned Yeats's progress as man and poet. This flourishing life is reflected fully in the 'Tower' poetry.

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2.5 "The Second Coming"

2.5.1 Context of the poem

The poem was written in 1919 after the First World War that created a sense of valuelessness of human lives and chaotic and disorderly situation all around the world. It was coincided with the beginning of the Irish War of Independence in January 1919, that followed the Easter Rising in April 1916. It was the time before the British Government decided to send in the Black and Tans to Ireland. Yeats used the phrase "the second birth" instead of "the Second Coming" in his first drafts.

The poem was written in the time when the flu pandemic of 1918-1919 created a sense of uncertainty when his pregnant wife Georgie Hyde-Lees caught the virus and was very close to death. The pandemic claimed 70 percent death rates among the pregnant women. While his wife was convalescing, Yeats was composing "The Second Coming". The poem was first printed in *The Dial* in November 1920, and finally included in his collection of verses *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* published in 1921. The poem has Biblical reference of the Apocalypse and prophecy of Second Coming and describe the atmosphere of post-war situation.

2.5.2 Reading the Poem "The Second Coming"

The first stanza of the poem creates an image of disorder and uncontrolled situation. The gyre keeps on widening by losing control from the centre and there is discord between falcon and the falconer. The "falcon cannot hear the falconer", perhaps because of the

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uncontrollable "widening gyre". The falcons were used to hunt animals in medieval period, the bird was supposed to come back to its owner. But perhaps because of the disturbances created by "widening gyre" the bird could not hear it's master's call. The disconnection between the owner and the bird suggests disorderly chaotic situation. The line "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" suggests reflection of World War when most of the European countries crumbled due to lack of control from Central Government. The centre has no control and the things were falling apart. Because of the disorder and discord, the anarchy and chaotic situations were emerging fast in the world. The "blood dimmed tide" suggests a reference to the bloodshed of the World War that polluted the rivers and oceans making them red. In the blood dimmed tide the responsible stakeholders and innocent people were submerged. The responsible stakeholders were baffled and confused by the situation while irresponsible peoples were excited for the destruction with full intensity. It was because of irresponsible handling of situations that went out of control:

"The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all convictions, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity" (Lines 6-8).

In the second stanza, the poet assure that it was the sign of "Second Coming". The speaker senses a danger where he visualised a destructive image. The destruction is inevitable and eminent because of the sins, and lack of human values and lives. The first coming was pleasant and blissful but the second coming is for punishment and destruction. The "Spiritus Mundi", which is the soul of the Universe was rattling with the arrival of apocalypse and sent the horrible image of rough beast:

"When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi

Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert" (Lines 12-13)

He was troubled by the sight of horrible image that was emerging from the desert. The shape of the beast was abnormal that had a lion's body and head of a man. Its gaze was dangerously threatening and "pitiless as the sun". The shadows of the indignant desert birds that reel about the mysterious creature make the appearance more horrible.

Stop to Consider

The concept of "second coming" has religious origin. Both in Christianity and Muslim belief systems the return of Jesus Christ after his accension to heaven is found. The mention regarding Christ is found in Messianic prophecies and in Christian eschatologies. In the New Testament the word *epiphaneia* is used to refer to the arrival of Christ. In the Greek New Testament the term *parousia* is used seventeen times to refer to the arrival of Jesus Christ which also appear in Mathew 24:37. In Islam, the term *Raj½a* is used to refer to return or the "second coming". In Christian eschatological views the second arrival of Christ is mentioned who will come back to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. In Catholicism, it is believed that the Christ will come back to bring fullness of reign of God and he will punish the sinners and glorify the good souls which will be the final and eternal judgement but his return will depend on transforming power of holy spirits in the liturgy, living with the teachings of Christ and prayer for the Lord to come. According to Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the second coming of Jesus will be radically different than his first coming, which "was to save the lost world". Modern Scriptures of 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' teach that Christ's "Second Coming" will be the beginning of millennium which will be fearful for wicked and peaceful for good souls. They belief that there will be increasingly natural disasters, severe wars, and man-made disasters before the Second Coming.

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In the last stanza of the poem, the poet reveals that the beast has not arrived yet, but its arrival is inevitable. His vision was eminent signal of the destruction of the world. The 'stony sleep' in the line "That twenty centuries of stony sleep" suggests insincerity of the people of the world towards the call of God. The cycle of "twenty centuries" is over and it is the right time to start another cycle by destroying the present generation. The nightmare created by the rocking cradle by the beast was an warning of the arrival of the destructive beast. The preparation for the arrival is almost ready as the last two lines of the poem suggest,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born (Lines 21-22)

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According to Christianity, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem to save the human beings from sins. But the rough beast that was moving towards Bethlehem to be born was for punishment of guilty people and destruction.

Check Your Progress

Elaborate the central idea of the poem "The Second Coming". (150 words)

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2.6 Summing Up

After publishing this collection *The Tower* (1928), Yeats's most significant focus is upon passion - the fact and the idea. Yeats's most significant variations on the theme of passion: passion as Defence, passion as joy, passion s sublimation or Innocence, passion as transcendence or Apocalypse. Passion as fact and idea, practice and concept, is everywhere in Yeats's, as poet and man. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley two years before his death, Yeats says "…my poetry all comes from rage or lust." The Tower is a return to the pole of negation. Here, the bitterness is brilliantly evoked and masterfully controlled.

2.7 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 3 : Dylan Thomas :"A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London"

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives

Dylan Thomas is one of the leading post war poets of England. By the end of this unit you will be able to-

- *locate* him as a 'neo-romantic' poet
- *read* his poems in between high modernist poetry and the Movement poetry
- *relate* his poems to various ecclesiastical ideas which affected him as a poet
- *grasp* the significance of his apparent verbal obscurity in his poems

3.2 Introduction

The very name 'Dylan Thomas' conjures up the image of a poet who has written some of the most passionate, immortal lines in English language: "I sang in my chains like the sea", "I advance for as long asforever is". Yet, his work has received extreme reactions like that of Donald Davie who accused him of foregoing articulation in favour of crafting a hotchpotch that resists any attempt at identification of the individual objects. Sisson contends, "Thomas is historically important as the prototype of much of the literary pretension of the 1940s." [C. B. Cox, "Welsh

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Bards in Hard Times: Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas"] There are, and thankfully so, critics of another order; John Wain opines that the resistance to Thomas on the path of the English critics results from his all so apparent Welshness, "...the open emotionalism, the large verbal jesters which seem to them mere rant, the rapt pleasure in elaborate craftsmanship, and above all the bardic tone."

Thomas, who grew up in Wales, spent his childhood in Swansea, interspersed, at regular intervals, with visits to his maternal aunt Carmarthenshire dairy farm. These rural sojourns provided an impetus to much of his later literary energies.

From the outset Dylan Thomas rejected the poetic model whereby rhyme and metre, image and metaphor are employed primarily as means of shaping and 'dressing' — as one might dress a hedge or a person — observations and reflections derived from ordinary. experience. Thomas earned his poetic creed out of words rather than working towards words; to bring to light a submerged, 'unsentimental' reality through his 'craft or art' rather than using poetic devices to shape and dress essentially mundane or prosaic thoughts. He was fascinated with words, with their sensory qualities, meaning and connotations.*Finnegans Wake,* he later said, is the greatest work of our time, and though there is no evidence that he had read much of the book, he imitated the hypnotic incantation and density of Joyce's language.

Hopkins' poems were "obscure" to him, but Thomas loved them for the lavish, patterned use of sound he caught from them. Hopkins' sprung rhythm extended his own rhythmic resources. The vivid imagery of nature in both Hopkins and Lawrence, whose collected poems Thomas read from cover to cover, impressed him greatly; both poets presented a nature charged with sacred being, and Lawrence especially provided Thomas with his vocabulary of archetypal images. He read Eliot and Auden, and though he rebelled against them, they also influenced his style, and he was led by Eliot's critical essays to read in Herbert Grierson's anthology of English poetry of the seventeenth century. He admired the complex metaphors and puns, and was moved also by Donne's pervasive sense of morality.

Thereafter there was a considerable lull in his career. For he had no regular job and what he obtained through short stories, reviewing, film scripts, poetry readings, and sponging slipped through his fingers. He had spectacular quarrels with his wife. His talent was deserting him; at least, he found it increasingly difficult to compose, and months would pass with nothing to show for them. He died in New York of over drinking at the age of thirty-nine.

Placing him in the English literary tradition is an enterprise that will count

when you proceed with your reading of the poem. In placing him within the canon, it has to be mentioned that the readers rejoiced in Thomas' style because he challenged the dominant tendencies of the 1930s. Not that Eliot, Auden, Empson, and Ransom were passé but while the intellectual discourse and sparkling wit of these poets were revered there was this wistful longing for strong, direct emotion. No poet in the 1930s and 1940s, not even Spender, released emotion — moreover, affirmative emotion—in greater force and volume than Thomas. Technically the means to this included_ sweeping, unqualified assertion, traditionally rhetorical syntax with much repetition and apposition, lavish alliteration and assonance for emphasis, immensely energetic diction and rhythm, semantic vagueness, and a bardic or vatic pose. "And death shall have dominion"; "That force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age."; "Light breaks where no sun shines." Such assertions may not completely satisfy the intellect as its sifts the texts to discover their exact meaning. But they are glorious.

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SAQ

Attempt to name the typical features of Thomas's poetry. (60 words)

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3.3 Works of the Poet

Thomas wrote half of his poems and many short stories whilst living at his home, *And death shall have no dominion* is one of his best known works written at this address. His highly acclaimed first poetry volume, *18 Poems,* was published on 18 December 1934, the same year he moved to London. The publication of *18 Poems* won him many new admirers from the world of poetry. Again, the publication of *Deaths and Entrances* in 1946 was a major turning point in his career. Thomas was well known for being a versatile and dynamic speaker, best known for his poetry readings. His powerful voice would captivate American audiences during his speaking tours of the early 1950s. He made over 200 broadcasts for the BBC. Often considered his greatest single work *Under Milk Wood,* is a radio play featuring the characters of Llareggub, a fictional Welsh fishing village (humorously named; note that 'Llareggub' is 'Bugger All' backwards, implying that there is absolutely nothing to do there).

Thomas progressed through a period of "occasional" verse in which he focused his general notions on particular incidents and situations to give a grave

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and formal ceremonial poetry ("A Refusal to Mourn", "Do not go gentle into that goodnight", "On the Marriage of a Virgin," etc.) to a period of more limpid, open-worked poetry in which, instead of endeavoring to leap outside time into a pantheistic cosmos beyond the dimensions, he accepts time and change and uses memory as an elegiac device ("Poem in October," "Fern Hill," "Over Sir John's Hill," "Poem on His Birthday"). But these divisions are not strictly chronological, nor do they take account of all the kinds of verse he was writing. There is, for example, "A Winter's Tale," a "middle" poem, which handles a universal folk theme with a quiet beauty that results from perfect control of the imagery.

There are several critics who consider Thomas' war poems to be his major achievement; and without necessarily endorsing this, it is clear that the poems in question perform the extraordinary feat of holding the self as performance and physical destruction within — a telling war-time coinage — the theatre of war.

Thomas first appeared, to readers thereby trained to regard Eliot's dry gentlemanliness as the approved poetic stance, to be a prophet of wild new romanticism, challenging the cerebral orderliness of the fashionable poetryof the time. His breathless and daring imagery, with its skulls, maggots, hangmen, wombs, ghosts and thighs, his mingling of biblical and Freudian imagery, of the elemental world of nature in the raw with the feverish internal world of human desires, human secrets, human longings and regrets, his compound adjectives ("sea-sucked," "man-melted," "tide-tongued," "man-iron," "altarwise") — all this suggested a great liberating verbal energy.

Stop to Consider

Neo-romanticism:

"Neo-Romantic" style developed in England during the 1930s and was briefly ascendant during the 1940s. Dylan Thomas was its major poet. "Romantic" was the time, and implied that the Neo-Romantics were challenging the high Modernism of the 1920s and the discursive, intellectual style of the 1930s. Thomas was typical in this respect. He had the mystical intuitions, emotional intensity, personal utterance, and natural imagery of a poet in the Romantic tradition. But in the same poems he was also a poet of Metaphysical wit and Symbolist technique. Other poets of the Romantic revival similarly absorbed Modernist influences while also rebelling against them. Vernon Watkins was a disciple of Yeats. If we accepted Roland Barthes' description of Modernist poetry as an "explosion" of autonomous words, the paradigmatic English Modernist would be David Gascoyne in his youthful Surrealist

phase. In short, the interrelations between Neo-Romantic style and other tendencies of the age defy brief or simple description. No minor part of the problem is that Neo-Romantic style varied from poet to poet as much as Modernist styles did.

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In fact, however, though some of Thomas's poetry of the 1930's had over-excited imagery, a closer look at his poems revealed not only that they were constructed with enormous care and the images were most carefully related to each and to the unfolding meaning, but also that these images were put at the service of a number of clearly conceived themes — the relation between man and his natural environment, the problem of identity in view of the perpetual changes wrought by time, the relation of the living to the dead and of both to seasonal change in nature.

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower Drives my green age; that blasts the root of trees

Is my destroyer

The natural processes that linked past with present and man with nature gave him comfort. As Thomas developed, and his imagery became more disciplined, the theme of the unity of all life and of life and death as part of a continuing process in which the whole world of nature was involved became steadily more discernible. So did the ritual and sacramental element in his poetry. "After the Funeral" (1938), an elegy on an aunt in which he sees the sad shabbiness of her life and environment transfigured by love, is a triumph of compact emotional suggestion, every image having its place in building up the transition from mourning to comfort. Many of his poems of the 1940s are more open worked than his earlier productions, and sometimes possess a rhythmic fluidity that sweeps on the meaning with fine effect. "Poem in October," for example, begins:

It was my thirtieth year to heaven

Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood And the mussel pooled and the heron Priested shore

The morning beckon

With water praying and call of seagull and rook And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall Myself to set foot

That second

In the still sleeping town and set forth.

Here the compound adjectives ("Mussel pooled," "heron priested") and the sacramental suggestions ("priested," "praying,") are carefully placed in the run of

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the stanza and the uneven line-lengths give a reckoning motion that helps to involve the reader emotionally in the poem. *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) and *Collected Poems* (1953) show clearly that Thomas was capable of finely disciplined effects in both language and movement, and that, in spite of a tendency to overdrive favourite images and to confuse poetic gesturing with the poetic achievement, he was not a shouting madman but, at his best, a highly craftsman like poet. His popular adulation followed by his early death evoked a reaction, and the charge of empty verbal posturing was brought against him by some of the younger poets of the mid-1950s who were seeking a new chastity of diction and economy ofeffect (The Movement is a typically low-key, yet ironically aggrandizing label applied to themselves by a group of poets who emerged in the early 1950s, among them Philip Larkin, D.J. Enright, Donald Davie, Anthony Thwaite and Kinsley Amis himself. Their reaction against their 1940s predecessors was manifested in a plain style, a disdain for rhetoric or ostentation and a commitment to discursive realism — all clearly at odds with what Thomas seemed to stand for.) But though Thomas's reputation is not as high now as it was in the few years immediately before his death, his place is secure — not as the neo-romantic overdose he was once thought to be, but as a thoughtful, indeed a cerebral, poet who sought to put new drive and passion into the language of English poetry and who in his brief life left a handful of poems that will be read and remembered outside the classroom and the critic's study.

An appreciation of his poetic style would be incomplete without recording the attendant critical pressures ladled on it by the critics. Andrew Sanders notes that the association of the work of the Anglo-Welsh poet with a lush kind of surrealism has more often been assumed than proved. As his ambitious and uneven first volume, *18 Poems* (1934), suggests, Dylan Thomas (1914-53) had begun to mould an extravagant and pulsatinglyrhetorical style before he became aware of the imported innovations of international surrealist writing. He was, however, decidedly a poet who thought in images.

Stop to Consider

On Donne

If there is a kinship evident in Thomas's verse it is with the 'difficulty', the emotionalism, the lyric intensity,

and the metaphysical speculation of the school of Donne. It is Donne's 'Death's Duel' which is cited in the title of Thomas' volume *Deaths and Entrances* of 1946 (`our very birth and entrance intothis life, is exitus a morte, an issue from death') and it is Donne's ghost that broods over the

poem written in memory of Thomas's aunt Ann Jones. "In memory of Ann Jones", published in *The Map of Love* in 1939, is, however, specifically Welsh in terms of its local reference and in the claims that Thomas makes for himself as `Ann's bard on a raised hearth'. In considering the coffined corpse laid out in the farmhouse parlor it evokes a memory of a gush of love in the past (Ann's `fountain heart once fell in puddles / Round the parched worlds of Wales and drowned each sun') and it yearns for a future universal release from death.

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3.4 Critical Reception

Thomas' work was in the first place (around the 1930s) received as 'formless' writing - critics like H.G. Porteus reviewing his work, had spoken of an "unconducted tour of Bedlam". The opinion, however, shifted in the period following his death. It was more widely acknowledged to be tightly controlled and shaped. Crucial to this process was the publication of Thomas' letters to his fellow Swansea poet Veron Watkins in 1957. This showed Thomas to be a painstakingly conscientious craftsman striving deliberately even agonizingly for his effects. These letters were complemented by a sympathetic and illuminating study by Ralph Maud, one of the doyens of Thomas' criticism, *Entrances to the Poetry of Dylan Thomas* in 1963 and by his publication of Thomas' early note-books in 1968 *(Poet in the Making).* The notebooks are an extraordinary record of poems written between the ages of 16 — 20, revealing the strikingly precocious, yet consistent, evolution of the unique stylist — poet. A *Select Letters,* edited by Constantine Gibbon in 1967, and a *Collected Letters,* edited by Paul Ferris in 1985 added further weight to the argument that Thomas was thoroughly aware of what he was doing, even in his most seemingly obscure pieces.

Many earlier commentators focused on the importance of Thomas' Welshness: indeed, this together with speculation concerning the 'true' origin of Llareggub, the town in *Under Milk Wood*— has now become one of the dominant and more depressing features of the cottage industry that is Dylan Thomas today. This is of course which — like the focus on the character of the poet it resembles in some ways — is dangerously susceptible to simplification and stereotyping. A reductive policy of race and place a dot to dot psychoanalysis in which pre-determined drives 'explain' everything, overriding more complicated understandings of the self as produced by, and interacting with complex societies historically mutating through time.Both societies and selves are structures which

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are defined by their capacityfor change and claims for their fixed character must be treated with suspicion. And it is precisely the notion of unitary subjectivity which is so problematized in Thomas' writing, particularly in the early poetry and short fictions. And when new theory made its foray into the scene around the 1960s, it was precisely this concept of the unitary self, the **I** as coherent and issuing from an organically whole identity. At precisely the time when Thomas' work could have been read as anticipating such ideas, in the early 1970s, it was being isolated and side-lined in a debate about belonging and identity that were inappropriate to its strategies. However, the entire rhetoric changed with the coming of texts like Said's *Orientulism*(1978). The new critical light shed on the conceptions of national identity and cultural otherness shifted the larger framework within which Thomas was viewed. He was no longer just the bardic other of the thin-lipped London literati nor the deviant Welshman. With the onset of Said's work and following him that of HomiBhabha, among others, more nuanced ways of reading marginalized or non, metropolitan writings occurred.

Check Your Progress:

Analyze the significance of Welshness' in the poetry of **Dylan** Thomas. (100 words)

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Stop to Consider

Post Colonial Thought

Said had written of the ways in which the West had established, over thecourse of centuries, a specific discourse dealing with the East by marginalizing it as an Other, perceived often in self evidently contradictory terms as exotic, barbers, cowardly, obscurantist and so on. For Bhabha, however, the central term in analyzing post colonial literatures is 'hybritity'. Writings which are 'hybrid' cannot be described in terms of a 'discourse' and the 'counter-discourse' it invites; as Bhabha points out, to simply oppose the prominent discourse is to risk remaining tract within its binary structure, opposing the identity imposed with another constructed. Inverting the binary terms of an unequal relationship

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between cultures and nations, however unequal that relationship may be, is to remain within the limits said by those terms. Abandoning the dichotomies of Said, Bhabha argues that post colonial writing derives from a refusal to belong to any essential identity and not from a compromise between cultures; a recognition that such a concept of identity is an imperial construct in the first place.

Stop to Consider

Surrealism and Dylan Thomas

It cannot be missed that Thomas was, after all, an avid reader of the avant-garde periodical *Transition.* Surrealism, whose project, according to Walter Benjamin, was 'to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution', was in fact a complex set of artistic practices which went far beyond voluntarism or associationism, as a glance at the variety of surrealist visual art— say, Salvador Dali's hallucinatory realism and the collage of Max Ernst's *La Sentaine de Bonte* — reveals. More importantly, to the extent that surrealism had affinities with the Metaphysicals' "violent yoking $_{\$}$together of heterogeneous images" there was a link between surrealist practice and the climate created earlier by Eliot and Herbert Grierson.

Thomas, an avid reader of Donne, exploited such similarities toforge a semi-surrealised Metaphysical diode, a form of Gothic, from a marginalized and belated

Welsh modernism. In this — as with Freudianism — he was pragmatic and ambivalent rather than systematic.

3.5 "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London"

3.5.1 Context of the Poem

Dylan Thomas' poem *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London* was first published in 1945 in London's *Horizon* magazine. In 1946, the poem re-appeared in Dylan Thomas' own poetry collection titled *Deaths and Entrances*. The poem is written in the form of an elegy. It is a reaction to the death of a girl child during World War II. The story of the child came to Dylan Thomas in the

form of news where he got to know that the child's house was set on fire during an air raid which finally led to her demise. He mourns the untimely death of the child in this poem and along with it also expresses grief at the untimely deaths of many other children who could not even reach their prime during the Second World War.

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3.5.2 Reading the Poem

The setting of the poem is London. Even though Dylan Thomas talks about one particular child in this poem, in mourning her death, he also mourns the death of other such children who were victims of the tragedy. The words "a refusal to mourn" in the title is contradictory in nature because it seems that the speaker is not going to mourn but the entire poem provides a ground for the speaker to mourn the loss of a young child. Hence, the poem can be said to be an elegy. The poem explores the themes of grief, loss, and the complexities of human response to tragic events.

The poem has a first-person speaker who specifies that the child in the poem was a resident of London but doesn't give a name to the girl. He uses personification, metaphor, alliteration, allusion, and irony in the poem to talk about death. There are four six-line stanzas in the poem and the rhyme scheme is ABCABC. The first and fourth lines, second and fifth lines, and third and sixth lines rhyme together.

The speaker begins by saying that he won't utter any sound of prayer or cry to grieve the death of the child. He refuses to mourn "until the mankind making" (Line 1) meaning until the end of the world. He uses different metaphors to talk about death. In the first stanza, Death is depicted as the creator or maker of mankind and it is considered to be the father of living creatures like birds, beasts and flowers.

"Never until mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness" (Lines 1-6)

The phrase "last light breaking" in Line-4 is a reference to the last hour of a man's life when light ultimately turns into darkness. The

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speaker uses the words "still hour" to describe the time when one's body becomes absolutely still after death. "Darkness" in these lines might also mean the state of a human after his life ends. The speaker by refusing to mourn does not mean to suggest that he is not sad at the event, instead he means to say that he wants to reject traditional modes of mourning which might not be able to capture the essence of the child's life and death.

"And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn" (Lines 7-12)

The next stanza has Biblical references. Zion is a Biblical city and is known to be the holy city of Israel where God lived. The speaker uses the words "and I must enter again" to mean that he has to repeat everything again. He says when his time comes, he will have to return to the base of all life. And by doing that he will become a part of Earth. The speaker, in this stanza, hints at the cyclical nature of life and death. Hence, he uses Biblical allusions to talk about death as a return to nature.

Up until now, we see that the speaker just discussesthe cyclical nature of life and death referring to death as the ultimate truth of life. The next stanza onwards, however, he focuses on the death of the child that is the prime subject of Dylan Thomas' poetry.

"The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth."

In the third stanza, the speaker clearly states that he is not going to mourn the death of the child who died by fire in an air raid during the World War II even though he is sad at her death. This is the first time in the poem when the speaker is directly referring to the "child's death". He states his wish of not trying to bury the event of the child's

death with his sorrowful elegy. He does not want to taint the reality of the death of the child with his grief. That, according to him, will be a blasphemous act. He does not want to impact the situation with his sorrowful words. The last lines of this stanza precisely indicate his motive. He suggests that mourning should not be the sole response to death.

"Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death there is no other."

In the fourth and the final stanza, the speaker refers to the dead child as "London's daughter" (Line 19). This is also the time where the readers actually come to know that the child in question is a girl child. The speaker says that the child is now buried with the other dead people who are victims of the World War II. This is a way of Dylan Thomas in referringto the other dead individuals who had to give up their lives in the face of the war. The child, it seems, is robed in a shroud which is used when people are buried basically as a covering. The words "long friends" might refer to worms and insects that surround the person when he is buried underground. It might also refer to the other people who are buried around the dead person. All are now lying around the girl in the graveyard. The dead are together in this situation. The words "grains beyond age" refers to earth and nature. The dying child has become a part of nature, according to the speaker. The words "dark veins" suggest the soil of the earth under which lies the body of the child along with all the other dead people.

It seems, to the speaker, that even though the death of the child is a sorrowful event, nature is indifferent to the death because it is a part of life. This is suggested by the words "unmourning water". The speaker then personifies the river Thames as "riding Thames". The sound of the waves of the river Thames is compared to the silence of the child's grave.

Throughout the poem, we have the speaker lamenting the death of the child, at the same time also, referring to death as something

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inevitable in the face of life. Death is an integral part of the cycle of existence. Just like the people who died in the World War II, the speaker understands that he too will die someday at the hands of death. Death is equal across all time and space. In this poem, the speaker seems to be trying to come to terms with the inevitability of death and what comes after. When alive, the full magnitude of the intensity of death might be hard to comprehend, but the speaker in this poem, tries to understand the workings of death by looking at a young child and all the others who lost their lives during the World War II.

Check Your Progress

(a) The title of the poem suggests a refusal to mourn the death of a child. Explore the reasons behind the speaker's refusal and discuss how this refusal shapes the tone and meaning of the poem.

(b) The poem explores the complex relationship between life and death. Examine the contrasting perspectives on death presented in the poem and discuss how the speaker's refusal to mourn reflects a deeper understanding of mortality and the eternal cycle of life.

(c) What larger themes and messages does Dylan Thomas convey through "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London"? Discuss the poem's exploration of mortality, the human condition, and the nature of existence, and consider the lasting impact of the poem on the reader.

3.6 Summing Up

In the sections, an attempt has been made to acquaint you with the literary opus that is Thomas. In the introductory sections, I have tried to estimate the greatness of Thomas by referring to the various influences that molded his artistic sensibilities. In surveying his literary career, special attention has been given to the themes which prompted the unique style manifested not only in the content but also the style of his poetry. In a reading of Dylan Thomas the issue of his poetic style can never be ignored. This is followed by a brief overview of how the poet has been received down the ages right to the recent times. While in the section

entitled "Reading the Poem" the prescribed poem is seen through the prism of readings that illumine separate aspects of the poem.

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3.7 References and Suggested Readings

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