

Edited By:  
Dr. Digvijay Pandya

# Elective English - I

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DENG104

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Dr. Digvijay Pandya



**L**OVELY  
**P**ROFESSIONAL  
**U**NIVERSITY

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# **ELECTIVE ENGLISH - I**

Edited By:

Dr. Digvijay Pandya

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## SYLLABUS

### Elective English -I

**Objectives:**

- To improve understanding of literature among students.
- To enhance writing skills of students.
- To develop skills of critical analysis in students.

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1	The Post Office by R N Tagore
2	A Free Man's Worship by Bertrand Russell
3	Dream Children by Charles Lamb
4	The Spark Neglected Burns the House by Leo Tolstoy
5	Night of the Scorpion by Nissim Ezekiel. The World Is Too Much With Us By William Wordsworth
6	After Twenty Years by O. Henry
7	If by Rudyard Kipling, Where the Mind is Without Fear By Rabindranath Tagore
8	Eveline by James Joyce
9	The Monkey's Paw by W.W.Jacobs
10	Luck by Mark Twain

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## Unit 1: The Post Office by Rabindranath Tagore

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- 1.1 Traditional Arts and Methods of India
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- 1.5 Symbolism in Tagore's Play, The Post Office
- 1.6 Characters
- 1.7 Summary
- 1.8 Keywords
- 1.9 Review Questions
- 1.10 Further Readings

### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about Rabindranath Tagore;
- Discuss the story The Post Office;
- Explain the symbolism of the play *The Post Office*;
- Make analysis of the play *The Post Office*.

### Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal and which attempted a revival of the ultimate monistic basis of Hinduism as laid down in the Upanishads. He was educated at home; and although at seventeen he was sent to England for formal schooling, he did not finish his studies there. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close touch with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school at Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, though in his own non-sentimental and visionary way; and Gandhi, the political father of modern India, was his devoted friend. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but within a few years he resigned the honour as a protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became

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the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution.

Rabindranath Tagore is widely considered to be India's greatest playwright. He is highly revered by millions of people all across the sub-continent and, of course, by many recent immigrants to Canada. His work, however, is practically unknown to mainstream Canadian audiences. He was born in Calcutta, now Kolkata, India into a wealthy Brahmin family in 1861. After a brief stay in England (1878) to attempt to study law, he returned to India, and instead pursued a career as a writer, playwright, songwriter, poet, philosopher and educator. During the first 51 years of his life he achieved some success in the Calcutta area of India where he was born and raised with his many stories, songs and plays. His short stories were published monthly in a friend's magazine and he even played the lead role in a few of the public performances of his plays. Otherwise, he was little known outside of the Calcutta area, and not known at all outside of India.

This all suddenly changed in 1912. He then returned to England for the first time since his failed attempt at law school as a teenager. Now a man of 51, his was accompanied by his son. On the way over to England he began translating, for the first time, his latest selections of poems, *Gitanjali*, into English. Almost all of his work prior to that time had been written in his native tongue of Bengali. He decided to do this just to have something to do, with no expectation at all that his first time translation efforts would be any good. He made the handwritten translations in a little notebook he carried around with him and worked on during the long sea voyage from India. Upon arrival, his son left his father's brief case with this notebook in the London subway. Fortunately, an honest person turned in the briefcase and it was recovered the next day. Tagore's friend in England, a famous artist he had met in India, Rothenstein, learned of the translation, and asked to see it. Reluctantly, with much persuasion, Tagore let him have the poor system of education imposed by the British, combined the best of traditional Hindu education with Western ideals. Tagore's multi-cultural educational efforts were an inspiration to many, including his friend, Count Hermann Keyserling of Estonia. Count Keyserling founded his own school in 1920 patterned upon Tagore's school, and the ancient universities which existed in Northern India under Buddhist rule over 2,000 years ago under the name School of Wisdom. Rabindranath Tagore led the opening program of the School of Wisdom in 1920, and participated in several of its programs thereafter.

### **1.1 Traditional Arts and Methods of India**

Rabindranath Tagore's creative output tells you a lot about this renaissance man. The variety, quality and quantity are unbelievable. As a writer, Tagore primarily worked in Bengali, but after his success with *Gitanjali*, he translated many of his other works into English. He wrote over one thousand poems; eight volumes of short stories; almost two dozen plays and play-lets; eight novels; and many books and essays on philosophy, religion, education and social topics. Aside from words and drama, his other great love was music, Bengali style. He composed more than two thousand songs, both music and lyrics. Two of them became the National Anthems of India and Bangladesh. In 1929 he even began painting. Many of his paintings can be found in museums today, especially in India, where he is considered the greatest literary figure of India of all times.

Tagore was not only a creative genius, he was a great man and friend to many. For instance, he was also a good friend from childhood to the great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose. He was educated and quite knowledgeable of Western culture, especially western poetry and science. This made him a remarkable person, one of the first of our planet to combine East and West, and ancient and modern knowledge. Tagore had a good grasp of modern-post-Newtonian-

physics, and was well able to hold his own in a debate with Einstein in 1930 on the newly emerging principles of quantum mechanics and chaos. His meetings and tape recorded conversations with his contemporaries such as Albert Einstein and H.G. Wells, stand as cultural landmarks, and show the brilliance of this great man. Although Tagore is a superb representative of his country - India - the man who wrote its National Anthem - his life and works go far beyond his country. He is truly a man of the whole Earth, a product of the best of both traditional Indian, and modern Western cultures. The School of Wisdom is proud to have him as part of its heritage. He exemplifies the ideals important to us of Goodness, Meaningful Work and World Culture.



*Did u know?* Tagore was a close friend of Gandhi, to whom he gave the sobriquet "Mahatma," meaning "great soul," while Gandhi dubbed Tagore, "The Great Sentinel," out of his abiding respect for Tagore's unswerving commitment to open-mindedness, inclusiveness and diversity in the envisioning of India that was soon to be born.

Although Tagore wrote successfully in all literary genres, he was first of all a poet. Among his fifty and odd volumes of poetry are *Manasi* (1890) [*The Ideal One*], *Sonar Tari* (1894) [*The Golden Boat*], *Gitanjali* (1910) [*Song Offerings*], *Gitimalya* (1914) [*Wreath of Songs*], and *Balaka* (1916) [*The Flight of Cranes*]. The English renderings of his poetry, which include *The Gardener* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), and *The Fugitive* (1921), do not generally correspond to particular volumes in the original Bengali; and in spite of its title, *Gitanjali: the Song Offerings* (1912), the most acclaimed of them, contains poems from other works besides its namesake. Tagore's major plays are *Raja* (1910) [*The King of the Dark Chamber*], *Dakghar* (1912) [*The Post Office*], *Achalayatan* (1912) [*The Immovable*], *Muktadhara* (1922) [*The Waterfall*], and *Raktakaravi* (1926) [*Red Oleanders*]. He is the author of several volumes of short stories and a number of novels, among them *Gora* (1910), *Ghare-Baire* (1916) [*The Home and the World*], and *Yogayog* (1929) [*Crosscurrents*]. Besides these, he wrote musical dramas, dance dramas, essays of all types, travel diaries, and two autobiographies, one in his middle years and the other shortly before his death in 1941. Tagore also left numerous drawings and paintings, and songs for which he wrote the music himself.

## 1.2 The Post Office

Tagore wrote *The Post Office* (*Dak Ghar*) in 1911, after having lost his son, daughter, wife and father to disease, all within a few years. One night, lying in his roof garden and looking at a starlit sky, he was inspired to write this magnificent play about the "death" of a child, Amal, which is in fact the boy's liberation, and the beginning of a great voyage towards the Outside. Through the child's demise, Tagore expresses his conviction that the full meaning of life can only be grasped in death. Yet he does this with such a light, elegant and poetic touch that *The Post Office* has found its way into the hearts of audiences everywhere and in many different languages. Worth citing are two examples that demonstrate the impact this delicate piece has had on people in moments of extreme need: in 1940, the evening before the Nazis entered Paris, André Gides French translation of this play was read over the radio, so it was heard by almost the entire nation; in 1942, in the Warsaw ghetto, the Polish version of *The Post Office* was the last play performed at the orphanage of the great Jewish educator, Junusz Korczak. Asked why he chose this, Korczak responded "eventually we have to accept with serenity the angel of death." Within a month, he and the children were taken away to the gas chambers. But these examples should not suggest that the play is heavy or depressing; on the contrary it is a beautifully inspired look at the way in which we live on in the intangible and the eternal.

## Notes

The chronology of loss prior to Tagore's writing of *The Post Office* was astounding: his wife died in 1902; his eldest daughter died in 1918, Satischandra Ray, his assistant at Santiniketan died in 1904; his father died in 1905; his younger son, Samindra, died in 1907. He wrote *The Post Office* in Bengali in 1911 and he gave a description of how he came to do so. In the middle of the night, while lying under the stars on the roof of his house in Santiniketan (Abode of Peace), he had a strange experience. "My mind took wing. Fly! Fly! -I felt an anguish... There was a call to go somewhere and a premonition of death, together with an intense emotion. This feeling of restlessness I expressed in writing *Dak Ghar* (*The Post Office*.)

He explains:

*"When I wrote Dak Ghar, my soul was besotted by an ocean of feeling. It was a very strong wave. Come, venture outside, before you leave you will have to traverse this world. You have to feel the sorrow and joy and thrill and excitement of the human heart. At the time I was deeply involved in establishing the university [Shantiniketan] but suddenly I don't know how it happened that early one morning between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. my heart stood on the rooftop and sprouted wings. I felt a great premonition of a momentous event, perhaps Death. I felt as if I had to jump onto the platform of a train station, as if I were leaving immediately. I was saved. When the call was so strong, how could I resist. The call to go somewhere and the mystery of death is what I expressed in Dak Ghar."* [Translated by Julie Mehta].

*"I remember at the time when I wrote the play, my own feeling which inspired me to write it. Amal represents the man whose soul has received the call of the open road... But there is the post office in front of his window and Amal waits for the King's letter to come to him direct from the King, bringing him the message of emancipation. At last the closed gate is opened by the King's own physician, and that which is death' to the world of hoarded wealth and certified creeds brings him awakening in the world of spiritual freedom. The only thing that accompanies him in his awakening is the flower of love given to him by Sudha."*

He was inspired to write this magnificent play about the "death" of a child, Amal, which is in fact the boy's liberation, and the beginning of a great voyage toward the Outside. Through the child's demise, Tagore expresses his conviction that the full meaning of life can only be grasped in death. Yet he does this with such a light, elegant and poetic touch that *The Post Office* has found its way into the hearts of audiences everywhere and in many different languages.

The following verse, with its six contradictory propositions, from *The Upanishads*, which Tagore used a great deal in his lectures, sums up so much of what makes *The Post Office* so complex, and spiritual.

He moves, and he moves not. He is far, and likewise near.

He is within all, and he is outside all.

The *Isa* Upanishad

### 1.3 Analysis

This play in three acts was written in Bengali in 1911, not long after Tagore lost his son, daughter and wife to disease. In 1940, the evening before Paris fell to the Nazis, Andre Gide's French translation of this play was read over the radio. Two years after, in a Warsaw ghetto, a Polish version was the last play performed in the orphanage of Janusz Korczak who, when asked why he chose the play, said: "eventually one had to learn to accept serenely the angel of death." Within a month, he and his children were taken away and gassed. Mahatma Gandhi liked this play a lot, saying it has a soothing effect upon his nerves. W.B. Yeats praised it as "perfectly constructed and conveys to the right audience an emotion of gentleness and peace."

This is a death play. Something you can read, or remember reading, when you've stopped raging against the dying of the light and have accepted the inevitable. The ending is abrupt like all lives, like most deaths, like a lost position in a chess game which comes suddenly after a long series of moves made with much lively vigour, hope and great expectations. Frankly, I do not know where the gentleness and peace come from (must be from the potent combination of youth, hope, innocence, death and what goes beyond it) and why this play is a much acclaimed one, for its spiritual punch. Just like I do not know how some chess players—what W.B. Yeats may consider as the "right audience"—can calmly gaze at a lost position after a most searing battle over the board, topple his King after a long sigh, peacefully shake his opponent's hand, sign the scoresheet and serenely walk away.

The abrupt ending of the play, though surprising, is similar to the unwarranted arrival of death. The innocence of children, and how the same innocence is kindled in grown-ups when in company of children are beautifully portrayed in words. The play picks up pace towards the end, and ironically, only the herald of the anticipated arrives in time to show Amal a glimpse of a gilded dream, before he slides into an eternal slumber and the play is curtailed. There is an Amal in all of us - there is an innate innocence that knows only truth, and that longs for peace. Tagore mesmerises me and draws me deep into his works.

#### **1.4 Central Metaphors of the Play**

Though he can't read, Amal is fascinated by the idea of letters, which are people's thoughts and feelings, flying about through time and space.

What kind of knowledge is important?

Imagine there is only one post office- the central source of information, sharing, and communication.

Life is like a post office, a central clearing house from which our words, thoughts, sentiments, and deeds emanate out across the world.

Play is about emancipation, spiritual freedom, expansion, new life, liberation.

Characters defined by function but become a person and not just a function through their meeting and interactions with Amal. As his physical state deteriorates, his spiritual state, and ours expand.

Tagore's insights into death seem to be the deepest with this play.

"I have had so many experiences of loved ones who have died that I think I have come to know something about death, something perhaps of its deeper meaning. Every moment that I have spent at the death bed of some dear friend, I have known this, yet it is very difficult to describe how for me that great ocean of truth to which all life returns, can never suffer diminution by death... I see how the individual life comes back into the bosom of this ocean at the moment of death, I have felt too how great and fathomless this ocean is, yet how full it is of personality. For personality is ever flowing into it... It becomes instilled with personality. Yet this ocean seems as nothing, as neither light nor darkness, but as one great extension of the universe, an eternity of peace and life..."

Science recognises atoms, all of which can be weighed and measured, but never recognises personality, the one thing that lies at the basis of reality. All creation is that, for apart from personality, there is no meaning in creation. Water is water to me, because I am I. And so I have felt that in this great infinite, in this ocean of personality, from which my own little personal self has sprung, lies the completion of the cycle, like those jets of water from a fountain which rise and fall and come back home again."

## 1.5 Symbolism in Tagore's Play, *The Post Office*

While using symbolism to express controversial political views was not an invention of Tagore, his play, *The Post Office*, uses it effectively. Voltaire uses similar literary devices in his work, *Candide*, to express his views on optimism and to critique European governments. Tagore designed *The Post Office* to be deceptively simple. He keeps the characters' list short, and uses common language style. The main character is a small boy by the name of Amal. The boy has an intense curiosity of the outside world, and yearns for the type of knowledge that can't be learned from a book. Another character is the Doctor, he is the man who diagnoses Amal, and will not let him leave the house because he is sick. On the other end of the spectrum you have Madhav, Amal's guardian. He is a man that believes in learning from Books, and feels more comfortable in home than outside. The Dairyman is another character, he is a lowly curd peddler, not learned but experienced. The Watchman is a loyal servant to the king; he is knowledgeable of the government and King's systems. Along with this character is the Headman; he is an Indian who is placed in power by the king but not popular with the local population. Sudha is a girl, she gathers flowers, she is naïve and happy to do the work of her parents. Finally there is a group of boys, they encourage Amal to defy the doctor and leave the house. The understanding of Tagore's usage of symbolism in this play is central to understanding his ideology. Tagore was an Indian under British colonial rule. While Brittan had lost many of its colonies it still held onto India. Many Indians wanted to emancipate themselves from British rule and regain their sovereignty. However many Indians benefited from British rule and were content with the status quo. Throughout the play Tagore's symbols help explain the current state of India, and help to produce strong imagery of the past, present and future of the country.

The first scene introduces us to the Doctor and Amal. The doctor symbolizes the British Empire or British rule. All the characters throughout the book respect him; some characters encourage Amal to listen to his decisions. These would be the Indians content with British rule. Others want Amal to rebel, the Indians who want to be rid of British rule. Amal can be seen as a transition Indian. He is obedient enough of the doctor to stay inside yet he wants to leave, he knows that he is too young at the moment, but he knows his future lies in leaving. He can be seen as the youth of India. His attitude is characterized by this quote, "See that far-away hill from our window-I often long to go beyond those hills and right away" (p.331) Merely children that are not ready to rise up against the British but know that someday they will have to.

The next scene is a conversation between Amal and Madhav. Madhav represents the older generation of Indians. He is content to stay at home and listen to the orders of the doctor. He regrets not being a more learned man, and wants Amal to stay home and study. He symbolizes a generation that is too set in their ways and unwilling to stop the British rule. Madhav is content with his life, and now puts his attention toward the boy's life. "Formerly, earning was a passion for me... now I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy" (p. 330). This characterizes Madhav's willingness to let the younger generation deal with the British rule.

Later in the play Amal meets the Dairyman, followed by the Watchman, followed by the Headman. All three of these characters symbolize different working class levels of the Indian population. The Dairyman is the labourer, he is unhappy with his work but would not dare go against British rule, he encourages Amal to accept his book learning and not venture out of the house. The Watchman represents an Indian that follows British rule but does not know why, and more importantly doesn't care why. He is content with his job and does not question his orders. In one important exchange Amal talks about when Indians should start freeing themselves from the British. "Amal. Won't you sound the gong Watchman? Watchman. The

time has not yet come. Amal. How curious! Some say the time has not yet come, and some say the time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!"(p. 334). This exchange is Amal telling the Watchman that his generation has the power and timing to overthrow the Indians, the just need to strike the metaphorical gong and start the revolution. The Watchman responds with, "That is not possible; I strike the gong only when it is time."(p. 334). This shows that while India may be ready to rid themselves of the British not all the people are willing. The Headman is the last working class person presented by Tagore. He is the British controlled Indian. He gains from British control and would be unwilling to be involved in change. The three "men" symbolize Tagore's views on the current Indian generation.

The final set of characters is Sudha and a group of Boys. Both are symbols of India's youth generation. Sudha symbolizes the young and naïve group. She thinks that Amal should listen to the doctor, p. 337, by saying that he will be naughty if he doesn't listen. However in the end she still has a sense of being willing to listen to Amal's ideas in the future. The group of boys is the future of India, they are willing to defy the doctor and encourage Amal to join them. While Amal does not join them we get the sense that this group will someday rise up and control India.

Tagore's use of symbolism is genius. It makes his play seem subtle and inspired. Instead of writing a blunt scathing criticism of British Colonialism he chooses to write about the effects of Colonialism on India. He chooses to use symbolism to explain how he sees India in the past, present and future. His characters are very simple yet they are carefully planned. He set out with the intention of writing a play about Indian people under British rule, and through his use of symbolism, he succeeds.

## 1.6 Characters

Tagore keeps his characters' list short, and uses a common language style. The characters, aside from Amal, are each represented and defined by their function.

Amal has an intense curiosity of the outside world and yearns for the type of knowledge that can't be learned from a book. Sudha gathers flowers, she is naïve and happy to do work for her parents.

Madhab Dutta, Amal's guardian is a man who believes in learning from books and feels comfortable in his home than outside.

The Healer is the man who diagnoses Amal and will not let him leave the house because he is sick.

The Curdseller does exactly that, she sells curds, is a peddler and is not learned, but is experienced in life.

The Watchman is a loyal servant to the king; he is knowledgeable of the government and the King's systems.

The Headman is placed in power by the King but is not popular with locals.

Group of Boys who encourage Amal to defy the doctor and leave the house.

The Healer and Amal.

Amal: See that far away hill from our window- I often long to go beyond those hills.

The Healer: You musn't let him set foot outside, not at all.

The Healer symbolizes the British Empire or British rule. All the characters throughout the book respect him; some characters encourage Amal to listen to his decisions (symbolizing

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those content with British rule). Others want Amal to rebel (symbolizing those who want to be rid of British rule). Amal is in transition. He is obedient enough to stay inside, but he wants to leave. He knows he is too young, but he knows his future is disappearing. In a way he represents the youth of India.

Madhab Dutta and Amal.

Madhab: Formerly, earning was a passion for me...now I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy.

Madhab represents the older generation. He is content to stay at home and listen to the orders of the doctor. He regrets not being a more learned man, and wants Amal to stay home and study. He symbolizes a generation that is set in their ways. Madhab is content with his life and now turns his attention toward the boy's life.

Amal and the Other Young Characters.

The young people are all symbols of India's youth generation.

Sudha: Poor thing! But you musn't step outside-you've got to listen to the Healer.

She symbolizes the young and naïve, and those who wish to obey the older generation. However she is willing to listen to Amal's ideas as she spends more time with him.

The Boys: What Healer! You don't need a Healer! Representing the future of India, they are willing to defy the doctor and encourage Amal to join them. One asks if they will be the group that will eventually rise up and control India.

Amal and the Curdseller, the Watchman, the Headman.

Amal: Will you teach me how to sell curds?

Curdseller: Why would you want to sell curds?

The Curdseller, the labourer, is unhappy with his work but would not dare go against British rule. He encourages Amal to stay inside and learn.

Amal: Aren't you going to ring your gong?

Watchman: The time has not yet come.

Amal: Some say the time has gone by and some say the time hasn't come. But if you ring your gong, it will be time.

Amal represents the school of thought that the people should start freeing themselves from the British, that his generation has the power and timing to overthrow the ruling class, the gong being the metaphorical gong that will start the revolution. The Watchman represents someone who follows British rule but does not know why, and does not appear to care why. He is content with his job, and does not question his orders. While India may be ready to rid itself of British rule, not everyone is willing.

Headman: Who dares yell out my name like that?

The last working class character presented by Tagore, Headman represents the controlled mass, who appears to have a degree of power, and is unwilling to change in order to hang on to his power.

All three of these characters symbolize different working class levels of the Indian population, and represent Tagore's views on the current Indian generation.

The Royal Healer and the King are not literal characters like the ones above; they are the metaphor for Eternity and God, illuminating that the Eastern philosophy on death is much different than that of the West. As Amal's physical state deteriorates, his spiritual self transcends his physical state, bringing him closer to the King and his Royal Messenger.

The Royal Healer and the King are not literal characters like the ones above; they are the metaphor for Eternity and God, illuminating that the Eastern philosophy on death is much different than that of the West. As Amal's physical state deteriorates, his spiritual self transcends his physical state, bringing him closer to the King and his Royal Messenger.

## 1.7 Summary

- Amal is an orphaned child of about ten, from a rural village in India. He has been taken in by a childless but loving couple living in the city. Now, however, Amal is gravely ill, although he does not know the extent of his sickness. The very traditional local Healer has insisted that he remain indoors, much to the dismay of his loving "uncle," Madhab Dutta. So, confined to his room, he sits by the open window where he engages with a variety of passersby. Many of them are people of self-appointed importance or they fulfill some function of order in society.
- One by one, Amal converses with these folks and one by one, his innocent questioning and absence of judgement touches them all in such a way that they are changed by this child. All are taken aback by his simple but tireless quest for knowledge, his unflinching love for life and his need to discover the world around him... and the world beyond. Across the street, Amal sees a shiny new building with a bright yellow flag waving from the roof: it is the King's Post Office. Though he can't even read, he is fascinated by the notion of letters, which are people's thoughts and feelings, flying about through time and space; he would very much love to get a letter from the King and he would love to be in touch with the world far away. He would also like to travel to the distant hills on the far horizon. As Amal's physical strength diminishes, his spiritual strength expands. The central metaphor of the play is that life itself is like a post office, a central clearing house from which our words, thoughts and sentiments emanate out across the world. Not only that but, even when we are gone, our spirit will remain in the surrounding air.

## 1.8 Keywords

<i>Dak Ghar</i>	: The Post Office
<i>Madhab</i>	: Krishna (Hindu deity)
<i>Sudha</i>	: Nectar
<i>Shastras</i>	: The holy medical scriptures
<i>Thakurda</i>	: Grandfather
<i>Pundit</i>	: In India, a scholar or expert, especially of traditional Indian law, philosophy, or music
<i>Nagra</i>	: Shoes with curled up toes
<i>Dhoti</i>	: A rectangular piece of cloth, customarily white or cream in colour, that is five yards long worn by men in India (sarong)
<i>Chhatu</i>	: Graham flour and water
<i>Tatka Doy</i>	: Fresh curds
<i>Panch Mura Hills</i>	: Where the five roads meet
<i>Ramayana</i>	: One of the great epics of India, the story of <i>Sri Rama</i> by the great sage <i>Valmiki</i> , it has been a perennial source of spiritual, cultural

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and artistic inspiration, not only to the people of India but also to the people all over the world. It has helped to mould the Hindu characters and has inspired millions of people with the deepest of love and devotion.

*Champa flowers* : Plumeria

*Fakir* : A person who dedicates his or her life to a pursuit of contemplative ideals and practices extreme self-denial or self-mortification for religious reasons.

In 1913, Tagore became the first non-Westerner to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. This brought him to the fore in Western intellectual and cultural circles for several years although much of the interest that grew up around him was based more on Europe's love for the exoticism of the east than on the facts of what the man actually wrote and thought. By the mid 1930s he had fallen out of favour in the courts and salons of the west and since his death in 1941, he has become all but unknown in Europe and North America.

**Self Assessment**

**Choose the correct option:**

1. Rabindranath Tagore was born in the year  
(a) 1861 (b) 1911  
(c) 1921
2. Rabindranath Tagore wrote  
(a) poems and plays (b) novels and short stories  
(c) all of these
3. Rabindranath Tagore was the \_\_\_\_\_ Indian to win the Nobel Prize  
(a) first (b) second  
(c) third
4. The name of Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel-Prize winning book is  
(a) The Untouchable (b) Gitanjali  
(c) The Discovery of India
5. Which year did Tagore win the Nobel Prize?  
(a) 1913 (b) 1923  
(c) 1933
6. Which of the following poems has been composed by Tagore and is familiar to every Indian?  
(a) Vande Mataram (b) Jana Gana Mana  
(c) Saare Jahan Se Acchha

**Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (a)                      2. (c)                      3. (a)                      4. (b)
5. (a)                      6. (b)

## 1.9 Review Questions

Notes

1. Discuss the play *The Post Office*.
2. What symbolism do you see in *The Post Office*? Discuss.
3. Give a brief introduction to Rabindranath Tagore.
4. Besides text, what other theatrical elements were used in this production?
5. Give an example in the production where music is used to convey emotion.
6. Which character can you identify with in this play and why?
7. What does this scene say about their relationship?
8. Which type of persons does Sudha represent?

## 1.10 Further Readings



Books

Dutta, Krishna; Robinson, Andrew, eds. (1998). *Rabindranath Tagore: an anthology*. Macmillan. pp. 21–50.

Iyer, Natesan Sharda (2007). *Musings on Indian Writing in English: Drama*. Sarup & Sons. p. 26.

Yeats, William Butler (1989). *Prefaces and introductions: uncollected prefaces and introductions by Yeats to works by other authors and to anthologies edited by Yeats*. Simon & Schuster. p. 311.



Online links [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Notes

**Unit 2: A Free Man's Worship by Bertrand Russell****CONTENTS**

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**Objectives**

After reading this unit students will be able to:

- Know about William Russel;
- Discuss *A Free Man s Worship*.

**Introduction**

"A Free Man's Worship" (first published as "The Free Man's Worship" in Dec. 1903) is perhaps Bertrand Russell's best known and most reprinted essay. Its mood and language have often been explained, even by Russell himself, as reflecting a particular time in his life; "it depend(s)," he wrote in 1929, "upon a metaphysic which is more Platonic than that which I now believe in." Yet the essay sounds many characteristic Russellian themes and preoccupations and deserves consideration—and further serious study—as an historical landmark of early-twentieth-century European thought. For a scholarly edition with some documentation, see Volume 12 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, entitled *Contemplation and Action, 1902-14* (London, 1985; now published by Routledge).

**2.1 Introduction to the Author**

Bertrand Arthur William Russell (b.1872 – d.1970) was a British philosopher, logician, essayist and social critic best known for his work in mathematical logic and analytic philosophy. His most influential contributions include his defense of logicism (the view that mathematics is in

some important sense reducible to logic), his refining of the predicate calculus introduced by Gottlob Frege (which still forms the basis of most contemporary logic), his defense of neutral monism (the view that the world consists of just one type of substance that is neither exclusively mental nor exclusively physical), and his theories of definite descriptions and logical atomism. Along with G.E. Moore, Russell is generally recognized as one of the founders of modern analytic philosophy. Along with Kurt Gödel, he is regularly credited with being one of the most important logicians of the twentieth century.

Over the course of his long career, Russell made significant contributions, not just to logic and philosophy, but to a broad range of subjects including education, history, political theory and religious studies. In addition, many of his writings on a variety of topics in both sciences and humanities have influenced generations of general readers.

After a life marked by controversy—including dismissals from both Trinity College, Cambridge, and City College, New York—Russell was awarded the Order of Merit in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. Noted for his many spirited anti-war and anti-nuclear protests, Russell remained a prominent public figure until his death at the age of 98.

## 2.2 Russell's Work in Logic

Russell's main contributions to logic and the foundations of mathematics include his discovery of Russell's paradox, his defense of logicism (the view that mathematics is, in some significant sense, reducible to formal logic), his development of the theory of types, his impressively general theory of logical relations, his formalization of the reals, and his refining of the first-order predicate calculus.

Russell discovered the paradox that bears his name in 1901, while working on his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903). The paradox arises in connection with the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. Such a set, if it exists, will be a member of itself if and only if it is not a member of itself. The paradox is significant since, using classical logic, all sentences are entailed by a contradiction. Russell's discovery thus prompted a large amount of work in logic, set theory, and the philosophy and foundations of mathematics.

Russell's response to the paradox came with the development of his theory of types between 1903 and 1908. It was clear to Russell that some form of restriction needed to be placed on the original comprehension (or abstraction) axiom of naive set theory, the axiom that formalizes the intuition that any coherent condition or property may be used to determine a set (or class). Russell's basic idea was that reference to sets such as the set of all sets that are not members of themselves could be avoided by arranging all sentences into a hierarchy, beginning with sentences about individuals at the lowest level, sentences about sets of individuals at the next lowest level, sentences about sets of sets of individuals at the next lowest level, and so on. Using a vicious circle principle similar to that adopted by the mathematician Henri Poincaré, together with his own so-called "no class" theory of classes, Russell was able to explain why the unrestricted comprehension axiom fails: propositional functions, such as the function " $x$  is a set," may not be applied to themselves since self-application would involve a vicious circle. On Russell's view, all objects for which a given condition (or predicate) holds must be at the same level or of the same "type." Sentences about these objects will then always be higher in the hierarchy than the objects themselves.

Although first introduced in 1903, the theory of types was further developed by Russell in his 1908 article "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types" and in the three-volume work he co-authored with Alfred North Whitehead, viz. *Principia Mathematica* (1910, 1912, 1913). Thus the theory admits of two versions, the "simple theory" of 1903 and the "ramified theory" of 1908. Both versions of the theory came under attack: the simple theory for being too

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weak, and the ramified theory for being too strong. For some, it was important that any proposed solution be comprehensive enough to resolve all known paradoxes at once. For others, it was important that any proposed solution not disallow those parts of classical mathematics that remained consistent, even though they appeared to violate the vicious circle principle.

Russell himself had recognized many of these weaknesses, noting as early as 1903 that it was unlikely that any single solution would resolve all of the known paradoxes. Together with Whitehead, he was also able to introduce a new axiom, the axiom of reducibility, which lessened the vicious circle principle's scope of application and so resolved many of the most worrisome aspects of type theory. Even so, some critics claimed that the axiom was too ad hoc to be justified philosophically.

Of equal significance during this period was Russell's defense of logicism, the theory that mathematics is in some important sense reducible to logic. First defended in his 1901 article "Recent Work on the Principles of Mathematics," and then later in greater detail in his *Principles of Mathematics* and in *Principia Mathematica*, Russell's logicism consisted of two main theses. The first was that all mathematical truths can be translated into logical truths or, in other words, that the vocabulary of mathematics constitutes a proper subset of the vocabulary of logic. The second was that all mathematical proofs can be recast as logical proofs or, in other words, that the theorems of mathematics constitute a proper subset of the theorems of logic.

Like Gottlob Frege, Russell's basic idea for defending logicism was that numbers may be identified with classes of classes and that number-theoretic statements may be explained in terms of quantifiers and identity. Thus the number 1 would be identified with the class of all unit classes, the number 2 with the class of all two-membered classes, and so on. Statements such as "There are at least two books" would be recast as statements such as "There is a book,  $x$ , and there is a book,  $y$ , and  $x$  is not identical to  $y$ ." Statements such as "There are exactly two books" would be recast as "There is a book,  $x$ , and there is a book,  $y$ , and  $x$  is not identical to  $y$ , and if there is a book,  $z$ , then  $z$  is identical to either  $x$  or  $y$ ." It followed that number-theoretic operations could be explained in terms of set-theoretic operations such as intersection, union, and difference. In *Principia Mathematica*, Whitehead and Russell were able to provide many detailed derivations of major theorems in set theory, finite and transfinite arithmetic, and elementary measure theory. A fourth volume on geometry was planned but never completed.

Russell's most important writings relating to these topics include not only *Principles of Mathematics* (1903), "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types" (1908), and *Principia Mathematica* (1910, 1912, 1913), but also his earlier *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897), and his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919a), the last of which was largely written while Russell was serving time in Brixton Prison as a result of his anti-war activities. Coincidentally, it was at roughly this same time (1918–19) that Wittgenstein was completing his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* while being detained as a prisoner of war at Monte Cassino during World War I.

### **2.3 Russell's Work in Analytic Philosophy**

In much the same way that Russell used logic in an attempt to clarify issues in the foundations of mathematics, he also used logic in an attempt to clarify issues in philosophy. As one of the founders of analytic philosophy, Russell made significant contributions to a wide variety of areas, including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and political theory. According to Russell, it is the philosopher's job to discover a logically ideal language—a language that will exhibit the true nature of the world in such a way that we will not be misled by the accidental surface structure of natural language. Just as atomic facts (the association of universals with an appropriate number of individuals) may be combined into molecular facts in the world itself, such a

language would allow for the description of such combinations using logical connectives such as "and" and "or." In addition to atomic and molecular facts, Russell also held that general facts (facts about "all" of something) were needed to complete the picture of the world. Famously, he vacillated on whether negative facts were also required.

The reason Russell believes that many ordinarily accepted statements may be open to doubt is that they appear to refer to entities that are known only inferentially. Thus, underlying Russell's various projects was not only Russell's use of logical analysis, but also his long-standing aim of discovering whether, and to what extent, knowledge is possible. "There is one great question," he writes in 1911. "Can human beings *know* anything, and if so, what and how? This question is really the most essentially philosophical of all questions" (quoted in Slater 1994, 67).

Motivating this question was the traditional problem of the external world. If our knowledge of the external world comes through inference to the best explanation, and if such inferences are always fallible, what guarantee do we have that our beliefs are reliable? Russell's response was partly metaphysical and partly epistemological. On the metaphysical side, Russell developed his famous theory of logical atomism, in which the world is said to consist of a complex of logical atoms (such as "little patches of colour") and their properties. Together these atoms and their properties form the atomic facts which, in turn, are combined to form logically complex objects. What we normally take to be inferred entities (for example, enduring physical objects) are then understood to be logical constructions formed from the immediately given entities of sensation, viz., "sensibilia."

On the epistemological side, Russell argued that it was also important to show that each questionable entity may be reduced to, or defined in terms of, another entity (or class of entities) whose existence is more certain. For example, on this view, an ordinary physical object that normally might be believed to be known only through inference may be defined instead as a certain series of appearances, connected with each other by continuity and by certain causal laws. ... More generally, a 'thing' will be defined as a certain series of aspects, namely those which would commonly be said to be *of* the thing. To say that a certain aspect is an aspect *of* a certain thing will merely mean that it is one of those which, taken serially, *are* the thing.

The reason we are able to do this is that our world is not wholly a matter of inference. There are things that we know without asking the opinion of men of science. If you are too hot or too cold, you can be perfectly aware of this fact without asking the physicist what heat and cold consist of. ... We may give the name 'data' to all the things of which we are aware without inference (1959, 23).

We can then use these data (or sensibilia or sense data) with which we are directly acquainted to construct the relevant objects of knowledge. Similarly, numbers may be reduced to collections of classes, points and instants may be reduced to ordered classes of volumes and events, and classes themselves may be reduced to propositional functions.

It is with these kinds of examples in mind that Russell suggests that we adopt what he calls "the supreme maxim in scientific philosophizing", namely the principle that "Whenever possible, logical constructions", or as he also sometimes puts it, logical fictions, "are to be substituted for inferred entities" (1914c, 155; cf. 1914a, 107, and 1924, 326). Anything that resists construction in this sense may be said to be an ontological atom. Such objects are atomic, both in the sense that they fail to be composed of individual, substantial parts, and in the sense that they exist independently of one another. Their corresponding propositions are also atomic, both in the sense that they contain no other propositions as parts, and in the sense that the members of any pair of true atomic propositions will be logically independent of one another. It turns out

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that formal logic, if carefully developed, will mirror precisely, not only the various relations between all such propositions, but their various internal structures as well.

It is in this context that Russell also introduces his famous distinction between two kinds of knowledge of truths: that which is direct, intuitive, certain and infallible, and that which is indirect, derivative, uncertain and open to error (see 1905, 41f; 1911, 1912, and 1914b). To be justified, every indirect knowledge claim must be capable of being derived from more fundamental, direct or intuitive knowledge claims. The kinds of truths that are capable of being known directly include both truths about immediate facts of sensation and truths of logic.

Eventually, Russell supplemented this distinction between direct and indirect knowledge with his famous distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. As Russell explains, "I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, *i.e.* when I am directly aware of the object itself. When I speak of a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes presentation" (1911, 209). Later, he clarifies this point by adding that acquaintance involves, not knowledge of truths, but knowledge of things (1912a, 44). Thus, while both intuitive and derivative knowledge involve knowledge of propositions (or truths), both knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description involve knowledge of objects (or things). Since it is those objects with which we have direct acquaintance that are the least questionable members of our ontology, it is these objects upon which Russell ultimately bases his epistemology.

Russell's contributions to metaphysics and epistemology were also unified by his views concerning the centrality of both scientific knowledge in general and the importance of there being an underlying scientific methodology that in large part is common to both philosophy and scientific disciplines. In the case of philosophy, this methodology expressed itself through Russell's use of logical analysis. In fact, Russell often claimed that he had more confidence in his methodology than in any particular philosophical conclusion.

This broad conception of philosophy arose in part from Russell's idealist origins (see, *e.g.*, Griffin 1991 and Hylton 1990a). This is so, even though Russell tells us that his one, true revolution in philosophy came about as a result of his break from idealism. Russell saw that the idealist doctrine of internal relations led to a series of contradictions regarding asymmetrical (and other) relations necessary for mathematics. Thus, in 1898, he abandoned the idealism that he had encountered as a student at Cambridge, together with his Kantian methodology, in favour of a pluralistic realism. As a result, he soon became famous as an advocate of the "new realism" and for his "new philosophy of logic," emphasizing as he did the importance of modern logic for philosophical analysis. The underlying themes of this "revolution" included his belief in pluralism, his emphasis upon anti-psychologism, and his belief in the importance of science. Each of these themes remained central to Russell's philosophy for the remainder of his life (see, *e.g.*, Hager 1994 and Weitz 1944).

## **2.4 Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions**

Russell's philosophical methodology required the making and testing of hypotheses through the weighing of evidence. Hence Russell's comment that he wished to emphasize the "scientific method" in philosophy (see, *e.g.*, Irvine 1989). It also required the rigorous analysis of problematic propositions using the machinery of first-order logic. It was Russell's belief that by using the new logic of his day, philosophers would be able to exhibit the underlying "logical form" of natural-language statements. A statement's logical form, in turn, would help philosophers resolve problems of reference associated with the ambiguity and vagueness of natural language.

Thus, just as we distinguish three separate senses of "is" (the *is* of predication, the *is* of identity, and the *is* of existence) and exhibit these three senses using three separate logical notations ( $Px$ ,  $x = y$ , and " $x$ " respectively) we will also discover other ontologically significant distinctions by being made aware of a sentence's correct logical form. On Russell's view, the subject matter of philosophy is then distinguished from that of the sciences only by the generality and the *a prioricity* of philosophical statements, not by the underlying methodology of the discipline. In philosophy, just as in mathematics, Russell believed that it was by applying logical machinery and insights that advances in analysis would be made.

Russell's most famous example of his "analytic method" concerns denoting phrases such as descriptions and proper names. In his *Principles of Mathematics*, Russell had adopted the view that every denoting phrase (for example, "Scott," "the author of *Waverley*," "the number two," "the golden mountain") denoted, or referred to, an existing entity. By the time his landmark article, "On Denoting," appeared two years later in 1905, Russell had modified this extreme realism and had instead become convinced that denoting phrases need not possess a theoretical unity.

While logically proper names (words such as "this" or "that" which refer to sensations of which an agent is immediately aware) do have referents associated with them, descriptive phrases (such as "the smallest number less than pi") should be viewed as a collection of quantifiers (such as "all" and "some") and propositional functions (such as " $x$  is a number"). As such, they are not to be viewed as referring terms but, rather, as "incomplete symbols." In other words, they should be viewed as symbols that take on meaning within appropriate contexts, but that are meaningless in isolation.

## **2.5 Russell's Neutral Monism**

One final major contribution to philosophy was Russell's defence of neutral monism, the view that the world consists of just one type of substance that is neither exclusively mental nor exclusively physical. Like idealism (the view that there exists nothing but the mental) and physicalism (the view that there exists nothing but the physical), neutral monism rejects dualism (the view that there exist distinct mental and physical substances). However, unlike both idealism and physicalism, neutral monism holds that this single existing substance may be viewed in some contexts as being mental and in others as being physical. As Russell puts it, "Neutral monism"—as opposed to idealistic monism and materialistic monism—is the theory that the things commonly regarded as mental and the things commonly regarded as physical do not differ in respect of any intrinsic property possessed by the one set and not by the other, but differ only in respect of arrangement and context.

To help understand this general suggestion, Russell introduces the analogy of a postal directory:

The theory may be illustrated by comparison with a postal directory, in which the same names comes twice over, once in alphabetical and once in geographical order; we may compare the alphabetical order to the mental, and the geographical order to the physical. The affinities of a given thing are quite different in the two orders, and its causes and effects obey different laws. Two objects may be connected in the mental world by the association of ideas, and in the physical world by the law of gravitation. ... Just as every man in the directory has two kinds of neighbours, namely alphabetical neighbours and geographical neighbours, so every object will lie at the intersection of two causal series with different laws, namely the mental series and the physical series. 'Thoughts' are not different in substance from 'things'; the stream of my thoughts is a stream of things, namely of the things which I should commonly be said to be thinking of; what leads to its being called a stream of thoughts is merely that the laws of succession are different from the physical laws.

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In other words, when viewed as being mental, a thought or idea may have associated with it other thoughts or ideas that seem related even though, when viewed as being physical, they have very little in common. As Russell explains, "In my mind, Caesar may call up Charlemagne, whereas in the physical world the two were widely sundered" (CP, Vol. 7, 15). Even so, it is a mistake, on this view, to postulate two distinct types of things (the idea of Caesar, and the man Caesar) that are composed to two distinct substances (the mental and the physical). Instead, "The whole duality of mind and matter, according to this theory, is a mistake; there is only one kind of stuff out of which the world is made, and this stuff is called mental in one arrangement, physical in the other" (CP, Vol. 7, 15).

Russell appears to have developed this theory around 1913, while he was working on his Theory of Knowledge manuscript, and on his 1914 Monist article, "On the Nature of Acquaintance." Decades later, in 1964, he remarked that "I am not conscious of any serious change in my philosophy since I adopted neutral monism" (Eames 1967, 511).

Russell's most important writings relating to these topics include "On Denoting" (1905), "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910a), "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918, 1919), "Logical Atomism" (1924), *The Analysis of Mind* (1921), *The Analysis of Matter* (1927a), and *Theory of Knowledge* (CP, Vol. 7).

## 2.6 Russell's Social and Political Philosophy

Russell's social influence stems from three main sources: his long-standing social activism, his many writings on the social and political issues of his day, and his popularizations of numerous technical writings in philosophy and the natural sciences.

Among Russell's many popularizations are his two best-selling works, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) and *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945). Both of these books, as well as his numerous books popularizing science, have done much to educate and inform generations of general readers. Naturally enough, Russell saw a link between education, in this broad sense, and social progress. As he put it, "Education is the key to the new world" (1926, 83). Partly this is due to our need to understand nature, but equally important is our need to understand each other:

The thing, above all, that a teacher should endeavour to produce in his pupils, if democracy is to survive, is the kind of tolerance that springs from an endeavour to understand those who are different from ourselves. It is perhaps a natural human impulse to view with horror and disgust all manners and customs different from those to which we are used. Ants and savages put strangers to death. And those who have never travelled either physically or mentally find it difficult to tolerate the queer ways and outlandish beliefs of other nations and other times, other sects and other political parties. This kind of ignorant intolerance is the antithesis of a civilized outlook, and is one of the gravest dangers to which our overcrowded world is exposed. (1950, 121)

At the same time, Russell is also famous for suggesting that a widespread reliance upon evidence, rather than upon superstition, would have enormous social consequences: "I wish to propose for the reader's favourable consideration," says Russell, "a doctrine which may, I fear, appear wildly paradoxical and subversive. The doctrine in question is this: that it is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true" (A1928, 11).

Still, Russell is best known in many circles as a result of his campaigns against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and against western involvement in the Vietnam War during the 1960s. However, Russell's social activism stretches back at least as far as 1910, when he published his *Anti-Suffragist Anxieties*, and to 1916, when he was convicted and fined in connection with anti-war protests during World War I. Because of his conviction, he was dismissed from his post at Trinity College, Cambridge. Two years later, he was convicted a second time. The

result was six months in prison (see, e.g., Hardy 1942). Russell also ran unsuccessfully for Parliament (in 1907, 1922, and 1923) and, together with his second wife, founded and operated an experimental school during the late 1920s and early 1930s (see, e.g., Russell 1926).

Although he became the third Earl Russell upon the death of his brother in 1931, Russell's radicalism continued to make him a controversial figure well through middle-age. While teaching in the United States in the late 1930s, he was offered a teaching appointment at City College, New York. The appointment was revoked following a large number of public protests and a 1940 judicial decision which found him morally unfit to teach at the College (see, e.g., Dewey and Kallen 1941).

In 1954 he delivered his famous "Man's Peril" broadcast on the BBC, condemning the Bikini H-bomb tests. A year later, together with Albert Einstein, he released the Russell-Einstein Manifesto calling for the curtailment of nuclear weapons. In 1957 he was a prime organizer of the first Pugwash Conference, which brought together a large number of scientists concerned about the nuclear issue. He became the founding president of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958 and was once again imprisoned, this time in connection with anti-nuclear protests in 1961. The media coverage surrounding his conviction only served to enhance Russell's reputation and to further inspire the many idealistic youths who were sympathetic to his anti-war and anti-nuclear protests.

During these controversial years Russell also wrote many of the books that brought him to the attention of popular audiences. These include his *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916), *A Free Man's Worship* (1923), *On Education* (1926), *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927c), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), *The Scientific Outlook* (1931), and *Power: A New Social Analysis* (1938). Upon being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, Russell used his acceptance speech to emphasize, once again, themes related to his social activism.

## 2.7 "A Free Man's Worship"

Science has removed the veil of mystery from the workings of the universe, forcing Man to accept a view in which all things are the result of cold, uncaring forces. Man must accept that his existence is an unforeseen accident of Nature, and our understanding of the blind workings of these same forces persuades us that Mankind will eventually perish, along with his proud achievements.

"... Such ... is the world which Science presents for our belief. ... That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; ... all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins..."

How ironic that blind forces created a creature that thinks and aspires to understand the forces that created it, with an understanding denied the creating forces since they are blind. And more, this creature has feelings of good and evil, which also are denied the creating forces. And this new creature uses these insights and feelings to make judgments about the universe that created it.

"A strange mystery it is that Nature, omnipotent but blind, in the revolutions of her secular hurrying through the abysses of space, has brought forth at last a child, subject still to her power, but gifted with sight, with knowledge of good and evil, with the capacity of judging all the works of his unthinking Mother."

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In spite of being powerless within this mechanistic universe, as metaphorically emphasized by the fact that we die after just a few short years of existence, this thinking and feeling creature is nevertheless "free." He is free to ponder, to understand, to pass judgment, and imagine things that theoretically could exist. All these things are denied to the rest of the universe, to the forces that bind the sentient individual, and this makes the sentient "superior" to the creating and enslaving forces.

"In spite of Death, the mark and seal of the parental control, Man is yet free, during his brief years, to examine, to criticize, to know, and in imagination to create. To him alone, in the world with which he is acquainted, this freedom belongs; and in this lies his superiority to the resistless forces that control his outward life."

Even primitive people understand that they are subject to forces more powerful than themselves. Those of our ancestors who acknowledged the power of stronger men and prostrated themselves in their worship, were more likely to be spared, and therefore tended to survive. The powers of Nature were dealt with similarly, because of the savages imperfect understanding of the differences between Nature and Man; hence, our ancestors prostrated themselves before the imagined Gods who represented Natural forces and offered sacrifices of valued things as if these would evoke compassion.

"The savage, like ourselves, feels the oppression of his impotence before the powers of Nature; but having in himself nothing that he respects more than Power, he is willing to prostrate himself before his gods, without inquiring whether they are worthy of his worship. Pathetic and very terrible is the long history of cruelty and torture, of degradation and human sacrifice, endured in the hope of placating the jealous gods: surely, the trembling believer thinks, when what is most precious has been freely given, their lust for blood must be appeased, and more will not be required."

The savage relates to Nature the way a slave relates to his master. A slave dare not complain to his master about the unfair infliction of pain. Similarly, the savage dare not complain about the unfairness of his Gods.

"The religion of Moloch as such creeds may be generically called is in essence the cringing submission of the slave, who dare not, even in his heart, allow the thought that his master deserves no adulation. Since the independence of ideals is not yet acknowledged, Power may be freely worshipped, and receive an unlimited respect, despite its wanton infliction of pain."

The thinking person bravely acknowledges the imperfectness of the world. Unlike the savage, for whom survival is paramount and which constrains his thinking, we thinking people refuse to surrender our wish for the world to be better. We boldly worship "truth" and "beauty" and other concepts which are luxuries for the savage. The savage is enslaved by his excessive concern with the Powers of Nature, which for him are too complex to challenge. We have become "free" by refusing to worship fear driven Power, like a slave worships his master, and to worship instead an imagined world of goodness, fairness and perfection. Even when the world does not bring forth goodness in our lives, we can at least imagine it, and seek solace from the imagined state. Although we know that we are mortal, we can at least imagine immortality, and be comforted by the thought. No matter how buffeted our lives may be by uncaring natural forces, we can still imagine a tranquil state, and use its vision to survive the real world with equanimity (cf. Ch. 19).

"... Let us admit that, in the world we know, there are many things that would be better otherwise, and that the ideals to which we do and must adhere are not realized in the realm of matter. Let us preserve our respect for truth, for beauty, for the ideal of perfection which life does not permit us to attain, though none of these things meet with the approval of the unconscious universe. If Power is bad, as it seems to be, let us reject it from our hearts. In this

lies Man's true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love of the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments. In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free, free from our fellowmen, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even, while we live, from the tyranny of death. Let us learn, then, that energy of faith which enables us to live constantly in the vision of the good; and let us descend, in action, into the world of fact, with that vision always before us."

Part of growing up is surrendering the Mother Love that bathed our self centered baby years. Our wishes cannot always be met by crying, as they once were. The adult must abandon childhood dreams when Fate denies them, and we must emotionally accept that this is normal. This acceptance of limitations is a precondition for further growth.

"... To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation. For the young, there is nothing unattainable; a good thing desired with the whole force of a passionate will, and yet impossible, is to them not credible. Yet, by death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of duty, we must learn, each one of us, that the world was not made for us, and that, however beautiful may be the things we crave, Fate may nevertheless forbid them. It is the part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hopes, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to Power is not only just and right: it is the very gate of wisdom."

After learning that the outer world was not created for our benefit, but that we are mere unintended products of its blind forces, it becomes easier to accept the limitations of living within it. We can forgive it for whatever unintended calamities occur, for the Universe does not seek out its victims. It is unconscious, and uncaring, so there is no point in worshipping it for the purpose of avoiding its anger. This frees us to begin to see beauty within it. Because it is powerful it deserves our respect, but because it does not take notice of us we are free to think about it any way that we want. That which once scared us becomes beautiful, and worthy of our worship. But this is a new worship, for instead of being driven by fear and the need to propitiate, we are driven by the idealization of beauty, by aesthetics. This is a sort of triumph of the human mind over a once intimidating universe.

"... When, without the bitterness of impotent rebellion we have learnt both to resign ourselves to the outward rule of Fate and to recognize that the non-human world is unworthy of our worship, it becomes possible at last so to transform and refashion the unconscious universe, so to transmute it in the crucible of imagination, that a new image of shining gold replaces the old idol of clay. In all the multiform facets of the world in the visual shapes of trees and mountains and clouds, in the events of the life of man, even in the very omnipotence of Death the insight of creative idealism can find the reflection of a beauty which its own thoughts first made. In this way mind asserts its subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of Nature."

Death represents another challenge to the person who has shaken off the shackles of savage thinking. There is no denying that it is inevitable and irrevocable. The vastness of the un-lived future, matched by the vastness of the un-lived past, would seem to diminish the significance of the short span we do live. How ironic that during our brief span there should be so much travail and pain. Seeing that much of this sorrow is produced by petty strivings, we are less eager to pursue the endless and trivial struggles that once constituted our everyday life. Ever more freed from conventional shackles, and more aloof, it is easier to comprehend the poignancy of the human predicament: we are all subject to the same brief existence, surrounded by an immense and uncaring universe, we invent meaning and work together to achieve imagined goals, but most of these goals are transitory and petty, so in effect we squander our short tenure. And finally, we die alone, carrying the burden of knowledge that our struggles were for imagined causes, and that our final defeat is a passage into an uncaring, inanimate oblivion.

Notes

However, with our contemporaries we share the realization of the aloneness of Death, and this recognition can bond us. Out of this shared dilemma can arise a new empathy for our fellow Man.

**"... In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, and in the irrevocableness of a vanished past, there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of the vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow. In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for the little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour; from the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge; all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul, which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. Victory, in this struggle with the powers of darkness, is the true baptism into the glorious company of heroes, the true initiation into the overmastering beauty of human existence. From that awful encounter of the soul with the outer world, enunciation, wisdom and charity are born; and with their birth a new life begins."**

Whereas the savage continues to view the inanimate world as animate, and therefore worships false gods (in the manner of a slave), and whereas the savage continues to be driven by petty strivings with transitory rewards of personal happiness, thereby squandering a finite life, and whereas the savage refuses to accept the inevitable victory of an uncaring universe over his petty struggles, and therefore invents pitiful palliative realities promising everlasting heavenly happiness, the thoughtful man is free of all these false worshippings, false strivings, and false hopes. This emancipating perspective opens the way to the free man's worship.

"... The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendor, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and make it a part of ourselves. To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship."

Thoughtful men, who have freed themselves from the savage's slave worship mentality, are bound together by an acknowledgement of their shared fate. Each of us faces the existential dilemma, each confronts an uncaring physical universe and an evil animate one, each of us endures this for a brief time, and each of us will die alone. To the extent that I understand my individual fate, I also understand the fate of my fellow man. Our shared doom creates a feeling of fellowship. Together we march through the treacherous fields of life, and one by one we fall down to die. We are fellow sufferers, and it feels right to reach out with a helpful hand to those who we shall later become. We may see their shortcomings, and know that we have ours; and remembering their burden of sorrows, we forgive.

"... United with his fellow men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love. The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never tiring affection, to

strengthen failing courage, to instill faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but wherever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed."

Let our little day in the immense scheme of things be free of unnecessary pain, and be filled with gratitude. Let us worship, during our few precious moments, at our self built shrine dedicated to aesthetic beauty. If we cherish these few good things during our journey, then we will be less buffeted by the uncaring universe that unknowingly created us. This is the only worship worthy of free men.

"Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power."



*Did u know?* Here are the Russell bullet-points.

- Russell says, without God, "Science" is the only tool we have to understand the world.
- Science gives us three bleak certainties:
  - (1) Your life has no purpose-it's but an accidental put-together of atoms.
  - (2) There's no existence after death.
  - (3) All the achievements of humanity are destined to be destroyed by the inexorable onslaught of nature's power.
- Realize the certainty of these three things. They form a "foundation of unyielding despair." Build your life on them.

## 2.8 Critical Analysis

Bertrand Russell's *A Free Man's Worship* is his attempt of emancipating the modern people from the bloody tradition worship of power. As a modern humanist philosopher, Russell first takes the allusion of Marlow's Dr Faustus to describe the probable creation story of the human world. Russell does not take allusion from any other sources but only Marlow because in his drama the description given by Mephistopheles is the most probable creation story, related to science. So he takes his allusion and believes that the creation story is the most logical. Any way Russell believes that human beings came in to existence and the first savage ancestors were totally powerless on the hand of nature.

**Notes**

Bertrand Russell believes that our savage ancestors found themselves helpless and powerless because nature was dark and chaotic and no means to think otherwise. They began to imagine a power that was unseen for them they thought that, here must be some visible force, which is beyond their sight and control. Then they thought is, they gave some worship to that power. It would make their life better, more helpful and powerful. Thinking so they established the power of imagination and began to worship to that power which is the worst task made by them.

After they established power and began to worship it a tradition of worshipping over power was developed. The tradition of worship came to be developed in such a negative way that we worship God; the blood thirst demonic picture of God, was created so that we worsened the tradition more and more. He gives two examples of God to criticize the negative tradition of worship. The Moloch God was worshipped by sacrificing the children by burning them in to the flame of fire. He also criticizes the God in the Book of Job in the Bible where both Gods, the Moloch God as well as the other God in negative sense are the source of suffering rather than love to the worshipper. He criticized such demon like Gods and attacks over the negative tradition of worship. He suggests that it is the time to alter the tradition of worship but it is better to stop to worship if we can.

Russell reminds the moral readers that only humans can distinguish between good and bad or right and wrong. He says that human being is different from other creation of Mother Nature, in the sense that only humans have the indomitable (strong) nature of spirit that is using our mind. He reminds us that by using the mind, we can think, imagine, analyze and evaluate what is right and what is wrong. He thinks that power and its worship is very meaningless.

In his opinion, there is no human power but super human power such as nature, time and death. In nature, there is power of change and violence. In time, there is power of fate and in death, there is power of finality, in this power there is such force, which we cannot control or prevent. Whatever we worship after these powers, they are deaf, dumb and victimization. No one can be immoral; no one can escape from the moth of death at last. To use such mind is touse (dishevel) indomitable nature of our spirit and by using so we can conclude that our worship to power is meaningless. We should be indifferent to the power. It is better not to worship power. If not so it is the time to alter the tradition of power worship and it is better to worship good, loveable and affectionate power.

Finally, Russell suggests us that when we stop to worship power we can be freeman. To be a freeman it is very difficult because we are guided by our petty and trivial personal selfish desire. We are bounded in the material world so we cannot renounce this world. Until and unless we renounce such material desires, we cannot be a free man. It is like the world of a dark cave, which is difficult to cross, but once we cross it we will reach a beautiful temple, which is to be the freeman.

What Russell says is if we abandon our personal selfish desire and if we reject the material world, we become freeman and we have different type of world of the worship. The Freeman does not worship like the savage who worships as a slave on the feet of power to fulfill his petty and trivial desires. But, to the freeman worship is different because he is not the slave on the feet of power. Instead, his worship is deep thinking or meditation for the welfare of humanity. In Russell's opinion, *A Freeman s Worship* is to burn in to the fire of worldly human passions. It is the great thinking of human for the benefit of the human world like Buddha.

## Self Assessment

Notes

State whether the following statements are true or false:

1. Russell argues that the correspondence theory meets the three requirements of any theory of truth.  
(a) True (b) False
2. For Russell, minds do not create truth or falsehood.  
(a) True (b) False
3. Russell believes that it is possible to discover moral ideals with which to sustain ourselves in this ultimately meaningless existence.  
(a) True (b) False
4. Russell asserts that the worship of force is the result of failure to maintain our own ideals against a hostile universe.  
(a) True (b) False
5. Russell identifies the "free man's worship" with organized religion.  
(a) True (b) False
6. Russell thinks that morality requires some kind of deity.  
(a) True (b) False

## 2.9 Summary

- The following is an "abridged and annotated version" of a famous Bertrand Russell essay. I include it here because it illustrates how a sentient being who has wrestled with life's dilemmas in a commendable way achieves a measure of detached compassion for the predicament of existence. When I first read this essay I was overwhelmed by a feeling that I could have written it if only my writing skills were better.
- I salute Bertrand Russell for having written the best essay I've ever encountered! It captures my "feelings" about the predicament of being an automaton, the product of an evolution about which I have ambivalent feelings, and it illustrates the humanistic attitudes that I have for my fellow man. This essay is a thing of beauty, it is prose verging on poetry.
- To the purist who dislike abridgements I should offer an apology, but others have expressed their confusion over what Bertie was trying to say. I still encourage the reader to consult the source, which is only about twice as long as my abridged version. In the following annotated abridgement I will use un-italicized, bold font to indicate what Bertrand Russell wrote, while my annotations will be italicized.
- Since the time of Greek and Roman philosophers, there have been attempts to replace a spirit haunted world view with a mechanistic world view. Lucretius believed that not only was the mechanistic view correct, but it also freed men from humiliating and unnecessary spirit appeasing rituals. Primitive ways of thinking are so entrenched that even today, surrounded by technology and scientific insight, most people still believe in spirits, angels, superstition, life after death and some version of a God. I believe that humans will carry this ancient burden with them into all future centuries that they somehow manage to reach.

**Notes**

- The Philosophers of the 18th Century Enlightenment viewed the workings of Nature as mechanistic. They were reductionists, and removed God from the role of dictating everyday events. Whereas some of the Philosophers believed God set things in motion and then stepped back to watch his handiwork, others (like Holbach) gave Him no role whatsoever thereby denying God's existence. In either case, the mechanistic universe viewpoint answered the "how" questions (how things work), while in the process denying the existence of "why" questions (Dreiser, 1932). The mechanistic universe perspective failed to provide guidance on "how one should live" questions. Voltaire spoke for many in *Candide* when he portrayed the world as filled with misfortunes due to a universe that doesn't care about humans as well as widespread evil that is endemic to human nature.
- Nietzsche, in the mid 19th Century, had in mind the "uncaring universe" and its implications for "how to live" when he wrote (approximate words): "When God is at last dead for Man, when the last gleam of light is extinguished, and when he is surrounded by the impenetrable darkness of an uncaring universe that exists for no purpose, then at last Man will know that he is alone and must create his own values to live by."
- Near the end of the 19th Century HG Wells wrote *The Universe Rigid* (a manuscript that was lost by his publisher, prompting him to write *The Time Machine*, 1895). He understood more profoundly than even most contemporary scientists the implications of their mechanistic universe (*i.e.*,  $a = F/m$ ).
- The uncaring nature of the universe was an important part of "the climate of opinion" at the turn of the Century, when Bertrand Russell wrote "A Free Man's Worship" (1903). Russell took on the challenge of how a Godless person might view the "of existence," and even how he might "worship" existence. Russell touched base on all these points, but he did it with such powerful, poetic prose, that all other attempts to write what he managed to convey were pale in comparison. That is my humble opinion.

**2.10 Keywords**

- Portrayed* : Depicted (someone or something) in a work of art or literature.  
*Predicament* : A difficult, unpleasant, or embarrassing situation.

**Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (a)                      2. (b)                      3. (a)                      4. (a)  
 5. (a)                      6. (b)

**2.11 Review Questions**

1. Explain Russell's Work in Logic.
2. What is the Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions?
3. Explain Russell's Neutral Monism.
4. Briefly explain Russell's Social and Political Philosophy.
5. Write a critical review of "A Free Man's Worship".

## 2.12 Further Readings

Notes



Books

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Online links [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

Notes

## Unit 3: Charles Lamb-Dream Children : A Reverie-A Detailed Study

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of Charles Lamb;
- Explain *Dream Children : A Reverie*.

### Introduction

Charles Lamb was an English essayist, best known for his *Essays of Elia* and for the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*, which he produced with his sister, Mary Lamb. Lamb has been referred to by E.V. Lucas, his principal biographer, as the most lovable figure in English literature. Lamb was honoured by The Latymer School, a grammar school in Edmonton, a suburb of London where he lived for a time; it has six houses, one of which, "Lamb", is named after Charles.

### 3.1 Biography

Charles Lamb was the youngest child of John Lamb, a lawyer's clerk. He was born in the Inner Temple and spent his youth there, later going away to school at Christ's Hospital. There he formed a friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge which lasted for many years. After leaving school in 1789, he went to work for the South Sea House, whose subsequent downfall in a pyramid scheme after Lamb left would be contrasted to the company's prosperity in the first *Elia* essay. In 1792 he went to work for British East India Company, the death of his father's employer having ruined the family's fortunes. Charles and his sister Mary both suffered periods of mental illness, and Charles spent six weeks in a psychiatric hospital in 1795. He was, however, already making his name as a poet.

In 1799, John Lamb died and Charles became guardian to Mary, whose mental instability prevented her from looking after herself. Lamb continued to work as a clerk for the East India

Company and doubled as a writer in various genres, his tragedy, *John Woodvil*, being published in 1802. His farce, *Mr H*, was performed at Drury Lane in 1807. In the same year, *Tales from Shakespeare* (Charles handled the tragedies and Mary the comedies) was published, and became a best-seller for William Godwin's "Children's Library".

Charles, who had never married because of his family commitments, fell in love with an actress, Fanny Kelly, of Covent Garden, but she refused him and he remained until his death a bachelor. His collected essays, under the title, *Essays of Elia*, were published in 1823 ("Elia" being the pen-name Lamb used as a contributor to *The London Magazine*). A further collection was published ten years later, shortly before Lamb's death. He died of an infection, erysipelas, contracted from a cut on his face. His sister, who was ten years his senior, survived him. Lamb was honoured by The Latymer School, a grammar school in Edmonton, a suburb of London where he lived for a time; it has six houses, one of which, "Lamb", is named after Charles.

### **3.2 Youth and Schooling**

Lamb was the son of Elizabeth Field and John Lamb. Lamb was the youngest child, with ten-year older sister Mary, an even older brother John, and 4 other siblings who did not survive their infancy. John Lamb (father), who was a lawyer's clerk, spent most of his professional life as the assistant and servant to a barrister by the name of Samuel Salt who lived in the Inner Temple in London. It was there in the Inner Temple in Crown Office Row, that Charles Lamb was born and spent his youth. Lamb created a portrait of his father in his "Elia on the Old Benchers" under the name Lovel. Lamb's older brother was too much his senior to be a youthful companion to the boy but his sister Mary, being born ten years before him, was probably his closest playmate. Lamb was also cared for by his paternal aunt Hetty, who seems to have had a particular fondness for him. A number of writings by both Charles and Mary suggest that the conflict between Aunt Hetty and her sister-in-law created a certain degree of tension in the Lamb household. However, Charles speaks fondly of her and her presence in the house seems to have brought a great deal of comfort to him.

Some of Lamb's fondest childhood memories were of time spent with Mrs. Field, his maternal grandmother, who was for many years a servant to the Plummer family, who owned a large country house called Blakesware, near Widford, Hertfordshire. After the death of Mrs. Plummer, Lamb's grandmother was in sole charge of the large home and, as Mr. Plummer was often absent, Charles had free rein of the place during his visits. A picture of these visits can be glimpsed in the Elia essay *Blakesmoor in H—shire*.

"Why, every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried [sic] bed-rooms-tapestry so much better than painting—not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots—at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally—all Ovid on the walls, in colours vividder than his descriptions."

Little is known about Charles's life before the age of seven. We know that Mary taught him to read at a very early age and he read voraciously. It is believed that he suffered from smallpox during his early years which forced him into a long period of convalescence. After this period of recovery Lamb began to take lessons from Mrs. Reynolds, a woman who lived in the Temple and is believed to have been the former wife of a lawyer. Mrs. Reynolds must have been a sympathetic schoolmistress because Lamb maintained a relationship with her throughout his life and she is known to have attended dinner parties held by Mary and Charles in the 1820s. E.V. Lucas suggests that sometime in 1781 Charles left Mrs. Reynolds and began to study at the Academy of William Bird.

**Notes**

His time with William Bird did not last long, however, because by October 1782 Lamb was enrolled in Christ's Hospital, a charity boarding school chartered by King Edward VI in 1552. Christ's Hospital was a traditional English boarding school; bleak and full of violence. The headmaster, Mr. Boyer, became famous for his teaching in Latin and Greek, but also for his brutality. A thorough record of Christ's Hospital in Several essays by Lamb as well as the Autobiography of Leigh Hunt and the Biographia Literaria of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom Charles developed a friendship that would last for their entire lives, can be found. Despite the brutality Lamb got along well at Christ's Hospital, due in part, perhaps, to the fact that his home was not far distant thus enabling him, unlike many other boys, to return often to the safety of home. Years later, in his essay "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," Lamb described these events, speaking of himself in the third person as "L."

*"I remember L. at school; and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages, which I and other of his schoolfellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us."*

Christ's Hospital was a typical English boarding school and many students later wrote of the terrible violence they suffered there. The upper master of the school from 1778 to 1799 was Reverend James Boyer, a man renowned for his unpredictable and capricious temper. In one famous story Boyer was said to have knocked one of Lee Hunt's teeth out by throwing a copy of Homer at him from across the room. Lamb seemed to have escaped much of this brutality, in part because of his amiable personality and in part because Samuel Salt, his father's employer and Lamb's sponsor at the school was one of the institute's Governors.

Charles Lamb suffered from a stutter and this "an unconquerable impediment" in his speech deprived him of Grecian status at Christ's Hospital and thus disqualifying him for a clerical career. While Coleridge and other scholarly boys were able to go on to Cambridge, Lamb left school at fourteen and was forced to find a more prosaic career. For a short time he worked in the office of Joseph Paice, a London merchant and then, for 23 weeks, until 8 February 1792, held a small post in the Examiner's Office of the South Sea House. Its subsequent downfall in a pyramid scheme after Lamb left would be contrasted to the company's prosperity in the first Elia essay. On 5 April 1792 he went to work in the Accountant's Office for British East India Company, the death of his father's employer having ruined the family's fortunes. Charles would continue to work there for 25 years, until his retirement with pension.

LAMB is the heir to the eighteenth-century essayists, but with a richer imagination and a more delicate sensibility. He is an essayist rather than a story-teller,—an essayist of an intense individuality. But he could dream as the other poets could; and here is one of them, contained in the "Essays of Elia," published in 1822.

In 1792 while tending to his grandmother, Mary Field, in Hertfordshire, Charles Lamb fell in love with a young woman named Ann Simmons. Although no epistolary record exists of the relationship between the two, Lamb seems to have spent years wooing Miss Simmons. The record of the love exists in several accounts of Lamb's writing. Rosamund Gray is a story of a young man named Allen Clare who loves Rosamund Gray but their relationship comes to nothing because of the sudden death of Miss Gray. Miss Simmons also appears in several Elia essays under the name "Alice M." The essays "Dream Children," "New Year's Eve," and several others, speak of the many years that Lamb spent pursuing his love that ultimately failed. Miss Simmons eventually went on to marry a silversmith by the name of Bartram and Lamb called the failure of the affair his 'great disappointment.'

Family tragedy Charles and his sister Mary both suffered periods of mental illness. Charles spent six weeks in a psychiatric hospital in 1795. He was, however, already making his name as a poet.

On 22 September 1796, a terrible event occurred: Mary, "worn down to a state of extreme nervous misery by attention to needlework by day and to her mother at night," was seized with acute mania and stabbed her mother to the heart with a table knife.

Although there was no legal status of 'insanity' at the time, a jury returned a verdict of 'Lunacy' and therefore freed her from guilt of willful murder. With the help of friends Lamb succeeded in obtaining his sister's release from what would otherwise have been lifelong imprisonment, on the condition that he took personal responsibility for her safekeeping. Lamb used a large part of his relatively meagre income to keep his beloved sister in a private 'madhouse' in Islington called Fisher House.

The 1799 death of John Lamb was something of a relief to Charles because his father had been mentally incapacitated for a number of years since suffering a stroke. The death of his father also meant that Mary could come to live again with him in Pentonville, and in 1800 they set up a shared home at Mitre Court Buildings in the Temple, where they lived until 1809.

Despite Lamb's bouts of melancholia and alcoholism, both he and his sister enjoyed an active and rich social life. Their London quarters became a kind of weekly salon for many of the most outstanding theatrical and literary figures of the day. Charles Lamb, having been to school with Samuel Coleridge, counted Coleridge as perhaps his closest, and certainly his oldest, friend. On his deathbed, Coleridge had a mourning ring sent to Lamb and his sister. Fortuitously, Lamb's first publication was in 1796, when four sonnets by "Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House" appeared in Coleridge's *Poems on Various Subjects*. In 1797 he contributed additional blank verse to the second edition, and met the Wordsworths, William and Dorothy, on his short summer holiday with Coleridge at Nether Stowey, thereby also striking up a lifelong friendship with William. In London, Lamb became familiar with a group of young writers who favoured political reform, including Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt.

Lamb continued to clerk for the East India Company and doubled as a writer in various genres, his tragedy, *John Woodvil*, being published in 1802. His farce, *Mr H*, was performed at Drury Lane in 1807, where it was roundly booed. In the same year, *Tales from Shakespeare* (Charles handled the tragedies; his sister Mary, the comedies) was published, and became a best seller for William Godwin's "Children's Library."

In 1819, at age 44, Lamb, who, because of family commitments, had never married, fell in love with an actress, Fanny Kelly, of Covent Garden, and proposed marriage. She refused him, and he died a bachelor. His collected essays, under the title *Essays of Elia*, were published in 1823 ("Elia" being the pen name Lamb used as a contributor to the *London Magazine*). A further collection was published ten years or so later, shortly before Lamb's death. He died of a streptococcal infection, erysipelas, contracted from a minor graze on his face sustained after slipping in the street, on 27 December 1834, just a few months after Coleridge. He was 59. From 1833 till their deaths Charles and Mary lived at Bay Cottage, Church Street, Edmonton north of London (now part of the London Borough of Enfield). Lamb is buried in All Saints' Churchyard, Edmonton. His sister, who was ten years his senior, survived him for more than a dozen years. She is buried beside him.

Lamb's first publication was the inclusion of four sonnets in Coleridge's *Poems on Various Subjects* published in 1796 by Joseph Cottle. The sonnets were significantly influenced by the poems of Burns and the sonnets of William Bowles, a largely forgotten poet of the late 18th century. His poems garnered little attention and are seldom read today. Lamb's contributions

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to the second edition of the Poems showed significant growth as a poet. These poems included *The Tomb of Douglas* and *A Vision of Repentance*. Because of a temporary fall-out with Coleridge, Lamb's poems were to be excluded in the third edition of the Poems. As it turned out, a third edition never emerged and instead Coleridge's next publication was the monumentally influential *Lyrical Ballads* co-published with Wordsworth. Lamb, on the other hand, published a book entitled *Blank Verse* with Charles Lloyd, the mentally unstable son of the founder of Lloyd's Bank. Lamb's most famous poem was written at this time entitled *The Old Familiar Faces*. Like most of Lamb's poems it is particularly sentimental but it is still remembered and widely read, often included in Poetic Collections. Of particular interest to Lambarians is the opening verse of the original version of *The Old Familiar Faces* which is concerned with Lamb's mother. It was a verse that Lamb chose to remove from the edition of his *Collected Work* published in 1818.

*I had a mother, but she died, and left me, Died prematurely in a day of horrors—All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.*

From a fairly young age Lamb desired to be a poet but never gained the success that he had hoped. Lamb lived under the poetic shadow of his friend Coleridge. In the final years of the 18th century Lamb began to work on prose with the novella entitled *Rosamund Gray*, a story of a young girl who was thought to be inspired by Ann Simmonds, with whom Charles Lamb was thought to be in love. Although the story is not particularly successful as a narrative because of Lamb's poor sense of plot, it was well thought of by Lamb's contemporaries and led Shelley to observe "what a lovely thing is *Rosamund Gray*! How much knowledge of the sweetest part of our nature in it!"

In the first years of the 19th century Lamb began his fruitful literary cooperation with his sister Mary. Together they wrote at least three books for William Godwin's *Juvenile Library*. The most successful of these was of course *Tales From Shakespeare* which ran through two editions for Godwin and has now been published dozens of times in countless editions, many of them illustrated. Lamb also contributed a footnote to Shakespearean studies at this time with his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," in which he argues that Shakespeare should be read rather than performed in order to gain the proper effect of his dramatic genius. Beside contributing to Shakespeare studies with his book *Tales From Shakespeare*, Lamb also contributed to the popularization of Shakespeare's contemporaries with his book *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare*.

Although he did not write his first *Elia* essay until 1820, Lamb's gradual perfection of the essay form for which he eventually became famous began as early 1802 in a series of open letters to Leigh Hunt's *Reflector*. The most famous of these is called "The Londoner" in which Lamb famously derides the contemporary fascination with nature and the countryside.

### **3.3 Dream Children : A Reverie**

Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about, me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich Person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no

story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by every body, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish indeed." And then I told how,

This is hardly a story at all; it is so slight in substance and in texture; it is a reverie only. Yet it has its movement and its climax; it makes only a single impression; and thus it is seen to have certain of the essential qualities of the true short-story.

when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psalter by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said "those innocents would do her no harm;" and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eye-brows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great-house in the holydays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Caesars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken pannels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying a out upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth — or in watching the dance that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved

**Notes**

by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L—, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out — and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man’s estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of every body, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk pain;—and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up, and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them, some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W—n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech; “We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name”—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side — but John L. (or James Elia) was gone for ever.

**Self Assessment**1. **Choose the correct options:**

- (i) Charles spent six weeks in an psychiatric hospital in
- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1795 | (b) 1790 |
| (c) 1798 | (d) 1790 |
- (ii) *Essays of Elia*, a collection of Charles Lamb’s essays was published in
- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1825 | (b) 1824 |
| (c) 1823 | (d) 1829 |

(iii) Lamb's beloved sister kept in a private mad house in Islington called

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| (a) Prison       | (b) Mad House  |
| (c) Fisher House | (d) Safe House |

(iv) Grandmother Mrs. Field was tall and upright but later she bowed down by a disease called

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| (a) Tuberculosis | (b) Fever         |
| (c) Cancer       | (d) None of these |

Notes

### 3.4 Summary

- The children of James Elia, John and Alice, asked him to tell them about his grandmother- their great grandmother- Mrs. Field who used to live in a great mansion in Norfolk. The house belonged to a rich nobleman who lived in another new house. Grandmother Field was the keeper of the house and she looked after the house with great care as though it was her own. The tragic incident of the two children and their cruel uncle had taken place in the house. The children had come to know the story from the ballad of 'The Children in the wood'. The story was carved in wood upon the chimney piece. But a foolish rich person later pulled down the wooden chimney and put a chimney of marble. The new chimney piece had no story on it. Alice was very unhappy that the rich man had pulled down the chimney piece with the story. She looked upbraiding and her anger was like her mother's.
- When the house came to decay later, after the death of Mrs. Field the nobleman carried away the ornaments of the house and used them in his new house. The ornaments of the old house looked very awkward in the new house, just like the beautiful tombs of Westminster Abbey would look awkward if placed in someone's drawing room. Things looked beautiful only if they are in harmony with the surroundings. John enjoyed the comparison and smiled as if he also felt it would be very awkward indeed. Grandmother Field was a very good lady. She was also very religious for she was well acquainted with 'The Book of Psalms' in 'The Old Testament' and a great portion of 'The New Testament' of 'The Bible'. Alice here spread her hands as if she was not interested in the praise of a quality of the grandmother that she herself did not have. Children find it difficult to learn lessons by heart.
- Grandmother Field did not fear the spirits of the two infants which haunted the house at night. So she slept alone. But Elia used to sleep with his maid as he was not so religious. John tried to look courageous but his eyes expanded in fear. When the grandmother died many people in the neighbourhood including the gentry or the aristocrats attended her funeral. She was also a good dancer when she was young. Here, Alice moved her feet unconsciously as she too was interested in dancing. Grandmother Field was tall and upright but later she was bowed down by a disease called cancer. She was good to her grand children. Elia in childhood used to spend his holiday there. He used to gaze upon the bust of the twelve Caesars or roam about in the mansion or in the garden. In the garden, there were fruits like nectarines, peaches, oranges and others. Elia never plucked them but rather enjoyed looking at them. Here John deposited a bunch of grapes upon the plate again. He was showing that he too was not tempted by fruits.
- His farce, Mr H, was performed at Drury Lane in 1807.
- Fortuitously, Lamb's first publication was in 1796.
- His collected essays, under the title Essays of Elia, were published in 1823.

**Notes**

- The most famous of these is called “The Londoner” in which Lamb famously derides the contemporary fascination with nature and the countryside.

### **3.5 Keywords**

- Portrayed* : Depict (someone or something) in a work of art or literature.
- Friskings* : It is a search of a person’s outer clothing wherein a person runs his or hands along the outer garments to detect any concealed weapons.
- Melancholy looking* : Sad or depressed.

### **3.6 Review Questions**

1. Discuss Charles Lamb as an essayist.
2. Why is the essay entitled as ‘Dream Children’.
3. Discuss the role of Grandmother Field. How does Lamb present her before his Dream Children?
4. What type of the essay is Dream Children? Discuss.

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (i) (a) (ii) (c) (iii) (c) (iv) (c)

### **3.7 Further Readings**



- Books* Life of Charles Lamb, E.V. Lucas, G.P. Putman and Sons, London, 1905.  
Young Charles Lamb, by Winifred Courtney, New York University Press, 1982.  
Essays by Charles Lamb.



*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 4: Charles Lamb-Dream Children : A Reverie-A Critical Analysis

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the major works of Charles Lamb;
- Explain Lamb's *Dream Children : A Reverie*.

### Introduction

A well-known literary figure in nineteenth-century England, Lamb is chiefly remembered for his "Elia" essays, works celebrated for their witty and ironic treatment of everyday subjects. Through the persona of "Elia," Lamb developed a highly personal narrative technique to achieve what many critics regard as the epitome of the familiar essay style. Extremely popular in Lamb's day, the "Elia" essays first appeared in the *London Magazine* between 1820 and 1825, but were later collected into two volumes. These nostalgic works have appealed to readers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly because of their gradual revelation of Lamb's literary alter ego and his humorous idiosyncrasies. Lamb's other writings include criticism of William Shakespeare's dramas and the virtual rediscovery of a number of neglected Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights in the early nineteenth century. A dramatist and a skilled poet, Lamb was also a noted children's author, frequently in collaboration with his sister, Mary. Lamb's essays are thought to demonstrate a characteristically Romantic imagination akin to that of the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, Lamb's contemporaries and friends. Overall, Lamb is highly regarded as an essayist, an original and perceptive critic, and a noteworthy correspondent with the renowned literati of early nineteenth-century England.

## 4.1 Charles Lamb's Major Works

Although he began his literary career as a sonneteer, Lamb quickly discovered that his talent and inclination lay in prose, not verse. His first fictional work, a short novel entitled *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*, displays the influence of eighteenth-century sentimental writers Henry Mackenzie and Laurence Sterne. Lamb's next literary composition, *John Woodvil* (1802), set shortly after England's monarchical Restoration in 1660, owes a debt to Elizabethan tragedy and features a commentary on the politics of Lamb's day via historical analogy. Lamb's collaborative works with his sister, Mary, all fall into the category of juvenile literature and include *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1807), a collection of children's stories and poems, *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), simplified renderings in prose of William Shakespeare's most famous plays, and *Poetry for Children* (1809). Lamb also adapted Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* for younger readers in *The Adventures of Ulysses* (1808). Among Lamb's critical writings, his anthology *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, Who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare* includes selections from the plays of such Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists as Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, George Chapman, and Thomas Middleton. Since many of these works were previously unobtainable to early nineteenth-century readers, Lamb's compilation was an important reference source and is supplemented with explanatory notes now considered among Lamb's most significant critical work. In a related essay, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Presentation," Lamb argued that the best qualities of Shakespeare's drama can be fully appreciated only through reading: according to Lamb, stage performances often diminish the play's meanings, and individual performers often misinterpret Shakespeare's intended characterizations. Lamb's most prominent works were his last: the collections *Elia: Essays Which Have Appeared under That Signature in the London Magazine* and *The Last Essays of Elia* were published in 1823 and 1833, respectively. Featuring sketches in the familiar essay form—a style popularized by Michel de Montaigne, Robert Burton, and Sir Thomas Browne—the "Elia" essays are characterized by Lamb's personal tone, narrative ease, and wealth of literary allusions. Never didactic, the essays treat ordinary subjects in a nostalgic, fanciful way by combining humour, pathos, and a sophisticated irony ranging from gentle to scathing. Among the essays, "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago" features a schoolboy reminiscence of Coleridge, while "Confessions of a Drunkard" treats with ambivalence a theme that punctuated Lamb's own life. Counted among his most significant writings, Lamb's discerning and lively correspondence is collected in *The Letters of Charles Lamb* (1935).

## 4.2 Critical Analysis

This essay is about a dream. In this essay all characters are real except the children Alice and John. From the title we can guess that it's a dream and reverie, i.e., a day dream. Alice and John are children of James Elia (Charles Lamb). They ask their father, James Elia, to tell them about their grandmother. Grandmother's name is Field who has been acquainted to us by Lamb as a perfect woman with great qualities. Incidents are real from the life of Lamb. There is a story related to the house where grandmother Mrs Field was a keeper. It was about the murder of children by their cruel uncle. Alice and John came to know this story through a carved writing on a tree which was later brought down by a rich man. After the death of grandmother, house owner took away her belongings and placed them in his new house where they looked awkward. When grandmother was alive she used to sleep alone but Elia was afraid of the souls of infants murdered by uncle as it was thought that house was haunted by the spirits of those children. Elia had a brother John full of enthusiasm and zeal, who was loved by everyone specially by their grandmother. on the other hand Elia's childhood was full of isolation and he remained stagnant throughout his life. His mind was working fast but

bodily or physically he was totally off and lazy. He was lame and helped by John in every possible way who used to carry him in his back. Unfortunately, John also became lame but Elia never helped him and after his death he realized missing him. At the end of the essay, Alice and John are crying after hearing all this. Elia is looking his wife, whose name also Alia, in Alice's face. The children start to become faint and say to Elia or Lamb that we are not your real children and Alice is not your wife and our mother. Lamb wakes up and finds himself in a wooden chair and James Elia was vanished. The whole story is based on life of Lamb, he was never able to get married and childless died. He is also regretting and remembering moments like, about his brother, about grandmother, his childhood etc. So, whole of essay is full of melancholy and sad tone of Lamb's life. (One should better study about Lamb's short biography in order to understand his essays).

#### A Stylistic Analysis on Lamb's *Dream Children*

Charles Lamb was a famous English prose-writer and the best representative of the new form of English literature early in the nineteenth century. He did not adhere to the old rules and classic models but made the informal essay a pliable vehicle for expressing the writer's own personality, thus bringing into English literature the personal or familiar essay.

The style of Lamb is gentle, old-fashioned and irresistibly attractive, for which I can think of no better illustration than *Dream Children: A Reverie*. From the stylistic analysis of this essay we can find Lamb's characteristic way of expression.

*Dream Children* records the pathetic joys in the author's unfortunate domestic life. We can see in this essay, primarily, a supreme expression of the increasing loneliness of his life. He constructed all that preliminary tableau of paternal pleasure in order to bring home to us in the most poignant way his feeling of the solitude of his existence, his sense of all that he had missed and lost in the world. The key to the essay is one of profound sadness. But he makes his sadness beautiful; or, rather, he shows the beauty that resides in sadness. There are remarkable writing techniques to achieve such an effect.

### 4.3 Lexical Features

#### Old-fashioned but Elegant Diction

Lamb prefers to use archaic words in order to reach a certain distance between the author's real life and his whimsies, such as:

1. And how in her youth she was *esteemed* the best dancer (*esteemed* here means *admired, respected*).
2. Here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it *desisted* here means *stopped doing*.
3. And how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to *pluck* them (*pluck*, also a poetic word, here means *pick*).
4. He had *meditated* dividing with her, and both seemed willing to *relinquish* them for the present as irrelevant (*meditated* here means *thought*, and *relinquish* means *give up*).

#### Repetition of the Word *here*

While regarding for beautiful things and fine actions, Lamb does not forget to show the readers pictures of the children—real children until the moment when they fade away. He repeats the word *here* altogether eight times, to portray the children's response. For example:

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1. *Here* Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks.
2. *Here* John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish indeed."

With this repeating word, we can see these children almost as clearly and as tenderly as Lamb saw them. If we take the essay's main purpose into account, we will find the more real they seem, the more touching is the revelation of the fact that they do not exist, and never have existed.

#### 4.4 Sentence Features

##### **Loose Structure and Post-Modification**

Generally speaking, the tone of this essay is relaxed and comfortable, which can be attributed to Lamb's use of loose structure and post-modification. Let's study the sentence below:

1. Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw.
2. If applied to daily communication, the former part of this sentence seems somewhat prolix. However, here it gives us a sense of comfort and enjoyment, for in the essay it causes our sympathy with the author of the fondness of innocent children. Therefore, we do not feel weary.

##### **Cohesion**

Sentences in *Dream Children* are long, sometimes containing more than eighty words in one. The author makes them cohesive with the help of coordination, conjunctions, as well as some adverbs. For instance:

1. *Then* I went on to say, *how* religious and *how* good their great-grandmother Field was, *how* beloved and respected by everybody (Adverb *then* and the coordination *how* *how* *how* here function as cohesive devices.)
2. But still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, *and* kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, *and* was nearly pulled down, *and* all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, *and* looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, *and* stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. (Conjunction *and* here functions as a cohesive device.)

#### 4.5 On Humour and Pathos as Used by Charles Lamb

"Some things are of that nature as to make One's fancy chuckle while his heart doth ache"  
Wrote Bunyan.

The nature of things mostly appeared to Charles Lamb in this way. Lamb does not frolic out of lightness of heart, but to escape from gloom that might otherwise crush. He laughed to save himself from weeping. In fact, Lamb's personal life was of disappointments and frustrations. But instead of complaining, he looked at the tragedies of life, its miseries and worries as a humorist. Thus his essays become an admixture of humour and pathos. Examples of his keen sense of humour and pathetic touches are scattered in all of his essays. Let's focus our discussion on *Dream Children: A Reverie*.

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In Lamb's writing wit, humour and fun are interwoven and it is humour which is most notable for its extreme sensitiveness to the true proportion of things. Lamb often brings out the two sides of a fact and causes laughter at our own previous misconceptions. Therefore it borders on the painful realization. Thus his humour is very nearly allied to pathos. They are different facts of the same gem.

In his essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* Lamb talks of personal sorrows and joys. He gives expressions to his unfulfilled longings and desires. He readily enters into the world of fantasy and pops up stories in front of his dream children. He relates his childhood days, of Mrs. Field, his grandmother and John Lamb, his brother. He describes how much fun he had at the great house and orchard in Norfolk. Of his relations he gives us full and living pictures – his brother John is James Elia of *My Relations*, but here is John L-, so handsome and spirited youth, and a 'king'. John was brave, handsome and won admiration from everybody. Charles' grandmother Mrs. Field is the other living picture. She was a good natured and religious-minded lady of respectable personality. Narrator's sweet heart Alice Winterton is the other shadowed reality. The Dream Children, Alice and John are mere bubbles of fancy. Thus Lamb's nostalgic memory transports us back to those good old days of great grandmother Field. But even in those romantic nostalgia the hard realities of life does not miss our eyes. Death, separation and suffering inject us deep-rooted pathos in our heart. Whereas Mrs. Field died of cancer, John Lamb died in early age. Ann Simmons has been a tale of unrequited love story of Charles Lamb. Notably the children are millions of ages distant of oblivion and Charles is not a married man but a bachelor having a reverie.

In his actual life Lamb courted Ann Simmons but could not marry her, he wanted to have children but could not have any. Thus he strikes a very pathetic note towards the end of his essay when he puts the following word into the mouths of his imaginary children, "we are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all ... We are nothing, less than nothing, dreams. We are only what might have been". Alice is here no other girl but Ann Simmons, the girl Lamb wanted to marry, but failed to marry her. In fact, the subtitle of the essay – 'A Reverie' which literally means a daydream or a fantasy – prepares us for the pathos of the return to reality although the essay begins on a deceptively realistic note.

Although *Dream Children* begins on a merry note, the dark side of life soon forces itself upon Lamb's attention and the comic attitude gives way to melancholy at the end of the essay. Throughout the essay Lamb presents his children in such a way that we never guess that they are merely figments of his imagination – their movements, their reactions, their expressions are all realistic. It is only at the end of the essay that we realize that the entire episode with his children is a daydream. We are awakening by a painful realization of the facts.

Lamb's humour was no surface play, but the flower plucked from the nettle of peril and awe. In fact, Lamb's humour and pathos take different shapes in different essays. Sometimes it is due to his own unfulfilled desires, sometimes it is due to the ill-fortunes of his relatives and friends and on some other occasions it is due to his frustration in love etc. If his *Poor Relations* begin humorously of a male and female poor relation, he later gives us a few pathetic examples of poor relations that had to suffer on account of poverty. Again in his *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* Lamb sways between humour and pathos while describing the chimney sweepers. Similarly the essay *Dream Children* is a beautiful projection of Lamb's feelings and desire to have a wife and children of his own. It is humorous that in his dream he is married and has two children of his own while he had a disheartening frustration in love. Thus Lamb has painted both the lights and shades of life in full circle. His is the criticism of life in pathos and humours.

## 4.6 Article Features

### **Narration Enlivened by Depiction of the Children**

As is illustrated in sentences (5) and (6), the author's narration of the great-grandmother and his brother is enlivened by a certain depiction concerning the children. Incidentally, while preparing his ultimate solemn effect, Lamb has inspired us with a new, intensified vision of the wistful beauty of children—their imitativeness, their facile and generous emotions, their anxiety to be correct, their ingenuous haste to escape from grief into joy. This vision gives us an impression that they seem real, thus makes the revelation in the end touching and pathetic.

### **Unexpected Ending**

*Dream Children* begins quite simply, in a calm, narrative manner, representing Lamb as sitting by his fireside on a winter night telling stories to his own dear children, and delighting in their society, until he suddenly comes to his old, solitary, bachelor self, and finds that they were but dream-children. In the end of the essay, we read:

That I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech; "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing, less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name."

Reflecting upon the essay, we will surely be obsessed by the beauty of old houses and gardens and aged virtuous characters, the beauty of children, the beauty of companionships, the softening beauty of dreams in an arm-chair—all these are brought together and mingled with the grief and regret which were the origin of the mood.

### **Rhetorical Devices**

Lamb introduces some rhetorical devices to make his essay vivid and profound, such as:

And how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were *forbidden fruit*, unless now and then (metaphor)

Till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that *grateful* warmth (empathy)

The nature of things mostly appeared to Charles Lamb in this way. Lamb did not frolic out of lightness of heart, but to escape from gloom that might otherwise crush. He laughed to save himself from weeping. In fact, Lamb's personal life was of disappointments and frustrations. But instead of complaining, he looked at the tragedies of life, its miseries and worries as a humorist. Thus his essays become an admixture of humour and pathos. Examples of his keen sense of humour and pathetic touches are scattered in all of his essays. Let's focus our discussion on *Dream Children: A Reverie*.

### **Characters**

The young couple in the ancient Dutch farming village (in New England) who are the major living characters in "Dream Children" are the McNairs. The outward placidity that the pleasant and personable Mrs. McNair displays in her daily goings about among the villagers gives the

impression that nothing bad or disturbing has taken place in her life. Yet the reckless manner in which she rides her stallion through the fields causes wonderment among some of the locals, such as Mrs. DePuy and her husband, who own the old Patroon farm near the McNairs' land.

### Dream Children: Themes

Expressed as a directive, a major theme of this story is "Measure a person by his or her sense of loss." The young wife whose infant was stillborn is utterly transformed by the tragedy, going off on a new life course which is largely regulated by her ongoing need to penetrate by whatever means the unbreachable time-space wall of human existence and, in defiance of all logic, reason, and conventional wisdom, to be reunited with her lost baby son. Her husband, clearly not needing replacement therapy comparable with hers, reconstructs his life in the most convenient and thoughtful fashion...

Godwin's "Dream Children" examines themes of marriage, self-definition, and loss.

1. Taking into account its subject matter and Godwin's handling of the narrative structure, were you particularly affected emotionally by "Dream Children"? If so, explain.
2. Was the ending of the story, with its rhetorical question about Mrs. McNair's happiness, effective in "wrapping up" the story of her life? Comment either way, or both ways.
3. What in your opinion is the purpose of all the italicized passages throughout the story? Who is saying or thinking those things? How do...

### Self Assessment

#### 1. Choose the correct options:

- (i) The Adventures of Ulysses was published in
 

(a) 1808	(b) 1809
(c) 1810	(d) 1812
- (ii) The last essays of Elia were published in
 

(a) 1823 and 1833	(b) 1820 and 1830
(c) 1815 and 1820	(d) 1813 and 1823
- (iii) 'Elia' essays first appeared in the
 

(a) Dream Children	(b) London Magazine
(c) Children Stories	(d) None of these
- (iv) The style of Lamb is
 

(a) Gentle	(b) Old-fashioned
(c) both (a) and (b)	(d) None of these

### 4.7 Summary

- In Lamb's writing wit, humour and fun are interwoven and it is humour which is most notable for its extreme sensitiveness to the true proportion of things. Lamb often brings out the two sides of a fact and causes laughter at our own previous misconceptions. Therefore it borders on the painful realization. Thus his humour is very nearly allied to pathos. They are different facts of the same gem.

Notes

- In his essay *Dream Children: A Reverie* Lamb talks of personal sorrows and joys. He gives expressions to his unfulfilled longings and desires. He readily enters into the world of fantasy and pops up stories in front of his dream children. He relates his childhood days, of Mrs. Field, his grandmother and John Lamb, his brother. He describes how fun he had at the great house and orchard in Norfolk. Of his relations he gives us full and living pictures—his brother John is James Elia of *My Relations*, but here is John L-, so handsome and spirited youth, and a 'king'. John was brave, handsome and won admiration from everybody Charles' grandmother Mrs. Field is the other living picture. She was a good natured and religious-minded lady of respectable personality. Narrator's sweet heart Alice Winterton is the other shadowed reality. The *Dream Children*, Alice and John are mere bubbles of fancy. Thus Lamb's nostalgic memory transports us back to those good old days of great grandmother Field. But even in those romantic nostalgia the hard realities of life does not miss our eyes. Death, separation and suffering inject us deep-rooted pathos in our heart. Whereas Mrs. Field died of cancer, John Lamb died in early age. Ann Simmons has been a tale of unrequited love story of Charles Lamb. Notably the children are millions of ages distant of oblivion and Charles is not a married man but a bachelor having a reverie.
  - In his actual life Lamb courted Ann Simmons but could not marry her, he wanted to have children but could not have any. Thus he strikes a very pathetic note towards the end of his essay when he puts the following word into the mouths of his imaginary children, "we are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all ... We are nothing, less than nothing, dreams. We are only what might have been". Alice is here no other than Ann Simmons the girl Lamb wanted to marry, but failed to marry her. In fact, the subtitle of the essay—'A Reverie' which literally means a daydream or a fantasy—prepares us for the pathos of the return to reality although the essay begins on a deceptively realistic note.
  - Although *Dream Children* begins on a merry note, the dark side of life soon forces itself upon Lamb's attention and the comic attitude gives way to melancholy at the end of the essay. Throughout the essay Lamb presents his children in such a way that we never guess that they are merely figments of his imagination – their movements, their reactions, their expressions are all realistic. It is only at the end of the essay that we realize that the entire episode with his children is a daydream. We are awakening by a painful realization of the facts.
  - Lamb's humour was no surface play, but the flower plucked from the nettle of peril and awe. In fact, Lamb's humour and pathos take different shapes in different essays. Sometimes it is due to his own unfulfilled desires, sometimes it is due to the ill-fortunes of his relatives and friends and on some other occasions it is due to his frustration in love etc. If his *Poor Relations* begin humorously of a male and female poor relation, he later gives us a few pathetic examples of poor relations that had to suffer on account of poverty. Again in his *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* Lamb sways between humour and pathos while describing the chimney sweepers. Similarly the essay *Dream Children* is a beautiful projection of Lamb's feelings and desire to have a wife and children of his own. It is humorous that in his dream he is married and has two children of his own while he had a disheartening frustration in love. Thus Lamb has painted both the lights and shades of life in full circle. His is the criticism of life in pathos and humours.
1. Charles Lamb entitled the essay "Dream Children" because he never married and naturally never became the father of any children. The children he speaks of in the essay were actually the creations of his imagination or fancy.

2. Lamb had a sister, Mary Lamb, who did not marry since she had attacks of insanity. She has been referred to here as “faithful Bridget” because she never married and was Lamb’s only companion in his life. At the sudden breakdown of his reverie, he finds her seated by his side.
  3. Dream Children is a personal essay. Lamb presents the characters and incidents from his own life—the sketches of his grandmother Mrs. Field, his brother—John Lamb, his sister—Mary Lamb, his tragic love-affairs with Ann Simmons. But Lamb always plays with facts and fictions and transforms the real into the literary.
- Through the stylistic approach to *Dream Children*, we can see that Charles Lamb is a romanticist, seeking a free expression of his own personality and weaving romance into daily life. Without a trace of vanity or self-assertion, Lamb begins with himself, with some purely personal mood or experience, and from this he leads the reader to see life and literature as he saw it. It is this wonderful combination of personal and universal interests, together with Lamb’s rare old style, which make the essay remarkable.
  - *The Last Essays of Elia* were published in 1823 and 1833, respectively.
  - Lamb’s discerning and lively correspondence is collected in *The Letters of Charles Lamb* (1935).
  - *Dream Children* records the pathetic joys in the author’s unfortunate domestic life.

#### 4.8 Keywords

*Portrayed* : Depict (someone or something) in a work of art or literature.

*Protean* : Readily taking on various shapes or forms variable, exhibiting considerable variety or diversity.

*Prismatic effect* : Relating to, resembling, or constituting a prism.

#### 4.9 Review Questions

1. Who was Alice in Dream Children by Charles Lamb?
2. What is the summary of Dream Children a reverie by Charles lamb?
3. What is the theme of Dream Children by Charles lamb?
4. Who was James Elia in Lamb’s ‘Dream Children’?

#### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (i) (a)                      (ii) (a)                      (iii) (b)                      (iv) (c)

#### 4.10 Further Readings



- Books**
1. Life of Charles Lamb, E.V. Lucas, G.P. Putman and Sons, London, 1905.
  2. Young Charles Lamb, by Winifred Courtney, New York University Press, 1982.
  3. Essays by Charles Lamb.



**Online links** [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

Notes

## Unit 5: The Spark Neglected Burns the House by Leo Tolstoy

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5.8 Further Readings

### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about Leo Tolstoy;
- Weigh and consider the story *The Spark Neglected Burns the House*.

### Introduction

In Tolstoy's time the phrase "popular literature" (*narodnaia literatura*, "literature for or of the common people") subsumed a variety of related products. It included, first, the literature of the people, especially the narrative forms of folklore: heroic songs, fairy tales, religious legends, and the like. Produced and orally perpetuated among the common people themselves, usually by quasi-professional performers, this category of popular literature assumed written or printed form only through the efforts of folklorists and other transcribers of its oral performance. Once such works became known it was not long before stylizations of them followed. These are clearly not "of the people" but imitate as closely as possible the spirit and forms of their models. Stylizations, particularly of the *skazka* (the Russian fairy tale, or wonder tale), are well represented in 19th-century Russian literature. Well-known examples are Pushkin's "Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish" ("Skazka o rybake i rybke"), VF Odoevsky's "Moroz Ivanovich," ST Aksakov's "The Little Crimson Flower" ("Alen'kii tsvetochek"), and PP Ershov's "The Little Humpbacked Horse" ("Konek-gorbunok"). Tolstoy wrote many works, in particular his score or so of "Stories for the People" (*narodnye rasskazy*) which may be assigned to this category, but, as will appear below, not exclusively to it.

The life and customs of the common people was the subject of a second category of popular literature, produced by and for the educated sectors of society. Motivated in part by the penetration into Russian intellectual life of German philosophy and particularly Herder's ideas about the unique genius of the nation (Russian *narod*), this sort of writing originated in

the late 1820s and early 1830s. It was promoted by the important Russian literary critic VG Belinsky and blossomed in the mid-1840s into the "Natural School," which produced such works as DV Grigorovich's *The Fisher Folk (Rybaki)* and the anthologies *The Attics of St. Petersburg* and *The Organ Grinders of St. Petersburg*. Following this precedent, literature about the people continued to be marked by the realistic style and a tone sympathetic to folk life. Famous early examples are certain of Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches (Zapiski okhotnika)* from the late 1840s. Literature about the people gained renewed support from the populist critics of the 1870s and 1880s, especially NK Mixailovsky, and continued to be a powerful movement in literature even well into the twentieth century. A main tenet of Socialist Realism was that same sympathetic and realistic approach to the lives of common folk for which Belinsky called in the 1840s. Tolstoy's story of the early 1860s, "Polikushka," is one example among many that he wrote in this category.

Tolstoy made his most distinct contribution, however, to the third category of popular literature: works created by writers from the educated classes for a popular audience. There were two main subdivisions of this "literature for the people." The more successful, purely commercial in character, had formed an identifiable part of Russian literary culture since the early 18th century when, because of the developing literary taste of educated society, there began to be an unmet demand for works to satisfy the relatively static taste of readers from the lower social classes. In the middle of the nineteenth century this type of literature remained what it had been at its beginnings. Song books, books on the interpretation of dreams, casual collections of folklore, and stories of romance and adventure comprised the main store of the commercial inventory. Chapbooks (*i.e.*, naive tales of romance and adventure) like "Bova Korolevich" and "Peter of the Golden Keys" together with picaresque stories such as those attributed to Matvei Komarov, "inhabitant of the city of Moscow," continued to fascinate the popular reader. Standard titles were printed over and over again, while around this core there gathered a fairly numerous crowd of hack writers who earned their bread by producing quantities of similar works, always mindful of the cardinal rule that one should never stray far from a successful formula. The works of such now-forgotten writers such as Evstigneev, Volgin, V. Suvorov, Kassirov, the brothers Pazukhin, Kuz'michev and many others provided the staple printed diet of the popular reader in Tolstoy's time.

The second, and lesser, category of literature for the people, more idealistic in its purposes, sought to enlighten or edify the masses rather than to profit by entertaining them. Its history was much shorter than that of its commercial counterpart. Its first notable success was the journal *Village Reading (Sel'skoe chtenie)*, published (1843-48) by VF Odoevsky (who dabbled also in folklore stylization) and AP Zablotsky-Desiatovsky. Conducted on a very high level, *Village Reading* contained contributions from such well-known writers as MN Zagoskin, AF Vel'tman, and VI Dal' (who also, under the pen name "The Cossack Lugansky," contributed very significantly, as a leading writer of the Natural School, to the development of literature about the common people). In the late 1850s and 1860s the efforts of AF Pogossky took his magazines *Soldier Talk (Soldatskaia beseda)*, *Peasant Talk (Narodnaia beseda)*, and *Leisure and Labor (Dosug i delo)* to success.

In the 1870s, interest in raising the quality of the literature available to the people led to the formation of enterprises devoted solely to this goal. The most representative of these was VN Marakuev's *Popular Library (Narodnaia biblioteka)* founded in 1872 and engaged mainly in the production of inexpensive editions of the classics of Russian and other national literatures. Most of the concerns established for such purposes failed because they lacked adequate means of distributing their products to the common folk, mostly rural, for whom they were intended. In 1884 Tolstoy and two collaborators, VG Chertkov and P. I. Biriukov (later Tolstoy's authorized biographer), founded *The Intermediary (Posrednik)*, a publishing house for works intended for

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the popular audience. They planned to employ the distribution methods of the commercial producers of literature for the people (a combination of regional distribution centres and networks of itinerant peddlers) in the service of the goals of the idealistic category. Their efforts succeeded to an extent previously unheard of in the realm of educative literature for the common people. Biriukov estimated that in the 1890s *The Intermediary* distributed some 3,500,000 copies of various works per year. This must be accounted one of Tolstoy's most significant contributions to popular literature.

Tolstoy's interest in literature for the people is well-attested. In February, 1884, he wrote to V. G. Chertkov that the literature for the people then being produced was neither good, nor even useful, and some of it was actually harmful. In an address to an audience at his Moscow home on 14 February 1884 he elaborated his views. He asserted that writers engaged in such work for profit rather than to satisfy the "true needs" of their readers. They did not provide their prospective readers with works of the same quality they would demand for themselves. Even if they wanted to do this, they could not, because their own literary tradition (that of Pushkin and Gogol') was defective. Tolstoy expressed these ideas with the rhetorical heat characteristic of him at that period:

"I see only three reasons [for the failure of contemporary writing for the popular audience]: one, that the satiated wish not to feed the hungry, but to deal with them in a way profitable to themselves; second, that the satiated do not want to give that which is their own food, but give only the leftovers, which even the dogs won't eat; third, that the satiated are not in fact as full as they imagine, but only inflated, and their own food is not that good."

Tolstoy stressed the need for artistry of an especially high order in works intended for the popular audience. He criticized contemporary authors for writing "for the most part in an untalented and stupid manner" and for their "naive persuasion" that important matters of spirit and life "could be communicated by the first words and images which come to hand" (25:524). He was especially hard on what he saw as the unwarranted condescension of writers and publishers for their audience. He had long believed and frequently said that the standard Russian literary language was distinctly inferior to that of the common people themselves. (His best known assertion of this belief had been in an article which he had published in his own pedagogical journal, *Yasnaya Polyana*, in 1863. To the question posed by the title of the article, "Who Should Learn to Write from Whom: The Peasant Children from Us or We from the Peasant Children?" Tolstoy had answered: the children. In his speech to his Moscow audience, he exempted none of the contemporary writers of literature for the people from the criticism that their works were artistic failures, but he reserved his strongest words for writers with a commercial motive. Speaking on behalf of and from the viewpoint of the popular reader, Tolstoy said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, writers of our native land, cast into our mouths mental sustenance which is worthy both of yourselves and of us; write for us, who thirst for the living literary word; save us from all of these Eruslan Lazareviches, Milord Georges [characters from popular chapbooks], and other such food from the bazaar."

As I have suggested, Tolstoy made notable contributions to each of the three major categories of popular literature. Many works throughout his long career contain minor and major characters drawn from among the people. In this he was hardly remarkable; writing "about the people" was one of the hallmarks of developing Russian realism from its inception in the 1840s. For this reason, Tolstoy's contribution to literature about the people will not be considered further in this discussion. Much more striking was his contribution, mostly but not entirely after 1880, to the literature of folklore stylization and to writing specifically for the popular audience. Here he found a way of combining the forms associated with the literature of the people themselves with the intentions characteristic of those writing for the popular audience. To

these achievements, notably his many “stories for the people” and his two popular dramas, we now turn our attention.

In February, 1886, already hard at work on his own stories for the popular audience, Tolstoy wrote a letter to FF Tishchenko, a would-be author for the people, in which he outlined his requirements for such writing. It should be altruistic rather than produced for profit; it should communicate feelings; and it should be written expressly for the popular audience, making no concession to the literary expectations of the educated upper classes. Tolstoy demanded a simplification of language and style, specifically in comparison with the literary tradition of the recent past. He advised the avoidance of both lexical and syntactic elements foreign to Russian as spoken by common people. The exposition should be logical, straightforward, and economical with an eye to creating the strongest possible impression within the smallest possible compass. Finally, he believed that the most suitable subject matter of works for the common people was that based upon the ethical teachings of Christ.

Tolstoy’s score of stories and two plays for the popular audience amply illustrate these principles. Taken together they represent a combination, unique as far as I know, of the use and adaptation of familiar popular forms as a stylistic foundation, the overtly didactic presentation of ethically significant thematic material, and the artistic skill and power of a great literary master. In his effort to present his version of the Christian teaching in works for the common people Tolstoy re-invented the mediaeval ecclesiastical genre of the *exemplum*, a story told, usually as part of a homily or sermon, to illustrate a particular point of doctrine. Many of the works which he so created are exemplary also in the sense of illustrating what gems may be produced by the close study, adaptation, and application of popular and collective forms to an individual author’s specific artistic purposes.

## **5.1 The Stories for the People**

Written to exemplify certain ethical truths, the stories for the people resemble the other late works of Tolstoy, which are also, for the most part, overtly didactic. To the extent that he consciously, from an early date, sought to portray the “truth,” as he understood it, in his fiction, even his early works reflect his didactic proclivities. Thus, it is not the themes or the motives of Tolstoy which ultimately set the stories for the people apart from the rest of his work, but their style, which was developed specifically and consciously as an apt and accessible medium for conveying moral concepts to the popular audience.

Critics still argue over exactly which works should be classified as stories for the people, but certainly a number of stories written in the 1880s belong to the genre. Four of the more complete editions of Tolstoy’s collected works contain a volume or clearly marked section of a volume designated *Stories for the People* (*Narodnye rasskazy*). A total of some two dozen stories appeared in one or more of these editions, but only sixteen of them were included in every one. Of these the most celebrated are “What Men Live By”, “Two Old Men”, “Where Love Is, There Is God Also”, “How Much Land Does a Man Need”, “The Tale of Ivan the Fool”, and “The Three Hermits”. In 1887 Tolstoy consented to the publication by *The Intermediary* of a volume to be titled *Stories for the People*. Forbidden by the censorship, the book never appeared, but its proposed contents included fifteen of the sixteen stories. To this number may doubtless be added stories written earlier, such as “God Sees the Truth, But Waits”, and later, such as “Alesha Gorshok,” which share the same stylistic and thematic profile.

All of the stories are told by a third person narrator. Most commonly the narrator’s voice closely resembles that of the popular characters, and his outlook is sympathetic to them. The degree of his sympathy may vary, however. Often, as in “What Men Live By,” “Two Old Men,” and “The Tale of Ivan the Fool,” the narrator identifies closely with the characters.

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Occasionally the narrator's stance is more objective and neutral, as in "Two Brothers and the Gold." In no case is the voice of the narrator sarcastic, as it can often be in Tolstoy's depiction of upper class society.

The setting of the stories may be popular and Russian, or legendary or exotic. Major characters are drawn from among the common people, most frequently the peasants. Characters from other backgrounds appear in major and sympathetic roles only when they are distanced in some way. For example, "A Grain As Big As a Hen's Egg," in which a king has a major role, takes place in the distant past. In "Il'ias," featuring a rich landowner, the setting, vaguely middle-eastern, is far away. Supernatural characters, both angels and demons (including the Devil himself), appear in all but three of the stories. By contrast. In other, non-popular, late works by Tolstoy popular characters play only supporting or comparative roles, and the supernatural is almost never introduced. When it is, as in *The Fruits of Enlightenment* (*Plody prosveshcheniia*, a play about the attempts of a group of occultists to contact the spirits of the dead), it is ridiculed.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the stories for the people is their language. The syntactic foundation of all the stories is the simple sentence, pruned of all but essential elements and frequently elliptical. Longer sentences tend to be constructed of a string of principal clauses rather than subordinate clauses grouped around a main one. Constructions have either a Biblical or a popular colouring, or both. In most of the stories, the narrative is markedly popular. The popular flavour is achieved by the consistent inversion of literary word order in the sentence (e.g., "Ne mog eshche ia poniat'..." ["not able still was I to understand..."] instead of "ia eshche ne mog poniat'..." ["I still was not able to understand..."]) and the use of popular lexical material. This material is often proverbial and sometimes from folklore, for example, the traditional opening phrase of the skazka, "zhil-by1" (literally, "there lived-there was") which appears in many of these stories. On the other hand Tolstoy often, especially in the moralizing conclusions of the stories, introduced a tone of solemnity reminiscent of Biblical language. The Bible is actually quoted in nine of the stories, either in text or as epigraph. The influence of Biblical language affects nearly all of the stories. It is the clearest in the language of divine characters (the angels in "What Men Live By" and "Two Brothers and the Gold," the heavenly voice in "Where Love Is, There Is God Also") and generally whenever the narrative touches directly upon the underlying thematic sense of the work, as in the moralizing conclusion of "The Candle."

The stories for the people, with their absence of complex metaphorical language, maximally simplified syntax, syntactic inversion, peasant words and expressions, and the use of many devices and motifs from both folklore and Scripture, exemplify an innovative and coherent writing style. We may confidently agree with B. M. Eikhenbaum and S. P. Bychkovxv that they represent a remarkable stylistic departure from Tolstoy's earlier work. Tolstoy's use of language was studied, conscious, deliberate, and directed both at the creation of a popular tonal quality and at the avoidance of his former "literary" style, with its tendency to syntactic and lexical complexity, foreignisms, and lengthy periodicity.

All the stories for the people are more or less openly didactic and may even present a moral formally, as in "The Godson." Characters are most often developed through their actions and words. Occasionally the narrator characterizes his heroes directly, but usually he confines himself to brief physical descriptions. Very rarely, and nowhere at length, are the psychological processes of the characters described directly. This is another important distinction between the stories for the people and Tolstoy's other works, both early and late, where one continues to encounter the frequent use of devices such as interior monologue and stream of consciousness. The reason for this is surely to be found in Tolstoy's desire to remain true to the spirit of folklore in developing his popular style. Events usually occur in simple chronological order, but they also occur, according to folk conventions, in groups of three, as in "What Men Live

By," "Where Love Is, There Is God Also," "The Tale of Ivan the Fool," and several others. Plot in these stories does not take on the complex forms with which Tolstoy experimented in such non-popular late works as *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* and *Resurrection (Voskresenie)*, with their use of flashbacks and shifting points of view on the events described.

The "Stories for the People" are united thematically by the Christian teaching as Tolstoy had come to understand it in the late 1870s and 1880s. In his long essay *What I Believe (V chem moia vera, 1882)* he reduced Christianity to five moral imperatives, derived from the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. v-vii and parallels). Briefly stated, the five commandments are: (1) do not be angry; (2) do not lust; (3) do not swear—that is, do not, through an oath, surrender free moral choice to the will of others; (4) do not resist the evil doer with force; and (5) love all people alike. These commandments, their corollaries and the effects of disobeying them (or, more generally, the will of God which they represent) provide a complete thematic summary of the "Stories for the People."

The commandment to avoid anger is prominent in "Evil Allures, But Good Endures," "A Spark Neglected Burns the House," and "Little Girls Wiser Than Their Elders"; its corollary, forgiveness, is the theme of "The Repentant Sinner." The injunction against lust never appears in the stories for the people. We may surmise that Tolstoy discerned no need to preach this commandment among the people, and, judging by the frequency of the sexual theme in the non-popular late works (*Father Sergius (Otets Sergii)*, *The Kreutzer Sonata (Kreicerova sonata)*, *Resurrection*, and others), he regarded infractions of it as an essentially upper-class phenomenon. The injunction against oath-taking appears as a theme in "The Tale of Ivan the Fool" when the devil is unable to raise an army in Ivan's kingdom because the people refuse to promise allegiance. In "Two Old Men," Elisei, the morally superior of the two characters, attaches little importance to the vow he has sworn to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land when it conflicts with an obligation to assist others who are in need. The fourth commandment, not to resist evil with force, is the subject of "The Candle," "The Tale of Ivan the Fool," and "The Godson." The only positive commandment, to love all people alike, is at the heart of most of the best known stories for the people: "What Men Live By," "Two Old Men," "The Three Hermits," and "Where Love Is, There Is God Also."

The five remaining stories deal with the evil that comes from ignorance of or disobedience to the Christian teaching. Their theme is excess. In "How Much Land Does a Man Need," it takes the form of greed for more land than needed; in "The Imp and the Crust"—the misuse of a bumper crop of grain to produce strong drink; in "Il'ias—the contrast between the hero's current contentedness with poverty and his former anxiety with wealth. "Two Brothers and the Gold" and "A Grain As Big As a Hen's Egg" condemn the use of money as a replacement for active human concern.

The stylistic unity of the stories for the people is the product of a number of linguistic and larger structural devices which they share. Proverbs, sayings, and other bits of popular wisdom were incorporated into the stories. As early as 1862, Tolstoy stated that he intended to write a series of brief stories, each of which was to be inspired by, and offer an explanation of, a striking popular saying (8:302). Often such sayings were used as the titles of stories, for example. "Gde liubov', tam i Bog" ("Where Love Is, There Is God Also"), "Bog pravdu vidit, da ne skoro skazhet" ("God Sees the Truth, But Waits"), "Vrazh'e lepko, a Bozh'e krepko" ("Evil Allures, But Good Endures"), and "Upustish' ogon'—ne potushish'" ("A Spark Neglected Burns the House").

The majority of the stories rework existing popular narratives, such as those of the famous *Skazitel* ("teller of tales"), VP Shchegelenok, from whom Tolstoy obtained the subjects of "What Men Live By" and "Two Old Men." Another familiar model used by Tolstoy was the *lubok* or illustrated text. Not itself a form of folklore, it was well-known to the popular audience.

**Notes**

The word *lubok* (from *lub*, the inner bark of the lime tree, or from *lubochnaia koroba*, the phrase designating the box used by peddlers to transport their goods) was known from the early 17th century. Essentially, the *lubok* consisted of a picture (or a series of pictures) accompanied by a printed text which might be explanatory or narrative as the case required. Many of the shorter stories for the people (e.g., "Little Girls Wiser Than Their Elders," "Evil Allures, But Good Endures," and "Il'ias") were modelled on the *lubok* and printed, often as separate sheets, with an accompanying picture. Finally, Tolstoy made use of folklore anthologies as sources for the stories. "The Godson," "The Repentant Sinner," "The Workman Emel'ian and the Empty Drum," "The Three Hermits" and "The Imp and the Crust" are all closely modelled on religious legends or fairy tales found recorded in the collections made by A. N. Afanas'ev and other folklorists.

The stories contain several elements common to folk narratives and not found in Tolstoy's usual literary style. As previously mentioned, angels and demons frequently appear as do events and characters in groups of three, the latter in distinct contrast to Tolstoy's preference in his "literary" style for comparison and contrast based upon binary groupings. There is evidence in the form of notebooks kept by Tolstoy, especially in the late 1870s, of his deliberate attempt to gather striking turns of phrase from common folk. From time to time he would conceal himself behind bushes growing by the entrance to the drive leading to the manor house at Yasnaya Polyana (his country estate). He would eavesdrop upon the conversation of those passing by along the road on foot. When he would overhear some particularly choice or juicy example of popular speech he would discreetly emerge from his hiding place, catch up with the travelers, and engage them in further conversation as they walked along together. Having thus gathered some gems of the popular lexicon or syntax he would return to his ambush and make careful notes of the discoveries he had made, not a few of which later found their way into his stories.

Finally, Tolstoy quoted freely from scripture and adopted some mannerisms typical of the Bible and other religious literature. This element is most frequently found in the epigraph (where it has a significance not unlike that of the proverbs used as titles) or at the climax of the story or, where there is a moral, in the passage where it is explained. Assuming that to the popular, Orthodox reader Biblical language would be both familiar and authoritative, Tolstoy may have used it to add weight to the moral teaching of his stories.

It may be thought unlikely that works so overtly burdened with didactic purpose and directed at so specific an audience would have much chance of being artistically memorable. In the case of many of these stories, especially the very brief ones, this prediction proves all too accurate. Yet such stories as "God Sees the Truth, But Waits," "What Men Live By," "Two Old Men," "The Three Hermits," "Where Love Is, There Is God Also," and "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" possess high artistic value. They represent a masterful achievement in the creation—from heterogeneous, although related, elements—of a unified style which yet permits a modicum of flexibility and is singularly well adapted to its solemn moral purpose.

## **5.2 Popular Dramas**

After 1880 Tolstoy produced some half dozen dramatic works of varying length. He had made some rather tentative experiments in writing plays in his earlier career, primarily in the late 1850s and the first half of the 1860s. None of these early experiments were either published or produced during Tolstoy's lifetime. It was also the fate of much of Tolstoy's later dramatic writing to remain "in the drawer," as the Russian phrase has it. Both of the plays which he wrote for the popular theatre, however, were produced, although in one case not as its author had planned.

Tolstoy's creation of the "Stories for the People" and their publication by *The Intermediary* attracted the attention of persons interested in producing plays for the common people, and Tolstoy wrote two plays for them. The first, called "The First Distiller" ("Pervyi vinokur"), was an enlarged, dramatized version of "The Imp and the Crust." It follows very closely the plot and style of this story for the people, which concerns the attempts of the Devil to seduce a stolid, hard-working peasant away from his life of virtue. First staged in 1886 at an open-air theatre in the factory village of Aleksandrovskoe, near St. Petersburg, it was Tolstoy's only play "for the people" actually to be performed in such a venue. Its success frightened the censorship, and further popular performances of plays by Tolstoy were banned.

Of much larger significance is Tolstoy's second popular drama, *The Power of Darkness* (*Vlast' t'my*), also written in 1886. At the particular insistence of KP Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod and an intimate adviser of Tsar Alexander III, its production was forbidden in any theatre. It was first produced only a decade later, in 1895, by various theatres, including the Maly Theatre in Moscow and the Aleksandriinskii Theatre in St. Petersburg. In 1902 the play was one of the first great successes of Konstantin Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre.

*The Power of Darkness* is a curious amalgam of traditional (*i.e.*, literary) dramatic forms and devices and the style of language and speech which Tolstoy developed in writing the "Stories for the People." Organized in the manner of the well-made play of the neo-classical era, it is divided into five acts with an introductory exposition in Act I, the further development of characters and situation in Acts II and III, the catastrophe in Act IV, and the denouement in Act V. The neo-classical unity of place is carefully preserved (the entire action of the piece is set in the interior of the leading character's house) and the one incident of gross violence which the play contains, the murder of an illegitimate baby, takes place off stage.

The main theme of the play is expressed by its epigraph which, as so often in the "Stories for the People," takes the form of a folk saying: "When the claw is caught, the whole bird is lost" ("Kogotok uviaz, vsei ptichke propast"). The play's main character, a peasant named Nikita, commits a small sin by dallying with the wife of his aged master and is, by degrees, led into the commission of one further crime after another. The action of the play is centered upon the slow moral destruction of Nikita as he sinks gradually into a morass of evil, culminating, however, in his final repentance and redemption.

The main characters are all peasants. They and their lives are depicted realistically, more unsparingly, in fact, than in any of the "Stories for the People." The play's realism is reminiscent of two works of young Tolstoy ("A Landowner's Morning" and "Polikushka") which portray the darker side of peasant life, and anticipate the harsh realism of some of Anton Chekhov's stories of peasant life, in particular his "Peasants" ("Muzhiki"). At the same time, the peasant characters symbolically represent universal types and values. Thus, Matrena, the protagonist's mother, represents evil while his father, Akim, represents good. Nikita himself is cast between his two progenitors, played upon now by the power of evil, now by the power of good. Symbolically, the play becomes the representation of the struggle between good and evil for the soul of a human being.

In contrast to the very positive representation accorded to peasant characters in general in the "Stories for the People," *The Power of Darkness* is something of an anomaly among Tolstoy's writings for the popular audience. Not only is the power of evil much more palpably to be felt here than in the stories, but the overtly sexual themes presented in the play have no counterpart anywhere in the stories. Even so, the play was enthusiastically received by the popular audience. It remains the only dramatic work by Tolstoy to have received positive acknowledgement during the writer's lifetime and to have stood the test of time by becoming a part of the standard repertory of the Russian theatre.

**Notes**

The “Stories for the People” and Tolstoy’s two popular dramas have a unique place in the context of “popular literature.” Just as they represent a synthesis of various elements on the stylistic level, so too in the broader context they represent a synthesis of the various categories of popular literature. They are “of the people” in their language, their devices, and often in their sources. They are “about the people” in their emphasis on popular characters and settings and the patent tone of sympathy with the lot of the narod. And of course, they were “for the people,” written primarily for the improvement and appreciation of what Tolstoy was convinced was the most discriminating of artistic audiences.

In the last thirty years of his life Tolstoy’s activity was threefold. He was an artist, producing fictions in various genres and with various ends in view. He was also a religious thinker and publicist, developing and explaining a philosophical system which was mainly ethical in its emphasis. Finally, he was an aesthete, elaborating a theory of universally comprehensible art which, in effect, provided the theoretical framework within which the artist and the religious thinker could cooperate. His writings for the people represent the unique confluence of these three modes of activity: the moralism of the religious thinker was presented in a manner which both pleased the artist and satisfied the requirements of the aesthete.

### **5.3 Introduction to the Author**

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Russian author, essayist and philosopher wrote the epic novel *War and Peace* (1865-69), Man in connection with the general life of humanity appears subject to laws which determine that life. But the same man apart from that connection appears to be free. How should the past life of nations and of humanity be regarded—as the result of the free, or as the result of the constrained, activity of man? That is a question for history.

Anonymously narrated, the novel is set during the Napoleonic wars, the era which forms the backdrop of Tolstoy’s painstakingly detailed depiction of early 19th century Tsarist Russia under Alexander I: her archetypes and anti-heroes. Through his masterful development of characters Pierre, Andrew, Natasha, Nicholas, Mary and the rest, *War and Peace* examines the absurdity, hypocrisy, and shallowness of war and aristocratic society. It all comes to a climax during the Battle of Borodino. Initially Tolstoy’s friends including Ivan S. Turgenev and Gustave Flaubert decided that the novel’s ‘formlessness’ weakened the overall potential for its success, but they were soon proved wrong. Almost one hundred years after his death, in January of 2007, Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878) and *War and Peace* were placed on Time magazine’s ten greatest novels of all time, first and third place respectively.

#### **Childhood: Days of Idyll, Moscow and Kazan University**

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born on 28 August 1828 into a long line of Russian nobility. He was the fourth child of Countess Maria Volkonsky (who Tolstoy does not remember, as she died after giving birth to his sister Mariya in 1830) and Count Nicolay Ilyich Tolstoy (1797-1837) a Lieutenant Colonel who was awarded the order of St. Vladimir for his service. At the age of sixteen he had fathered a son with a servant girl, Leo’s half-brother Mishenka. When Count Tolstoy resigned from his last post with the Military Orphanage, a marriage was arranged between him and Maria Volkonsky. After her death the Count’s distant cousin Tatyana Aleksandrovna Yergolskaya ‘Aunt Tatyana’, who already lived with them helped him in running the household, raising the children and overseeing their tutoring. Leo’s paternal grandfather Count Ilya Andreyevich Tolstoy (d.1820) had been an overly generous and trusting man; by the time Leo was born the Tolstoy fortunes had dwindled and the newlyweds settled at the Volkonsky family estate ‘Yasnaya Polyana’ (meaning ‘Clear Glade’) located in Tula Region, Shchekino District of central Russia. Leo’s maternal great grandfather Prince Nikolas Sergeevich Volkonsky had established

it in the early 1800s; upon his death his daughter Countess Volkonsky inherited it. It is now preserved as a State Memorial and National Preserve.

From Leo's Introduction to biographer Paul Birukoff's *Leo Tolstoy: Childhood and Early Manhood* (1906) we gather the very clear and fond memories he has of his early years and his loved ones: Leo's father never humbled himself before any one, nor altered his brisk, merry, and often chaffing tone. Count Tolstoy was a gentle, easy going man. Quick to tell a joke, he was reluctant to mete out corporal punishment that was so common at the time to the hundreds of serfs on their estate. He disliked wolf-baiting and fox-hunting, preferring to ride in the fields and forests, or walking with his children and their pack of romping greyhounds. Leo recounts outings with his siblings, friends, and paternal grandmother Pelageya Nikolayevna Tolstoy (d.1838) to pick hazelnuts; she seemed a dreamy magical figure to him. Sometimes he spent the evening in her bedroom while their blind story-teller Lev Stepanovich narrated lengthy, enchanting tales.

Leo greatly admired his oldest brother Nikolay 'Koko' (1823-1860). In recollecting their childhood Leo revered him, along with his mother, as saintly in their modesty, humility, and unwillingness to condemn or judge others. His other siblings were Sergey (b.1826), Dmitriy (1827-1855) and Mariya (b.1830). The Tolstoy House was a bustling household, often with extended family members and friends visiting for dinner or staying for days at a time. The children and adults played Patience, the piano, put on plays, sang Russian and Gypsy folk songs and read stories and poetry aloud. A voracious reader, Leo would visit his father in his study as he read and smoked his pipe. Sometimes the Count would have young Leo recited memorised passages from Alexander Pushkin. The family home still contains the library of over twenty thousand books in over thirty languages. When not indoors, there was no shortage of outdoor activities for the children: tobogganing in winter, horseback riding, playing in the orchards, forests, formal gardens, greenhouses and bathing in the large pond which Leo loved to do all his life.

Days in the country however were to come to an end when, in 1836, the Tolstoys moved to Moscow so that the boys could attend school. The following summer Count Tolstoy died suddenly. He was buried at Tula. Leo had a hard time accepting this inevitability of life; the loss of his father was a profound experience to such a young boy and as he watched his beloved grandmother Pelageya (who died two years later) suffer through her grief, he had his first spiritual questionings. His father's sister, Countess Aleksandra Osten Saken 'Aunt Aline' became the children's guardian and Nikolay and Sergey stayed with her in Moscow while Leo and his sister Mariya and Dmitriy moved back to Yasnaya Polyana to live with Aunt Tatyana.

When Aunt Aline died in 1841, Leo, now aged thirteen travelled with his brothers to Kazan where their next guardians Aunt and Uncle Yushkof lived. Despite the pall of death, loss of innocence and upheavals in living arrangements, Leo started preparations for the entrance examinations to Kazan University, wanting to enter the faculty of Oriental languages. He studied Arabic, Turkish, Latin, German, English, and French, and geography, history, and religion. He also began in earnest studying the literary works of English, Russian and French authors including Charles Dickens, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, Mikhail Lermontov, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Laurence Sterne, Friedrich Schiller, and Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire.

### **Boyhood: Military Service and First Writings**

In 1844, at the age of sixteen and the end of what Tolstoy says was his childhood, and the beginning of his youth, he entered the University of Kazan to study Turco-Arabic literature. While he did not graduate beyond the second year (he would later attempt to study law) this period of his life also corresponded with his coming out into society. He and his brothers moved out of their uncle's home and secured their own rooms. No longer the provincial, there

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were balls and galas to attend and other such manly pursuits as drinking, gambling and visiting brothels. Tolstoy did not have much success as a student, but he would become a polyglot with at least some working knowledge of a dozen languages. He did not respond to the universities' conventional system of learning and left in 1847 without obtaining his degree.

Back at Yasnya Polyana and during the next few years Tolstoy agonised about what next to do with his life. He expressed his aspirations, confusion and disappointments in his diary and correspondence with his brothers and friends. He attempted to set the estates' affairs in order but again was caught up in the life of a young nobleman, travelling between the estate and Moscow and St. Petersburg. He was addicted to gambling, racking up huge debts and having to sell possessions to pay them off including parts of his estate. He would go on drinking binges, associating with various characters of ill-repute that his Aunt Tatyana repeatedly warned him about. To her and a few other confidantes he often confessed his remorse when sober and wrote in his diary; "I am living a completely brutish life...I have abandoned almost all my occupations and have greatly fallen in spirit. (ibid, Ch. VI)" He took to wearing peasant clothes including a style of blouse that would later be named after him, 'tolstovkas'. He again attempted university exams in the hope that he would obtain a position with the government, but also pondered the alternative, to serve in the army.

When his brother Nikolay, who was now an officer in the Caucasian army, came to visit Yasnya Polyana for a short while, Tolstoy seized the opportunity to change his life. In the spring of 1851 they left for the Caucasus region at the southern edge of Russia. The unglamorous nomadic life they led, travelling through or staying in Cossack and Caucasian villages, meeting the simple folk who populated them, exalting in the mountainous vistas, and meeting the hardy souls who traversed and defended these regions left their indelible mark on Tolstoy. Having long corresponded with his Aunts, he now turned his pen to writing fiction. The first novel of his autobiographical trilogy *Childhood* (1852) was published in the magazine *Sovremennik* which would serialise many more of his works. It was highly lauded and Tolstoy was encouraged to continue with *Boyhood* (1854) and *Youth* (1857), although, after his religious conversion he admitted that the series was insincere and a clumsy confusion of truth with fiction (ibid, Introduction).

In 1854, during the Crimean War Tolstoy transferred to Wallachia to fight against the French, British and Ottoman Empire to defend Sevastopol. The battle inspired *Sevastopol Sketches* written between 1855 and 1856, published in three installments in *The Contemporary* magazine. In 1855 he left the army, the same year he heard about his brother Dmitry's illness. He arrived at his bedside just before he succumbed to tuberculosis, the same disease to take his brother Nikolay's life on 20 September 1860. Again Tolstoy was in limbo, torn between his 'unrestrained passions' and setting forth a realistic plan for his life. He had tried unsuccessfully to educate the hundreds of muzhiks or peasants who tended his fields, founding a school for the children in the family estate's Kuzminsky House, but it proved to be frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful. He set off on travels throughout Western Europe. By this time *Childhood* had been translated to English and Tolstoy was a well-known author, enjoying a Counts' life as a bachelor. When he was unable to pay a gambling debt of 1,000 rubles to publisher Katkov, incurred while playing billiards with him, Tolstoy relinquished his unfinished manuscript of *The Cossacks* which was printed as-is in the January 1863 issue of the magazine *The Russian Messenger*. Again Tolstoy vacillated between bouts of sobriety and debauch;

"I put men to death in war, I fought duels to slay others. I lost at cards, wasted the substance wrung from the sweat of peasants, punished the latter cruelly, rioted with loose women, and deceived men. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, and murder, all were committed by me, not one crime omitted, and yet I was not the less considered by my equals to be a comparatively moral man. Such was my life for ten years." (ibid, Ch. VI)

At times in these dark days he turned to the figure of his mother and all the good she represented and to which he aspired, for; "Such was the figure of my mother in my imagination. She appeared to me a creature so elevated, pure, and spiritual that often in the middle period of my life, during my struggle with overwhelming temptations, I prayed to her soul, begging her to aid me, and this prayer always helped me much."

But times were to change and things were soon to rapidly settle: Tolstoy fell in love.

### Youth: Marriage, Children, War and Peace and Anna Karenina

In September of 1862, at the age of thirty four, Tolstoy married the sister of one of his friends, nineteen year old Sofia 'Sonya' Andreyevna Behrs (b.1844). Their children were: Sergey (b.1863), Tatiana (b.1864), Ilya (b.1866), Leo (b.1869), Marya 'Masha' (1871-1906), Petya (1872-1873), Nicholas (1874-1875), unnamed daughter who died shortly after birth in 1875, Andrey (b.1877), Alexis (1881-1886), Alexandra 'Sasha' (b.1884), and Ivan (1888-1895).

Wanting her to understand everything about him before they married, Tolstoy had given Sonya his diaries to read. Even though she consented to marriage it took her some time to get over the initial shock of their content. However, the tension and jealousy they sparked between them never clearly dissipated. In other matters Countess Tolstoy proved helpful to her husband's writing career: she organised his rough notes, copied out drafts, and assisted with his correspondence and business affairs of the estate. Thus Tolstoy plunged into his writing: he started *War and Peace* in 1862 and its six volumes were published between 1863 and 1869. Listless and depressed even though it was met with much enthusiasm, Tolstoy travelled to Samara in the steppes where he bought land and built an estate he could stay at in the summer.

He started writing his next epic *Anna Karenina* with the opening line that gloomily alluded to his own life: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way", in 1873. The first chapters appeared in the *Russian Herald* in 1876. The same year it was published in its entirety. In 1878, Count Tolstoy suffered the most intense bout of self-doubt and spiritual introspection yet; he became depressed and suicidal; his usually rational outlook on life became muddled with what he thought was a morally upright life as husband and father. He harshly examined his motives and criticised himself for his egotistical family cares....concern for the increase of wealth, the attainment of literary success, and the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure (ibid, Intro.).

So Tolstoy wrote his "Confessions" (1879) and began the last period of "My Awakening to the Truth" which has given him the highest well-being in life and joyous peace in view of approaching death.' A number of his non-fiction articles and novels outlining his ideology and harshly criticising the government and church followed including *The Census in Moscow*, *A Criticism of Dogmatic Theology* (1880), *A Short Exposition of the Gospels* (1881), *What I Believe* (1882), *What Then Must We Do?* (1886), and *On Life and Death* (1892). His other plays, viz. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886), *The Power of Darkness* (1888), *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890), *Father Sergius* (written between 1890-98), *Hadji Murad* (written between 1896 and 1904), *The Young Czar* (1894), *What Is Art?* (1897), *The Forged Coupon* (1904), *Diary of Alexander I* (1905), and *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* (1908) were also written around this time. With the publication of *Resurrection* (1901) Tolstoy was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church; but his popularity with the public was unwavering. Tolstoy the author now had a large following of disciples devoted to 'Tolstoyism'.

### Conversion and Last Years

Tolstoy's main follower was a wealthy army officer, Vladimir Chertkov (1854-1910). Sonya would soon be caught in a bitter battle with him for her husband's private diaries. Having

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embraced the pacifist doctrine of non-resistance as per the teachings of Jesus outlined in the gospels, Tolstoy gave up meat, tobacco, alcohol and preached chastity. He wrote *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1893), titled after Luke's Gospel in the New Testament. When Mahatma Gandhi read it he was profoundly moved and wrote to Tolstoy regarding the Passive Resistance movement. They started a correspondence and soon became friends. Tolstoy wrote "A Letter to a Hindu" in 1908. Admiring their ideals of a simple life of hard work, living off the land and following the teachings of Jesus, Tolstoy offered his friendship and moral and financial support to the Doukhobors. A Christian sect was persecuted in Russia, many Tolstoyans assisted them in their mass emigration to Canada in 1899. Tolstoy was involved with many other causes including appealing to the Tsar to avoid civil war at all costs. In 1902 he moved back to Yasnya Polyana.

In January of 1903, as he writes in his diary, Tolstoy still struggled with his identity: where he had come from and who he had become; "I am now suffering the torments of hell: I am calling to mind all the infamies of my former life—these reminiscences do not pass away and they poison my existence. Generally people regret that the individuality does not retain memory after death. What a happiness that it does not! What an anguish it would be if I remembered in this life all the evil, all that is painful to the conscience, committed by me in a previous life....What a happiness that reminiscences disappear with death and that there only remains consciousness."

The ruminations were prompted by his friend Paul Biryukov asking him for his assistance in penning his biography. His literary executor Chertkov would write *The Last Days of Leo Tolstoy* (1911). For as the last days of Tolstoy were playing out, he still at times agonised over his self-worth and regretted his actions from decades earlier. Having renounced his ancestral claim to his estate and all of his worldly goods, all in his family but his youngest daughter Alexandra scorned him. He was intent on starting a new life and did so on 28 October 1910, making it as far as the stationmaster's home at the Astapovo train station. Leo Tolstoy died there of pneumonia on 20 November 1910. Although he wanted no ceremony or ritual, thousands showed up to pay their respects. He was buried in a simple wooden coffin near Nikolay's 'place of the little green stick' by the ravine in the Sary Zakaz Wood on the Yasnya Polyana estate; returned to that place of idylls where Nikolay told him one could find the secret to happiness and the end to all sufferings.

## **5.4 The Spark Neglected Burns the House**

*Then came Peter, and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would make a reckoning with his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*

*But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat saying, Pay what thou owest.*

*So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord called him unto him, and saith to him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-*

*servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.* -Matthew. xviii. 21-35.

There once lived in a village a peasant named Iván Stcherbakóf. He was comfortably off, in the prime of life, the best worker in the village, and had three sons all able to work. The eldest was married, the second about to marry, and the third was a big lad who could mind the horses and was already beginning to plough. Ivan's wife was an able and thrifty woman, and they were fortunate in having a quiet, hard-working daughter-in-law. There was nothing to prevent Iván and his family from living happily. They had only one idle mouth to feed; that was Iván's old father, who suffered from asthma and had been lying ill on the top of the brick oven for seven years. Iván had all he needed: three horses and a colt, a cow with a calf, and fifteen sheep. The women made all the clothing for the family, besides helping in the fields, and the men tilled the land. They always had grain enough of their own to last over beyond the next harvest and sold enough oats to pay the taxes and meet their other needs. So Iván and his children might have lived quite comfortably had it not been for a feud between him and his next-door neighbour, Limping Gabriel, the son of Gordéy Ivánof.

As long as old Gordéy was alive and Iván's father was still able to manage the household, the peasants lived as neighbours should. If the women of either house happened to want a sieve or a tub, or the men required a sack, or if a cart-wheel got broken and could not be mended at once, they used to send to the other house, and helped each other in neighbourly fashion. When a calf strayed into the neighbour's thrashing-ground they would just drive it out, and only say, 'Don't let it get in again; our grain is lying there.' And such things as locking up the barns and outhouses, hiding things from one another, or backbiting were never thought of in those days.

That was in the fathers' time. When the sons came to be at the head of the families, everything changed.

It all began about a trifle.

Iván's daughter-in-law had a hen that began laying rather early in the season, and she started collecting its eggs for Easter. Every day she went to the cart-shed, and found an egg in the cart; but one day the hen, probably frightened by the children, flew across the fence into the neighbour's yard and laid its egg there. The woman heard the cackling, but said to herself: 'I have no time now; I must tidy up for Sunday. I'll fetch the egg later on.' In the evening she went to the cart, but found no egg there. She went and asked her mother-in-law and brother-in-law whether they had taken the egg. 'No,' they had not; but her youngest brother-in-law, Tarás, said: 'Your Biddy laid its egg in the neighbour's yard. It was there she was cackling, and she flew back across the fence from there.'

The woman went and looked at the hen. There she was on the perch with the other birds, her eyes just closing ready to go to sleep. The woman wished she could have asked the hen and got an answer from her.

Then she went to the neighbour's, and Gabriel's mother came out to meet her.

'What do you want, young woman?'

'Why, Granny, you see, my hen flew across this morning. Did she not lay an egg here?'

'We never saw anything of it. The Lord be thanked, our own hens started laying long ago. We collect our own eggs and have no need of other people's! And we don't go looking for eggs in other people's yards, lass!'

The young woman was offended, and said more than she should have done. Her neighbour answered back with interest, and the women began abusing each other. Ivan's wife, who had

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been to fetch water, happening to pass just then, joined in too. Gabriel's wife rushed out, and began reproaching the young woman with things that had really happened and with other things that never had happened at all. Then a general uproar commenced, all shouting at once, trying to get out two words at a time, and not choice words either.

'You're this!' and 'You're that!' 'You're a thief!' and 'You're a slut!' and 'You're starving your old father-in-law to death!' and 'You're a good-for-nothing!' and so on.

'And you've made a hole in the sieve I lent you, you jade! And it's our yoke you're carrying your pails on—you just give back our yoke!'

Then they caught hold of the yoke, and spilt the water, snatched off one another's shawls, and began fighting. Gabriel, returning from the fields, stopped to take his wife's part. Out rushed Iván and his son and joined in with the rest. Iván was a strong fellow, he scattered the whole lot of them, and pulled a handful of hair out of Gabriel's beard. People came to see what was the matter, and the fighters were separated with difficulty.

That was how it all began.

Gabriel wrapped the hair torn from his beard in a paper, and went to the District Court to have the law of Iván. 'I didn't grow my beard,' said he, 'for pockmarked Iván to pull it out!' And his wife went bragging to the neighbours, saying they'd have Iván condemned and sent to Siberia. And so the feud grew.

The old man, from where he lay on the top of the oven, tried from the very first to persuade them to make peace, but they would not listen. He told them, 'It's a stupid thing you are after, children, picking quarrels about such a paltry matter. Just think! The whole thing began about an egg. The children may have taken it—well, what matter? What's the value of one egg? God sends enough for all! And suppose your neighbour did say an unkind word—put it right; show her how to say a better one! If there has been a fight -- well, such things will happen; we're all sinners, but make it up, and let there be an end of it! If you nurse your anger it will be worse for you yourselves.'

But the younger folk would not listen to the old man. They thought his words were mere senseless dotage. Iván would not humble himself before his neighbour.

'I never pulled his beard,' he said, 'he pulled the hair out himself. But his son has burst all the fastenings on my shirt, and torn it. ... Look at it!'

And Iván also went to law. They were tried by the Justice of the Peace and by the District Court. While all this was going on, the coupling-pin of Gabriel's cart disappeared. Gabriel's womenfolk accused Ivan's son of having taken it. They said: 'We saw him in the night go past our window, towards the cart; and a neighbour says he saw him at the pub, offering the pin to the landlord.'

So they went to law about that. And at home not a day passed without a quarrel or even a fight. The children, too, abused one another, having learnt to do so from their elders; and when the women happened to meet by the river-side, where they went to rinse the clothes, their arms did not do as much wringing as their tongues did nagging, and every word was a bad one.

At first the peasants only slandered one another; but afterwards they began in real earnest to snatch anything that lay handy, and the children followed their example. Life became harder and harder for them. Iván Stcherbakóf and Limping Gabriel kept suing one another at the Village Assembly, and at the District Court, and before the Justice of the Peace until all the judges were tired of them. Now Gabriel got Iván fined or imprisoned; then Iván did as much to Gabriel; and the more they spited each other the angrier they grew—like dogs that attack

one another and get more and more furious the longer they fight. You strike one dog from behind, and it thinks it's the other dog biting him, and gets still fiercer. So these peasants: they went to law, and one or other of them was fined or locked up, but that only made them more and more angry with each other. 'Wait a bit,' they said, 'and I'll make you pay for it.' And so it went on for six years. Only the old man lying on the top of the oven kept telling them again and again: 'Children, what are you doing? Stop all this paying back; keep to your work, and don't bear malice -- it will be better for you. The more you bear malice, the worse it will be.'

But they would not listen to him.

In the seventh year, at a wedding, Ivan's daughter-in-law held Gabriel up to shame, accusing him of having been caught horse-stealing. Gabriel was tipsy, and unable to contain his anger, gave the woman such a blow that she was laid up for a week; and she was pregnant at the time. Iván was delighted. He went to the magistrate to lodge a complaint. 'Now I'll get rid of my neighbour! He won't escape imprisonment, or exile to Siberia.' But Ivan's wish was not fulfilled. The magistrate dismissed the case. The woman was examined, but she was up and about and showed no sign of any injury. Then Ivan went to the Justice of the Peace, but he referred the business to the District Court. Ivan bestirred himself: treated the clerk and the Elder of the District Court to a gallon of liquor and got Gabriel condemned to be flogged. The sentence was read out to Gabriel by the clerk: 'The Court decrees that the peasant Gabriel Gordéyef shall receive twenty lashes with a birch rod at the District Court.'

Ivan too heard the sentence read, and looked at Gabriel to see how he would take it. Gabriel grew as pale as a sheet, and turned round and went out into the passage. Ivan followed him, meaning to see to the horse, and he overheard Gabriel say, 'Very well! He will have my back flogged: that will make it burn; but something of his may burn worse than that!'

Hearing these words, Ivan at once went back into the Court, and said: 'Upright judges! He threatens to set my house on fire! Listen: he said it in the presence of witnesses!'

Gabriel was recalled. 'Is it true that you said this?'

'I haven't said anything. Flog me, since you have the power. It seems that I alone am to suffer, and all for being in the right, while he is allowed to do as he likes.'

Gabriel wished to say something more, but his lips and his cheeks quivered, and he turned towards the wall. Even the officials were frightened by his looks. 'He may do some mischief to himself or to his neighbour,' thought they.

Then the old Judge said: 'Look here, my men; you'd better be reasonable and make it up. Was it right of you, friend Gabriel, to strike a pregnant woman? It was lucky it passed off so well, but think what might have happened! Was it right? You had better confess and beg his pardon, and he will forgive you, and we will alter the sentence.'

The clerk heard these words, and remarked: 'That's impossible under Statute 117. An agreement between the parties not having been arrived at, a decision of the Court has been pronounced and must be executed.'

But the Judge would not listen to the clerk.

'Keep your tongue still, my friend,' said he. 'The first of all laws is to obey God, Who loves peace.' And the Judge began again to persuade the peasants, but could not succeed. Gabriel would not listen to him.

'I shall be fifty next year,' said he, 'and have a married son, and have never been flogged in my life, and now that pockmarked Ivan has had me condemned to be flogged, and am I to go and ask his forgiveness? No; I've borne enough. . . . Ivan shall have cause to remember me!' Again Gabriel's voice quivered, and he could say no more, but turned round and went out.

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It was seven miles from the Court to the village, and it was getting late when Ivan reached home. He unharnessed his horse, put it up for the night, and entered the cottage. No one was there. The women had already gone to drive the cattle in, and the young fellows were not yet back from the fields. Iván went in, and sat down, thinking. He remembered how Gabriel had listened to the sentence, and how pale he had become, and how he had turned to the wall; and Ivan's heart grew heavy. He thought how he himself would feel if he were sentenced, and he pitied Gabriel. Then he heard his old father up on the oven cough, and saw him sit up, lower his legs, and scramble down. The old man dragged himself slowly to a seat, and sat down. He was quite tired out with the exertion, and coughed a long time till he had cleared his throat. Then, leaning against the table, he said: 'Well, has he been condemned?'

'Yes, to twenty strokes with the rods,' answered Iván.

The old man shook his head.

'A bad business,' said he. 'You are doing wrong, Iván! Ah! it's very bad — not for him so much as for yourself! . . . Well, they'll flog him: but will that do you any good?'

'He'll not do it again,' said Iván.

'What is it he'll not do again? What has he done worse than you?'

'Why, think of the harm he has done me!' said Iván. 'He nearly killed my wife, and now he's threatening to burn us up. Am I to thank him for it?'

The old man sighed, and said: 'You go about the wide world, Iván, while I am lying on the oven all these years, so you think you see everything, and that I see nothing. . . . Ah, lad! It's you that don't see; malice blinds you. Others' sins are before your eyes, but your own are behind your back. "He's acted badly!" What a thing to say! If he were the only one to act badly, how could strife exist? Is strife among men ever bred by one alone? Strife is always between two. His badness you see, but your own you don't. If he were bad, but you were good, there would be no strife. Who pulled the hair out of his beard? Who spoilt his haystack? Who dragged him to the law court? Yet you put it all on him! You live a bad life yourself, that's what is wrong! It's not the way I used to live, lad, and it's not the way I taught you. Is that the way his old father and I used to live? How did we live? Why, as neighbours should! If he happened to run out of flour, one of the women would come across: "Uncle Trol, we want some flour." "Go to the barn, dear," I'd say: "take what you need." If he'd no one to take his horses to pasture, "Go, Iván," I'd say, "and look after his horses." And if I was short of anything, I'd go to him. "Uncle Gordéy," I'd say, "I want so-and-so!" "Take it Uncle Trol!" That's how it was between us, and we had an easy time of it. But now? . . . That soldier the other day was telling us about the fight at Plevna (A town in Bulgaria, the scene of fierce and prolonged fighting between the Turks and the Russians in the war of 1877). . Why, there's war between you worse than at Plevna! Is that living? . . . What a sin it is! You are a man and master of the house; it's you who will have to answer. What are you teaching the women and the children? To snarl and snap? Why, the other day your Taráska — that greenhorn — was swearing at neighbour Irena, calling her names; and his mother listened and laughed. Is that right? It is you will have to answer. Think of your soul. Is this all as it should be? You throw a word at me, and I give you two in return; you give me a blow, and I give you two. No, lad! Christ, when He walked on earth, taught us fools something very different. . . . If you get a hard word from any one, keep silent, and his own conscience will accuse him. That is what our Lord taught. If you get a slap, turn the other cheek. "Here, beat me, if that's what I deserve!" And his own conscience will rebuke him. He will soften, and will listen to you. That's the way He taught us, not to be proud! . . . Why don't you speak? Isn't it as I say?'

Iván sat silent and listened.

The old man coughed, and having with difficulty cleared his throat, began again: 'You think Christ taught us wrong? Why, it's all for our own good. Just think of your earthly life; are you better off, or worse, since this Plevna began among you? Just reckon up what you've spent on all this law business—what the driving backwards and forwards and your food on the way have cost you! What fine fellows your sons have grown; you might live and get on well; but now your means are lessening. And why? All because of this folly; because of your pride. You ought to be ploughing with your lads, and do the sowing yourself; but the fiend carries you off to the judge, or to some pettifogger or other. The ploughing is not done in time, nor the sowing, and mother earth can't bear properly. Why did the oats fail this year? When did you sow them? When you came back from town! And what did you gain? A burden for your own shoulders. . . . Eh, lad, think of your own business! Work with your boys in the field and at home, and if some one offends you, forgive him, as God wished you to. Then life will be easy, and your heart will always be light.'

Iván remained silent.

'Iván, my boy, hear your old father! Go and harness the roan, and go at once to the Government office; put an end to all this affair there; and in the morning go and make it up with Gabriel in God's name, and invite him to your house for to-morrow's holiday' (it was the eve of the Virgin's Nativity). 'Have tea ready, and get a bottle of vodka and put an end to this wicked business, so that there should not be any more of it in future, and tell the women and children to do the same.'

Iván sighed, and thought, 'What he says is true,' and his heart grew lighter. Only he did not know how, now, to begin to put matters right.

But again the old man began, as if he had guessed what was in Iván's mind.

'Go, Iván, don't put it off! Put out the fire before it spreads, or it will be too late.'

The old man was going to say more, but before he could do so the women came in, chattering like magpies. The news that Gabriel was sentenced to be flogged, and of his threat to set fire to the house, had already reached them. They had heard all about it and added to it something of their own, and had again had a row, in the pasture, with the women of Gabriel's household. They began telling how Gabriel's daughter-in-law threatened a fresh action: Gabriel had got the right side of the examining magistrate, who would now turn the whole affair upside down; and the schoolmaster was writing out another petition, to the Tsar himself this time, about Iván; and everything was in the petition—all about the coupling-pin and the kitchen-garden—so that half of Iván's homestead would be theirs soon. Iván heard what they were saying, and his heart grew cold again, and he gave up the thought of making peace with Gabriel.

In a farmstead there is always plenty for the master to do. Iván did not stop to talk to the women, but went out to the threshing-floor and to the barn. By the time he had tidied up there, the sun had set and the young fellows had returned from the field. They had been ploughing the field for the winter crops with two horses. Iván met them, questioned them about their work, helped to put everything in its place, set a torn horse-collar aside to be mended, and was going to put away some stakes under the barn, but it had grown quite dusk, so he decided to leave them where they were till next day. Then he gave the cattle their food, opened the gate, let out the horses. Tarás was to take to pasture for the night, and again closed the gate and barred it. 'Now,' thought he, 'I'll have my supper, and then to bed.' He took the horse-collar and entered the hut. By this time he had forgotten about Gabriel and about what his old father had been saying to him. But, just as he took hold of the door-handle to enter the passage, he heard his neighbour on the other side of the fence cursing somebody in a

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hoarse voice: 'What the devil is he good for?' Gabriel was saying. 'He's only fit to be killed!' At these words all Ivan's former bitterness towards his neighbour re-awoke. He stood listening while Gabriel scolded, and, when he stopped, Iván went into the hut.

There was a light inside; his daughter-in-law sat spinning, his wife was getting supper ready, his eldest son was making straps for bark shoes, his second sat near the table with a book, and Tarás was getting ready to go out to pasture the horses for the night. Everything in the hut would have been pleasant and bright, but for that plague—a bad neighbour!

Iván entered, sullen and cross; threw the cat down from the bench, and scolded the women for putting the slop-pail in the wrong place. He felt despondent, and sat down, frowning, to mend the horse-collar. Gabriel's words kept ringing in his ears: his threat at the law court, and what he had just been shouting in a hoarse voice about some one who was 'only fit to be killed.'

His wife gave Tarás his supper, and, having eaten it, Tarás put on an old sheepskin and another coat, tied a sash round his waist, took some bread with him, and went out to the horses. His eldest brother was going to see him off, but Iván himself rose instead, and went out into the porch. It had grown quite dark outside, clouds had gathered, and the wind had risen. Iván went down the steps, helped his boy to mount, started the foal after him, and stood listening while Tarás rode down the village and was there joined by other lads with their horses. Iván waited until they were all out of hearing. As he stood there by the gate he could not get Gabriel's words out of his head: 'Mind that something of yours does not burn worse!'

'He is desperate,' thought Iván. 'Everything is dry, and it's windy weather besides. He'll come up at the back somewhere, set fire to something, and be off. He'll burn the place and escape scot free, the villain! ... There now, if one could but catch him in the act, he'd not get off then!' And the thought fixed itself so firmly in his mind that he did not go up the steps but went out into the street and round the corner. 'I'll just walk round the buildings; who can tell what he's after?' And Iván, stepping softly, passed out of the gate. As soon as he reached the corner, he looked round along the fence, and seemed to see something suddenly move at the opposite corner, as if some one had come out and disappeared again. Iván stopped, and stood quietly, listening and looking. Everything was still; only the leaves of the willows fluttered in the wind, and the straws of the thatch rustled. At first it seemed pitch dark, but, when his eyes had grown used to the darkness, he could see the far corner, and a plough that lay there, and the eaves. He looked a while, but saw no one.

'I suppose it was a mistake,' thought Iván; 'but still I will go round,' and Iván went stealthily along by the shed. Iván stepped so softly in his bark shoes that he did not hear his own footsteps. As he reached the far corner, something seemed to flare up for a moment near the plough and to vanish again. Iván felt as if struck to the heart; and he stopped. Hardly had he stopped, when something flared up more brightly in the same place, and he clearly saw a man with a cap on his head, crouching down, with his back towards him, lighting a bunch of straw he held in his hand. Iván's heart fluttered within him like a bird. Straining every nerve, he approached with great strides, hardly feeling his legs under him. 'Ah,' thought Iván, 'now he won't escape! I'll catch him in the act!'

Iván was still some distance off, when suddenly he saw a bright light, but not in the same place as before, and not a small flame. The thatch had flared up at the eaves, the flames were reaching up to the roof, and, standing beneath it, Gabriel's whole figure was clearly visible.

Like a hawk swooping down on a lark, Iván rushed at Limping Gabriel. 'Now I'll have him; he shan't escape me!' thought Iván. But Gabriel must have heard his steps, and (however he managed it) glancing round, he scuttled away past the barn like a hare.

'You shan't escape!' shouted Iván, darting after him.

Just as he was going to seize Gabriel, the latter dodged him; but Iván managed to catch the skirt of Gabriel's coat. It tore right off, and Iván fell down. He recovered his feet, and shouting, 'Help! Seize him! Thieves! Murder!' ran on again. But meanwhile Gabriel had reached his own gate. There Iván overtook him and was about to seize him, when something struck Iván a stunning blow, as though a stone had hit his temple, quite deafening him. It was Gabriel who, seizing an oak wedge that lay near the gate, had struck out with all his might.

Iván was stunned; sparks flew before his eyes, then all grew dark and he staggered. When he came to his senses Gabriel was no longer there: it was as light as day, and from the side where his homestead was something roared and crackled like an engine at work. Iván turned round and saw that his back shed was all ablaze, and the side shed had also caught fire, and flames and smoke and bits of burning straw mixed with the smoke, were being driven towards his hut.

'What is this, friends? ...' cried Iván, lifting his arms and striking his thighs. 'Why, all I had to do was just to snatch it out from under the eaves and trample on it! What is this, friends? ...' he kept repeating. He wished to shout, but his breath failed him; his voice was gone. He wanted to run, but his legs would not obey him, and got in each other's way. He moved slowly, but again staggered and again his breath failed. He stood still till he had regained breath, and then went on. Before he had got round the back shed to reach the fire, the side shed was also all ablaze; and the corner of the hut and the covered gateway had caught fire as well. The flames were leaping out of the hut, and it was impossible to get into the yard. A large crowd had collected, but nothing could be done. The neighbours were carrying their belongings out of their own houses, and driving the cattle out of their own sheds. After Ivan's house, Gabriel's also caught fire, then, the wind rising, the flames spread to the other side of the street and half the village was burnt down.

At Ivan's house they barely managed to save his old father; and the family escaped in what they had on; everything else, except the horses that had been driven out to pasture for the night, was lost; all the cattle, the fowls on their perches, the carts, ploughs, and harrows, the women's trunks with their clothes, and the grain in the granaries -- all were burnt up!

At Gabriel's, the cattle were driven out, and a few things saved from his house.

The fire lasted all night. Iván stood in front of his homestead and kept repeating, 'What is this? ... Friends! ... One need only have pulled it out and trampled on it!' But when the roof fell in, Iván rushed into the burning place, and seizing a charred beam, tried to drag it out. The women saw him, and called him back; but he pulled out the beam, and was going in again for another when he lost his footing and fell among the flames. Then his son made his way in after him and dragged him out. Iván had singed his hair and beard and burnt his clothes and scorched his hands, but he felt nothing. 'His grief has stupefied him,' said the people. The fire was burning itself out, but Iván still stood repeating: 'Friends! ... What is this? ... One need only have pulled it out!'

In the morning the village Elder's son came to fetch Iván.

'Daddy Iván, your father is dying! He has sent for you to say good-bye.'

Iván had forgotten about his father, and did not understand what was being said to him.

'What father?' he said. 'Whom has he sent for?'

'He sent for you, to say good-bye; he is dying in our cottage! Come along, daddy Iván,' said the Elder's son, pulling him by the arm; and Iván followed the lad.

When he was being carried out of the hut, some burning straw had fallen on to the old man and burnt him, and he had been taken to the village Elder's in the farther part of the village, which the fire did not reach.

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When Iván came to his father, there was only the Elder's wife in the hut, besides some little children on the top of the oven. All the rest were still at the fire. The old man, who was lying on a bench holding a wax candle (Wax candles are much used in the services of the Russian Church, and it is usual to place one in the hand of a dying man, especially when he receives unction) in his hand, kept turning his eyes towards the door. When his son entered, he moved a little. The old woman went up to him and told him that his son had come. He asked to have him brought nearer. Iván came closer.

'What did I tell you, Iván?' began the old man 'Who has burnt down the village?'

'It was he, father!' Iván answered. 'I caught him in the act. I saw him shove the firebrand into the thatch. I might have pulled away the burning straw and stamped it out, and then nothing would have happened.'

'Iván,' said the old man, 'I am dying, and you in your turn will have to face death. Whose is the sin?'

Iván gazed at his father in silence, unable to utter a word.

'Now, before God, say whose is the sin? What did I tell you?'

Only then Iván came to his senses and understood it all. He sniffed and said, 'Mine, father!' And he fell on his knees before his father, saying, 'Forgive me, father; I am guilty before you and before God.'

The old man moved his hands, changed the candle from his right hand to his left, and tried to lift his right hand to his forehead to cross himself, but could not do it, and stopped.

'Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!' said he, and again he turned his eyes towards his son.

'Iván! I say, Iván!'

'What, father?'

'What must you do now?'

Iván was weeping.

'I don't know how we are to live now, father!' he said.

The old man closed his eyes, moved his lips as if to gather strength, and opening his eyes again, said: 'You'll manage. If you obey God's will, you'll manage!' He paused, then smiled, and said: 'Mind, Iván! Don't tell who started the fire! Hide another man's sin, and God will forgive two of yours!' And the old man took the candle in both hands and, folding them on his breast, sighed, stretched out, and died.

Iván did not say anything against Gabriel, and no one knew what had caused the fire.

And Ivan's anger against Gabriel passed away, and Gabriel wondered that Iván did not tell anybody. At first Gabriel felt afraid, but after awhile he got used to it. The men left off quarrelling, and then their families left off also. While rebuilding their huts, both families lived in one house; and when the village was rebuilt and they might have moved farther apart, Iván and Gabriel built next to each other, and remained neighbours as before.

They lived as good neighbours should. Iván Stcherbakóf remembered his old father's command to obey God's law, and quench a fire at the first spark; and if any one does him an injury he now tries not to revenge himself, but rather to set matters right again; and if any one gives him a bad word, instead of giving a worse in return, he tries to teach the other not to use evil words; and so he teaches his womenfolk and children. And Iván Stcherbakóf has got on his feet again, and now lives better even than he did before.

**Self Assessment**

Notes

**Choose the correct option:**

1. Tolstoy's second popular drama was
 

(a) The First Distiller	(b) The Imp and the Crust
(c) The Power of Darkness	(d) None of these
2. Ivan's daughter-in-law had a
 

(a) Goat	(b) Hen
(c) Cow	(d) None of these
3. Ivan pulled a handful of hair from the beard of
 

(a) The old man	(b) Judge
(c) Gabriel	(d) None of these
4. Ivan remembered his old father's command to obey
 

(a) God's law	(b) Law from conscience
(c) Judges	(d) None of these

**5.5 Summary**

- The story opens with the family of Ivan Stchevbakof; a generally harmonious family that does rather well for itself. They were on good terms with their neighbours, the family of Gabriel Chormoi, until one day when a hen that belonged to the Stchevbakof family flew into the yard of the Chormoi family and laid an egg. Later that day, Ivan's daughter-in-law went to retrieve the egg, but grandmother Chormoi takes offense at being accused of stealing. A huge uproar ensues that embroils every member of each family.
- Against the advice of the family elders to seek quick reconciliation, the families bring cases against each other in court, and they blame each other for every little mishap that happens to befall them. Every accusation makes the enmity grow, the children learn from the example of their parents, and the feud goes on for six years.
- The elders urge for the families to forget their differences, but the feud continues. A drunken Gabriel strikes one of Ivan's daughters-in-law, and Ivan eventually sees to it that he is sentenced to flogging. Gabriel is shocked, and he curses his neighbour. The magistrate urges the two to reconcile, but Gabriel refuses.
- Ivan eventually begins to feel sorry for Gabriel, but he refuses to see his own wrongdoing in the quarrel. Ivan's father urges him to reconcile, and to stop wasting his time and money going to court, and to stop setting a bad example for his family. Ivan still refuses to reconcile.
- Eventually Gabriel sets Ivan's house on fire. No neighbours help Ivan save his belongings, and eventually the fire overtakes Gabriel's house as well. Ivan's father was burned in the fire, and, on his deathbed, Ivan's father asks his son whose fault the fire was. Ivan finally realizes that it was his fault, and asks forgiveness from his father and from God. His father urges Ivan never to tell that it was Gabriel that had set the fire, and Ivan agrees.
- Gabriel and Ivan again become good friends, and their families live together as their houses were rebuilt. The families then go on to become more prosperous than ever, all for following the elders' advice: to quench a spark before it becomes a fire.

Notes

### 5.6 Keywords

- Feud* : A bitter, often prolonged quarrel or state of enmity, especially such a state of hostilities between two families or clans.
- Reconcile* : Restore friendly relations between, cause to coexist in harmony; make or show to be compatible.
- Flogging* : Beat (someone) with a whip or stick to punish or torture them
- Scuttled* : Run hurriedly or furtively with short quick steps.

### 5.7 Review Questions

1. What made Ivan pity Gabriel as he sat down in his house thinking?
2. What in the old man's opinion had made Ivan unable to see things right?
3. What did the old man ask Ivan to do without delay?
4. Was Ivan better off or worse off after the quarrel began? Why?
5. Pick one or more topic areas of interest from Tolstoy's Confession and write an essay expounding his views and your perceptions of them.
6. By 1889, (Tolstoy dies in 1910) the sixty-one year old Tolstoy had come to believe that he had accomplished nothing in life. He poses the question "What will come of what I do today and tomorrow? What will come of my entire life?" (Confession, p. 34). How does Tolstoy answer his own question? How do you relate to his answer?
7. One of the fascinating characteristics we find in Confession is Tolstoy's criticism of his own class and acceptance of the peasant class and everything it stands for. Discuss what the author is saying.
8. From the stories listed in question #6, choose one or more items that are mirrored in Confession and discuss what Tolstoy means by making a similar statement in a short work and in the larger, philosophical one.

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (c)                      2. (b)                      3. (c)                      4. (a)

### 5.8 Further Readings



- Books*      The Life of Tolstoy: Later years by Aylmer Maude, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911 at Google Books
- Why We Fail as Christians by Robert Hunter, The Macmillan Company, 1919 at Wikiquotes
- Why we fail as Christians by Robert Hunter, The Macmillan Company, 1919 at Google Books



*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 6: After Twenty Years by O. Henry

Notes

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss about O. Henry;
- Weigh and consider the story *After Twenty Years*.

### Introduction

*After Twenty Years* is a short story written by the author whose pen name is O. Henry. In this particular short story there are three characters. The story begins with a policeman who is on his beat. He is making his rounds, rattling door knobs to ensure everything is secure. He goes towards a man that is standing in a dark doorway. Bob is standing there and tells the officer that he had agreed to meet his friend Jimmy Wells at this spot at 10 o'clock. He tells the story of how twenty years ago, they parted as young men but agreed that twenty years later they would meet at that particular spot again. They parted because of different life and career paths. Jimmy considered New York City as the place to live and Bob decided to travel out west to seek great wealth. The officer leaves. Later, Bob is approached by another man who he believes is Jimmy. He gives the man details about his successes out west. They walk to find a place to eat, but after a light shines on the man's face, Bob realizes it is another officer; the officer arrests Bob for crimes committed in Chicago. The officer who arrests Bob gives him a note from Jimmy. The note says that the two men did meet on time; Jimmy recognized Bob as someone wanted by the authorities. The story has a theme of conflict between one's friendship to another and one's moral duty and duty to society. Jimmy was confronted with a dilemma and had to make the choice to do his civic duty over loyalty to his friend; he had to cause his friend to get arrested because his friend had broken the law. In addition, Jimmy had to hire a cop to arrest Bob because he did not have the heart to arrest Bob himself.

### 6.1 Introduction to Author

**William Sydney Porter** (September 11, 1862 – June 5, 1910), better known by his pen name **O. Henry**, was an American writer. O. Henry's short stories are known for their wit, wordplay, warm characterization and clever twist endings.

Notes

Sidney Porter was born on September 11, 1862, in Greensboro, North Carolina. His middle name at birth was Sidney; he changed the spelling to Sydney in 1898. His parents were Dr. Algernon Sidney Porter (1825–1888), a physician, and Mary Jane Virginia Swaim Porter (1833–1865). They were married on April 20, 1858. When William was three, his mother died from tuberculosis, and he and his father moved into the home of his maternal grandmother. As a child, Porter was always reading, everything from classics to dime novels; his favourite works were Lane's translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Porter graduated from his aunt Evelina Maria Porter's elementary school in 1876. He then enrolled at the Lindsey Street High School. His aunt continued to tutor him until he was fifteen. In 1879, he started working in his uncle's drugstore and in 1881, at the age of nineteen, he was licensed as a pharmacist. At the drugstore, he also showed off his natural artistic talents by sketching the townsfolk.

Porter travelled with Dr. James K. Hall to Texas in March 1882, hoping that a change of air would help alleviate a persistent cough he had developed. He took up residence on the sheep ranch of Richard Hall, James' son, in La Salle County and helped out as a shepherd, ranch hand, cook and baby-sitter. While on the ranch, he learned bits of Spanish and German from the mix of immigrant ranch hands. He also spent time reading classic literature. Porter's health did improve and he travelled with Richard to Austin in 1884, where he decided to remain and was welcomed into the home of the Harrells, who were friends of Richard's. Porter took a number of different jobs over the next several years, first as a pharmacist then as a draftsman, bank teller and journalist. He also began writing as a sideline.

Porter led an active social life in Austin, including membership in singing and drama groups. Porter was a good singer and musician. He played both guitar and mandolin. He became a member of the "Hill City Quartet," a group of young men who sang at gatherings and serenaded young women of the town. Porter met and began courting Athol Estes, then seventeen years old and from a wealthy family. Her mother objected to the match because Athol was ill, suffering from tuberculosis. On July 1, 1887, Porter eloped with Athol to the home of Reverend R. K. Smoot, where they were married.

The couple continued to participate in musical and theatre groups, and Athol encouraged her husband to pursue his writing. Athol gave birth to a son in 1888, who died hours after birth, and then a daughter, Margaret Worth Porter, in September 1889. Porter's friend Richard Hall became Texas Land Commissioner and offered Porter a job. Porter started as a draftsman at the Texas General Land Office (GLO) in 1887 at a salary of \$100 a month, drawing maps from surveys and field notes. The salary was enough to support his family, but he continued his contributions to magazines and newspapers.

In the GLO building, he began developing characters and plots for such stories as "Georgia's Ruling" (1900), and "Buried Treasure" (1908). The castle-like building he worked in was even woven into some of his tales such as "Bexar Scrip No. 2692" (1894).

His job at the GLO was a political appointment by Hall. Hall ran for governor in the election of 1890 but lost. Porter resigned in early 1891 when the new governor was sworn in.

The same year, Porter began working at the First National Bank of Austin as a teller and bookkeeper at the same salary he had made at the GLO. The bank was operated informally and Porter was apparently careless in keeping his books and may have embezzled funds. In 1894, he was accused by the bank of embezzlement and lost his job but was not indicted.

He then worked full-time on his humorous weekly called *The Rolling Stone*, which he started while working at the bank. *The Rolling Stone* featured satire on life, people and politics and included Porter's short stories and sketches. Although eventually reaching a top circulation of 1500, *The Rolling Stone* failed in April 1895 since the paper never provided an adequate income. However, his writing and drawings had caught the attention of the editor at the *Houston Post*.

Porter and his family moved to Houston in 1895, where he started writing for the *Post*. His salary was only \$25 a month, but it rose steadily as his popularity increased. Porter gathered ideas for his column by loitering in hotel lobbies and observing and talking to people there. This was a technique he used throughout his writing career.

While he was in Houston, the First National Bank of Austin was audited by federal auditors and they found the embezzlement shortages that had led to his firing. A federal indictment followed and he was arrested on charges of embezzlement.

Porter's father-in-law posted bail to keep Porter out of jail, but the day before Porter was due to stand trial on July 7, 1896, he fled, first to New Orleans and later to Honduras. While holed up in a Trujillo hotel for several months, he wrote *Cabbages and Kings*, in which he coined the term "banana republic" to describe the country, subsequently used to describe almost any small, unstable tropical nation in Latin America. Porter had sent Athol and Margaret back to Austin to live with Athol's parents. Unfortunately, Athol became too ill to meet Porter in Honduras as Porter had planned. When he learned that his wife was dying, Porter returned to Austin in February 1897 and surrendered to the court, pending an appeal. Once again, Porter's father-in-law posted bail so Porter could stay with Athol and Margaret.

Athol Estes Porter died on July 25, 1897, from tuberculosis (then known as consumption). Porter, having little to say in his own defense, was found guilty of embezzlement in February 1898, sentenced to five years in prison, and imprisoned on March 25, 1898, as federal prisoner 30664 at the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio. While in prison, Porter, as a licensed pharmacist, worked in the prison hospital as the night druggist. Porter was given his own room in the hospital wing, and there is no record that he actually spent time in the cell block of the prison. He had fourteen stories published under various pseudonyms while he was in prison, but was becoming best known as "O. Henry", a pseudonym that first appeared over the story "Whistling Dick's Christmas Stocking" in the December 1899 issue of McClure's Magazine. A friend of his in New Orleans would forward his stories to publishers, so they had no idea the writer was imprisoned. Porter was released on July 24, 1901, for good behaviour after serving three years. Porter reunited with his daughter Margaret, now age 11, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Athol's parents had moved after Porter's conviction. Margaret was never told that her father had been in prison—just that he had been away on business.

### Later life

Porter's most prolific writing period started in 1902, when he moved to New York City to be near his publishers. While there, he wrote 381 short stories. He wrote a story a week for over a year for the *New York World Sunday Magazine*. His wit, characterization, and plot twists were adored by his readers, but often panned by critics. Porter married again in 1907, to childhood sweetheart Sarah (Sallie) Lindsey Coleman, whom he met again after revisiting his native state of North Carolina.

Porter was a heavy drinker, and his health deteriorated markedly in 1908, which affected his writing. In 1909, Sarah left him, and he died on June 5, 1910, of cirrhosis of liver, complications of diabetes, and an enlarged heart. After funeral services in New York City, he was buried in the Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, North Carolina. His daughter, Margaret Worth Porter, who died in 1927, was buried next to her father.

### Stories

Portrait of Porter from frontispiece in his collection of short stories *Waifs and Strays*

O. Henry's stories frequently have surprise endings. In his day, he was called the American answer to Guy de Maupassant. Both authors wrote plot twist endings, but O. Henry stories were much more playful. His stories are also known for witty narration.

Notes

Most of O. Henry's stories are set in his own time, the early 20th century. Many take place in New York City and deal for the most part with ordinary people: clerks, policemen, waitresses, etc.

O. Henry's work is wide-ranging, and his characters can be found roaming the cattle-lands of Texas, exploring the art of the con-man, or investigating the tensions of class and wealth in turn-of-the-century New York. O. Henry had an inimitable hand for isolating some element of society and describing it with an incredible economy and grace of language. Some of his best and least-known work is contained in *Cabbages and Kings*, a series of stories each of which explores some individual aspect of life in a paralytically sleepy Central American town, while advancing some aspect of the larger plot and relating back one to another.

*Cabbages and Kings* was his first collection of stories, followed by *The Four Million*. The second collection opens with a reference to Ward McAllister's "assertion that there were only 'Four Hundred' people in New York City who were really worth noticing. But a wiser man has arisen—the census taker—and his larger estimate of human interest has been preferred in marking out the field of these little stories of the 'Four Million.'" To O. Henry, everyone in New York counted.

He had an obvious affection for the city, which he called "Bagdad-on-the-Subway," and many of his stories are set there—while others are set in small towns or in other cities.

Among his most famous stories are:

- "The Gift of the Magi" about a young couple who are short of money but desperately want to buy each other Christmas gifts. Unbeknownst to Jim, Della sells her most valuable possession, her beautiful hair, in order to buy a platinum fob chain for Jim's watch; while unbeknownst to Della, Jim sells his own most valuable possession, his watch, to buy jewelled combs for Della's hair. The essential premise of this story has been copied, re-worked, parodied, and otherwise re-told countless times in the century since it was written.
- "The Ransom of Red Chief", in which two men kidnap a boy of ten. The boy turns out to be so bratty and obnoxious that the desperate men ultimately pay the boy's father \$250 to take him back.
- "The Cop and the Anthem" about a New York City hobo named Soapy, who sets out to get arrested so that he can be a guest of the city jail instead of sleeping out in the cold winter. Despite efforts at petty theft, vandalism, disorderly conduct, and "mashing" with a young prostitute, Soapy fails to draw the attention of the police. Disconsolate, he pauses in front of a church, where an organ anthem inspires him to clean up his life—and is ironically charged for loitering and sentenced to three months in prison.
- "A Retrieved Reformation", which tells the tale of safecracker Jimmy Valentine, recently freed from prison. He goes to a town bank to case it before he robs it. As he walks to the door, he catches the eye of the banker's beautiful daughter. They immediately fall in love and Valentine decides to give up his criminal career. He moves into the town, taking up the identity of Ralph Spencer, a shoemaker. Just as he is about to leave to deliver his specialized tools to an old associate, a lawman who recognizes him arrives at the bank. Jimmy and his fiancée and her family are at the bank, inspecting a new safe, when a child accidentally gets locked inside the airtight vault. Knowing it will seal his fate, Valentine opens the safe to rescue the child. However, much to Valentine's surprise, the lawman denies recognizing him and lets him go.
- "The Duplicity of Hargraves". A short story about a nearly destitute father and daughter's trip to Washington, D.C.

**Pen name****Notes**

Porter gave various explanations for the origin of his pen name. In 1909 he gave an interview to *The New York Times*, in which he gave an account of it:

It was during these New Orleans days that I adopted my pen name of O. Henry. I said to a friend: "I'm going to send out some stuff. I don't know if it amounts to much, so I want to get a literary alias. Help me pick out a good one." He suggested that we get a newspaper and pick a name from the first list of notables that we found in it. In the society columns we found the account of a fashionable ball. "Here we have our notables," said he. We looked down the list and my eye lighted on the name Henry, "That'll do for a last name," said I. "Now for a first name. I want something short. None of your three-syllable names for me." "Why don't you use a plain initial letter, then?" asked my friend. "Good," said I, "O is about the easiest letter written, and O it is."

A newspaper once wrote and asked me what the O stands for. I replied, "O stands for Olivier, the French for Oliver." And several of my stories accordingly appeared in that paper under the name Olivier Henry.

In the introduction to *The World of O. Henry: Roads of Destiny and Other Stories* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), William Trevor writes that when Porter was in the Ohio State Penitentiary "there was a prison guard named Orrin Henry, whom William Sydney Porter . . . immortalised as O. Henry".

The writer and scholar Guy Davenport offers another explanation: "[T]he pseudonym that he began to write under in prison is constructed from the first two letters of *Ohio* and the second and last two of *penitentiary*."

**Legacy**

The O. Henry Award is a prestigious annual prize named after Porter and given to outstanding short stories. Several schools around the country bear Porter's pseudonym.

In 1952, a film featuring five stories, called *O. Henry's Full House*, was made. The episode garnering the most critical acclaim was "The Cop and the Anthem" starring Charles Laughton and Marilyn Monroe. The other stories are "The Clarion Call", "The Last Leaf", "The Ransom of Red Chief" (starring Fred Allen and Oscar Levant), and "The Gift of the Magi".

The O. Henry House and O. Henry Hall, both in Austin, Texas, are named for him. O. Henry Hall, now owned by the University of Texas, previously served as the federal courthouse in which O. Henry was convicted of embezzlement.

Porter has elementary schools named for him in Greensboro, North Carolina (William Sydney Porter Elementary and Garland, Texas (O. Henry Elementary), as well as a middle school in Austin, Texas (O. Henry Middle School. The O. Henry Hotel in Greensboro is also named after Porter.

**6.2 After Twenty Years**

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain cigar in them had well nigh depeopled the streets. Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart

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form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.



*Notes* "After Twenty Years" is a story of a meeting between two friends according to the promise they made twenty years ago. They wish to tell each other of what befell them in the intervening years. The end of the story brings surprise.

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all right. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—"Big.

"Joe' Brady's restaurant." "Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarf pin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man. "I dined here at 'Big Joe, Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth.

Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from the date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door," "Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two. "I'll be on my way. Hope your friend

comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?" "I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least, If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands.

And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited. About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully. "Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence.

Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments.

Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest. At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other's face. The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells." The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short:

"Bob, I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plain-clothes man to do the job. JIMMY."

Notes



*Did u know?* O. Henry's real name was William Sydney Porter. He was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1862. He went to Texas at the age of twenty and drifted from one job to another till he became a teller in a bank. He quit this job to begin newspaper work but later started writing stories under the pseudonym O. Henry. He started living in New York, where he died in 1910. He specialised in the short story that ends with a completely unexpected surprise.

### 6.3 Characters and Plots

**Jimmy Wells:** (cop, best fellow in the world; strong and important person who controls the safety of the people). He loves New York. He is a fine-looking cop, watchful, guarding the peace. He is as true as any man in the world.

**Bob:** He has a colourless square face with bright eyes, and a little white mark near his right eye. He has a large jewel in his necktie.

**Setting (place/time):**

It was probably winter. The weather was cold, there was wind and rain. The story takes place in New York.

**General plot:**

The story is about the relationship between two friends. Twenty years ago two friends had their last dinner together. One of them was leaving town to find "great success". They agreed to meet in 20 years time to see who they were and the kind of future that waited for each of them.

### Self Assessment

Circle the letter of the best answer for each of the following questions.

1. The man standing in the doorway of the hardware store seems out of place in the neighborhood because
  - (a) he appears to be a wealthy man.
  - (b) no one there knows him.
  - (c) the businesses are all closed for the night.
  - (d) it is a dangerous place to be. \_\_\_\_\_
2. As the police officer approaches, what does the man in the doorway do?
  - (a) shrinks back
  - (b) stares at him intently
  - (c) begins to walk away
  - (d) speaks to him immediately \_\_\_\_\_
3. The story *suggests* that as young men, Bob and Jimmy
  - (a) had very similar personalities.
  - (b) had been very close friends.

- (c) wanted the same things out of life.
- (d) didn't actually care much about each other. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Bob's hand *most likely* trembles at the end of the story because of his feelings of
- (a) fear. (b) anger.
- (c) hatred. (d) regret. \_\_\_\_\_
5. The story *implies* that the reason Bob and Jimmy lost track of each other was because
- (a) Bob was staying out of sight to avoid arrest.
- (b) Jimmy had become a police officer.
- (c) Bob was too busy to think about his old friend.
- (d) Jimmy's address kept changing. \_\_\_\_\_
6. When the police officer asked Bob whether he would hold his friend to the exact time of the meeting, he *actually* wanted to find out whether
- (a) Bob was as true a friend as he claimed to be.
- (b) he had enough time to send another officer.
- (c) Bob knew that he really was Jimmy.
- (d) he should come back later without his police uniform. \_\_\_\_\_
7. The first clue that something unexpected was about to happen came when Bob
- (a) lit a cigar.
- (b) noticed that Jimmy was much taller than he used to be.
- (c) pulled out his watch
- (d) read the note from Patrolman Wells. \_\_\_\_\_

## 6.4 Summary

- After Twenty Years is a story about two characters, Bob and Jimmy Wells. Before parting ways in order to build their careers, the two friends had promised each other that twenty years down the line, they would meet at a particular restaurant. The story begins with one friend, Bob, having reached the meeting place and waiting for his friend to turn up. While waiting, a policeman on his duty stops by and Bob tells him the reason behind his standing in the dark corner. The cop informs him that the restaurant was demolished five years ago. A conversation starts and Bob tells the policeman about his career and how he struck it rich in the west and how he wishes that Jimmy too had done well.
- The policeman wishes him luck and continues on his beat. A little later, a man walks up to Bob, and addresses him by his name. The two friends then get chatting, with Bob telling his friend about how the west treated him. While walking, they reach a lighted area, when Bob stops abruptly and realizes that the person he has been talking to all along was not his friend Jimmy. When Bob says the same to the other man, Bob is informed that he has been under arrest for the past ten minutes. The stranger then hands a note to Bob. The note is from Patrolman Jimmy Wells, (the same policeman who was talking to Bob when he was waiting for Jimmy to turn up) and says that Jimmy was in the appointed place at the given time, but when Bob lit the cigar and

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Jimmy saw in his friend's face the face of a wanted criminal, he went away. Jimmy could not arrest his friend Bob himself and so asked someone else to arrest Bob.

### 6.5 Keywords

- Cigar* : A cigar is a tightly-rolled bundle of dried and fermented tobacco that is ignited so that its smoke may be drawn into the mouth.
- Impressiveness* : Splendid or imposing in size or appearance; "the grandness of the architecture"; "impressed by the richness.
- Hurried* : Move or act with haste; rush: do something more quickly:

### Answers: Self Assessment

1. (c)                      2. (d)                      3. (b)                      4. (a)  
5. (c)                      6. (b)                      7. (a)

### 6.6 Review Questions

1. Pointing out Jimmy Well's dilemma when he meets 'Silky' Bob after twenty years, discuss whether or not you would maintain that he did the only thing he should have done.
2. How would you categorise the story: comic or tragic? Give reasons for your answer based on the details of the story.
3. Though Bob is an underworld character, what is it that makes it difficult for us to dislike him?
4. Compare and contrast the character and destinies of Jimmy and Bob as presented in the story.

### 6.7 Further Readings



*Books* Guy Davenport, *The Hunter Gracchus and Other Papers on Literature and Art*, Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996.

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Arnett, Ethel Stephens (1973). *For Whom Our Public Schools Were Named*, Greensboro, North Carolina. Piedmont Press. pp. 245.

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*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 7: The World is Too Much with Us by William Wordsworth—An Introduction

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Objectives

Introduction

7.1 The World is Too Much with Us—A Discussion

7.2 Summary

7.3 Keywords

7.4 Review Questions

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about William Wordsworth;
- Weigh and consider the poem *The World is Too Much with Us*.

### Introduction

William Wordsworth was one of the founders of the literary movement we now call Romanticism, a period covering (roughly) the years 1790 to 1824. One of the most prominent features of Romantic poetry—that means poetry from the Romantic period, not that lovey-dovey stuff you see on greeting cards—is an obsession with nature; there are a whole lot of poems about mountains, flowers, birds, you name it. In addition to talking about nature, the Romantics also spent a lot of time on gross inequalities among social classes, industrialization, the government, etc. In many ways, they resemble a lot of our modern-day advocates for the environment and social equality.

William Wordsworth, the biggest nature-lover of them all, lived most of his life in a rural part of northern England called the Lake District, a land of beautiful hills, vales, and lakes. If you head over to “Best of the Web,” you can see some pictures of Wordsworth’s beloved Lake District. Having grown up and lived in one of the most beautiful places in England, it’s no surprise that Wordsworth was worried about the potential destruction of that landscape (through deforestation, urbanization, etc.) and about humanity’s increasing inability to appreciate it.

It is humanity’s inability to “feel” nature that most concerns the speaker of “The World is too Much with Us,” a poem Wordsworth probably wrote in 1802 but didn’t publish until 1807. The speaker claims that our obsession with “getting and spending” has made us insensible to the beauties of nature. “Getting and spending” refers to the consumer culture accompanying the Industrial Revolution that was the devil incarnate for Wordsworth and other “lake poets” like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Only something as malevolent as that evil red guy with horns and a pitch-fork could make people insensible to something as beautiful as (hold your breath) the wind! But that’s just it. Wordsworth’s point is that our obsession with “getting and spending” has made it impossible for us to appreciate the simple beauties of the world around us.

## Notes

**Why Should I Care?**

Despite that little gap of about 200 years, the Romantic poets speak to us more than you might think. Take “The World is too Much with Us” as an example. Possibly now more than ever, people are obsessed with “getting and spending.” The rise of the Internet has made anything we want, from groceries to video games, just a click away. If Internet shopping isn’t your thing, just think about the number of strip malls and stores that you could potentially visit on any given day. Why bother with nature when you could wander around the mall or download a movie? That is precisely the attitude that irritated Wordsworth so much.

Now, let’s face it – a lot of us appreciate the natural world, but ever-increasing urbanization has made nature more and more remote. For some of us, it feels like we have to drive for hours just to get to a place where there aren’t a ton of street lights obstructing our view of the stars. Even though the government works hard to preserve some of the choicer parts of the natural world through natural parks, wildlife preserves, and the like, no one can deny that cities are getting bigger; bigger cities means more shops, parking lots, and freeways, and a lot less nature.

William Wordsworth was an advocate for nature, and nowadays there is certainly no shortage of activists that make similar claims as Wordsworth. Sure, there are a number of differences, such as the fact that modern-day environmentalists tend to focus on how the ozone layer and forests are necessary if humanity is to avoid getting skin cancer or running out of fresh air. While things like pollution and the ozone layer weren’t understood in Wordsworth’s time as well as they are now, the fundamental issues are the same. Both Wordsworth and his modern-day ancestors realize that there is something in nature that keeps us alive and healthy, whether literally (modern activists) or spiritually (Wordsworth).

**7.1 The World is Too Much With Us–A Discussion**

In “The World Is Too Much with Us,” William Wordsworth offers his reader a sonnet, albeit an idiosyncratic one that deliberately ignores or adapts the traditional sonnet conventions to convey its theme. The sonnet is typically a poem composed of fourteen lines that features two “movements”: an octave, or opening set of eight lines, that presents a dilemma or conflict, the resolution to which is offered in the closing sestet, or set of six lines. Besides this structural convention, the traditional Italian sonnet, which is the basic form the poet builds upon, also features an *abba, abba, cde, cde* rhyme scheme, in which each letter represents a new end rhyme for each line.

Wordsworth elects, however, to manipulate both conventions and substitute his own formula instead. Rather than the traditional octave and sestet, there is only a brief break, or caesura, in line 9 to distance the previous lines from those that follow; the effect is that the reader immediately is transported into the climactic declaration of line 9. Similarly, the poet also posits his own rhyme scheme, beginning with the traditional *abba* form, but ending ostentatiously with three rhymed couplets.

These decisions to forgo convention are part of the poet’s Romantic temperament and his thematic tendencies. In effect, the form of the sonnet embodies the poet’s theme. Wordsworth—the most respectful of tradition among the clan of “rebel spirits” whose poetic company includes George Gordon, Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge—nevertheless is concerned with creating his own form and promoting it.

The poet begins with a straightforward declaration, “The world is too much with us,” then proceeds to explicate the meaning of this maxim. First offered is a comment upon the maxim’s scope: “late and soon.” Comprehensively, totally, utterly, the poet opines, people are captives of the world they seek to understand or control.

The reader is implicated with the poet (“us”) in “getting and spending” and laying “waste our powers” to see in “Nature” what is “ours.” “World” as cosmos, as debilitating “system” that robs people of their perceptions, is contrasted with “Nature,” the benevolent teacher through which one might learn of his or her inner nature and thus be free of deceit and cunning. The poet concludes, “We have given our hearts away,” and this is a “sordid boon!”

Wordsworth follows this assessment with a series of images from nature that underscores one’s ignorance and leads one to an abrupt denouement. The sea and the winds that might liberate one from world-weariness are depicted as singers or musicians with whose song people “are out of tune.” The reader is then startled by the poet’s sudden, aggressive “anti-confession”: “Great God! I’d rather be/ A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn.”

One looks for the “than,” the syntactic particle that would complete the comparison—the poet would rather be a pagan than what? The implied answer is “a citizen of Christian civilization,” one who has too quickly been dulled to the glories and lessons of “the pleasant lea” on which he stands.

He feigns, in conclusion, to prefer the ancient mythology, so dated, yet so contemporary, that would bring him “glimpses” of “Proteus rising from the sea” or “old Triton blow[ing] his wreathed horn.” From beginning to end, the sonnet is seen as an unrelenting attack on superficiality and conventionality in faith and in human motivation promoted by the fixed contours of “the world.”

## Self Assessment

- The literary movement we now call Romanticism, was founded by
  - PB Shelley
  - Coleridge
  - William Wordsworth
  - Both (b) and (c)
- Triton is in Greek mythology,
  - sea god
  - animal
  - a bird
  - None of these
- The sonnet is typically a poem composed of
  - fourteen lines
  - twelve lines
  - thirteen lines
  - None of these

## 7.2 Summary

- The speaker complains that “the world” is too overwhelming for us to appreciate it. We’re so concerned about time and money that we use up all our energy. People want to accumulate stuff, so they see nothing in Nature that they can “own.” According to the speaker, we’ve sold our souls.
- We should be able to appreciate beautiful events like the moon shining over the ocean and the blowing of strong winds, but it’s like we’re on a different wavelength from Nature. We’re kind of like, “Eh.”
- The speaker would rather be a pagan who worships an outdated religion so that when he gazes out on the ocean (as he’s doing now), he might feel less sad. If he were a pagan, he’d see wild mythological Gods like Proteus, who can take many shapes, and Triton, who looks like a mer-man.

Notes

### 7.3 Keywords

- Suckled* : Outworn: Brought up in an outdated religion.
- Proteus* : In Greek mythology, a sea-God who could change shape at will and who possessed complete knowledge of the past, present, and future.
- Triton* : In Greek mythology, a sea-God who had the body of a man and the tail of a fish. He used a conch shell as a trumpet.

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (d)                      2. (a)                      3. (a)

### 7.4 Review Questions

1. Write an essay arguing that Wordsworth's theme remains highly relevant today.
2. What is Pagan? Read a short biography of Wordsworth, then decide whether he was serious when he wrote that he would rather be a Pagan.
3. *Protean* is an English word derived from the name of the Greek god Proteus (line 13). In an authoritative dictionary, look up *protean* if you do not know the meaning. Then write a paragraph about a person who has a protean personality.
4. What is the meaning of *wreathéd* in the last line of the poem.
5. What is the meaning of "The World is Too Much with Us" by William Wordsworth?
6. What are the themes of "The World is Too Much with Us"?
7. What are some poetic devices used in "The World is Too Much With Us" that enhance the meaning of the poem?

### 7.5 Further Readings



- Books* "The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Fourth Edition," Damrosch, David, and Kevin.  
J.H. Detmar, General Editors, Volume 2A, "The Romantics and their Contemporaries," Wolfson, Susan and Peter Manning, Long Man, New York, New York, 2010.



*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 8: The World is Too Much with Us by William Wordsworth—Detailed Study

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8.11 Further Readings

### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about the poem *The World is Too Much with Us*;
- Explain the poem;
- Discuss the themes and tone of the poem;
- Make analysis of the poem.

### Introduction

William Wordsworth's poem is a statement about conflict between nature and humanity. The symbolism in his poem gives the reader a sense of the conviction and deep feelings Wordsworth had. Wordsworth longs for a much simpler time when the progress of humanity is tempered by the restrictions nature imposed.

Wordsworth gives a fatalistic view of the world, past and future. The words "late and soon" in the opening verse describe how the past and future are included in his characterization of mankind. The author knows the potential for humanity, but the mentality of "getting and spending" clouds the perspective of humanity. Wordsworth does not see us as incapable, in fact he describes our abilities as "powers". "We lay waste our powers" is blamed on the earlier mentioned attitude of "getting and spending". The appetite mankind has for devouring all that is around clouds our perspective as to what is being sacrificed for the progress. The "sordid boon" we have "given are hearts" is the materialistic progress of mankind. Humanity

**Notes**

has become self-absorbed and can no longer think clearly. The destructiveness society has on the environment will proceed unchecked and relentless like the “winds that will be howling at all hours”.

Unlike society, Wordsworth does not see nature as a commodity. The verse “Little we see in Nature that is ours”, shows that coexisting is the relationship envisioned. This relationship appears to be at the mercy of mankind because of the vulnerable way nature is described. The verse “This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon”, gives the vision of a woman exposed to the heavens. The phrase “sleeping flowers” might also describe how nature is being overrun unknowingly and is helpless.

Wordsworth seems to be the only enlightened one who is able to foresee the inevitable. He sees himself as one with the environment. The verse “I, standing on this pleasant lea, have glimpses that would make me less forlorn”, shows Wordsworth as a visionary who is not responsible for the destruction of nature. This destruction is not seen stopping as a result of any act by mankind. The change Wordsworth is hoping for will come in the form of a mighty revolt by nature. Wordsworth reaches back into ancient Greece for their Gods who symbolize nature and strength to make the change. Proteus is seen rising from the sea, facing the injustices inflicted upon nature, placing the cycle of life back in balance. Proteus was a sea-God who could change his appearance to elude capture. The ability to change one’s appearance is critical in facing the variety of threats mankind might impose. The God Triton was mentioned as a savior to nature as well. Triton was the most imposing of the Gods (excluding Zeus) because he was master of the seas. Wordsworth selected a sea-God as the savior to the world to represent a re-birth. Water has always been a symbol of new beginnings (birth itself with the amniotic fluid and baptisms which take place in water) and when the sea-Gods rise from their watery depths to correct the excesses of humanity, a re-birth will have taken place for the world.

Wordsworth sees himself as having insight to the problems which exist between humanity and nature. The materialistic progress being made by mankind is not without consequence. The destruction of the environment by mankind’s shortsightedness will continue as Wordsworth has foreseen. The change hoped for by the author will not come as a result of an initiative by the humanity, but as an uproar by Mother Nature in the form of a battle. This battle will bring forth a victory for the environment and stimulate a re-birth for the world.

### **8.1 “The World is Too Much with Us”**

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not. – Great God! I’d rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

## **8.2 Explanations**

### **Lines 1-2**

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

The poem opens with a complaint, saying that the world is out of whack and that people are destroying themselves with consumerism (“getting and spending”). “The world is too much with us” sounds odd, and could mean several things. It could mean that the world – life in the city, contemporary society – is just too much, as in “This is too much for me, and I can’t take it anymore.” The “world” might refer to the natural world instead of the city, in which case it would mean that humanity is so busy that they don’t have time for the natural world because “it’s too much.”

It could also mean mankind or society is a burden on the world, as in “there’s not enough space for both man and the earth” or “mankind has upset a delicate balance.”

“Late and soon” is a strange phrase. It could mean “sooner or later,” or it could mean we’ve done this recently or in the past (“late”) and will do it in the future as well (“soon”).

### **Lines 3-4**

Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The poem’s tone of complaint continues as the speaker describes a rift between nature and humanity. We get a potential clue as to the identity of at least one of those “powers” described in line 2: the ability to feel, which we’ve lost because we’ve given our hearts away.

The phrase “little we see in Nature that is ours” is tricky, and can mean several, related things. We’ve become so absorbed in consumerism – in another world – that we no longer seem a part of nature. Alternatively, “Nature” can’t be “got” or “spent” – because it isn’t a commodity that is manufactured – so it doesn’t seem like it has anything to offer us. A “boon” is a reward, a benefit, or something for which to be thankful. “Sordid” means “base” or “vile.” The speaker is being sarcastic here, almost as if he were saying “wow it’s so great that we’ve handed over our hearts...not!”

### **Lines 5-8**

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

The poet elaborates on man’s alienation from nature, claiming that humanity is no longer susceptible to the influence of the “Sea,” the “winds,” and basically everything else in nature.

**Notes**

"Tune" is interesting. It can mean "out of tune," in the sense that we're out of touch with nature, but it also suggests something like "attuned." The sea isn't literally taking her shirt off here; the speaker is elegantly describing the ways in which ocean-tides are affected by the moon, or just how the sea appears to him in its relationship with the moon. The speaker describes the winds at rest; they are "sleeping flowers" that will howl when they wake up. Wait a minute, flowers? Howling? Weird.

"For" is more complicated than it looks. It can mean both that we're not in the right tune "for" the natural world, in the right frame of mind to "get it." It could also mean "because," as if "because of these things we're out of tune." The plot thickens...

**Lines 9-10**

It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

In some sonnets, including this one, important things happen in the ninth line; there is a shift or "turn" that moves the poem in another direction. While the speaker reiterates the claim he's been making all along—humanity and nature are alienated from one another—he also tells us how he wishes things were, at least for him, personally. He appeals to the Christian God (the capitalization means he has a specific, monotheistic deity in mind) and says he'd rather be a Pagan who was raised believing in some antiquated ("outworn"), primitive religion ("creed").

To wish to be a Pagan in 1807—when the poem was published – would be like saying, "I wish I could wear clothes or do things that were in fashion a thousand years ago." Wait a second, he'd rather be a Pagan than what? Than someone who isn't moved by nature? Seems like it. "Suckled" just means "nursed at a breast" or "nourished."

**Lines 11-12**

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

The speaker explains why he would rather be a Pagan. If he were, then he could look at the land in front of him and see something that wouldn't make him feel so lonely and sad ("forlorn").

A "lea" is a meadow or open-grassland. Wait a second, wasn't the speaker just telling us about "this sea"? How did we get to the meadow? Maybe he's standing in a meadow overlooking the sea. The speaker wants "glimpses" of something, but we don't know what; he suggests that if he were a pagan he would only see things in snatches, for a brief moment, in the blink of an eye. And this isn't even guaranteed; he says he "might" have "glimpses."

**Lines 13-14**

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

The speaker elaborates on those potential "glimpses." He says he might see Proteus coming out of the ocean or Triton blowing his horn. Proteus is a sea-God in Greek mythology. He had the ability to prophesy the future, but didn't like doing it. If someone grabbed a hold of him and tried to make him predict the future, he would change his shape and try to get away. The modern word "protean"—meaning variable or changing a lot—comes from his name.

Triton was a son of Poseidon, the Greek God of the sea. He had a conch shell that he blew into in order to excite or calm the waves. "Wreathed" means something like twisted, sinewy, having coils; the "wreathed horn" is a reference to Triton's conch shell.

### **8.3 Forms and Devices**

Notes

Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) set forth a manifesto of poetic insight that shook the nineteenth century poetic establishment. Decrying tradition and classicism for their own sake, the poet undertook to write poetry "in the real language of men" and to defend his new techniques as a more authentic response to the world at large.

Wordsworth and his fellow Romantics sought nothing less than the revitalization of poetry and literature in the lives of common men and women, not just the aristocracy, while at the same time hoping for a more prestigious place for himself in the arbitration of taste, virtue, and religion in the public square.

"The World Is Too Much with Us" exemplifies both the proud, buoyant spirit and the dark undertones of his endeavour. In the poem, Wordsworth simultaneously employs and flaunts the traditional form as it has come to him. The sonnet serves as a bridge between the arrant traditionalism in which he was nurtured and the emancipated imagination of a new age, an age in which "the spontaneous overflow of emotion" would define poetic achievement.

The first eight lines are constructed with the expected metric and rhyme schemes; as readers arrive at what appears to be a conventional octave-sestet structural split, they are struck by the abrupt shift in tone, marked by the caesura, and the auspicious launch into rhymed couplets. The latter device, the equivalent of a "jingle" in twentieth century advertising, jars the reader's poetic sensibilities and, further, undermines his or her confidence in interpreting the poem aright at first glance.

These conventions broken, the poet proceeds to navigate new thematic territory as well. Faithful to his self-confessed predilections for "common language," the diction of the sonnet is unpretentious, if graphically sensuous. The poet's ploy of depicting the pre-Christian worldview as a nursing mother to be suckled surely shocked its original audience. This rather indelicate juxtaposition of "Pagan creed" and, by implication, "Mother Church" foregrounds Wordsworth's—and, more commonly, the Romantics'—disdain for organized religion and what he regarded as its untoward effect upon the appreciation of nature as a source of spiritual enlightenment.

### **8.4 Themes and Meanings**

This sonnet comprises an apt summary of many of the themes Wordsworth pursued throughout his tumultuous career. Primarily, "The World Is Too Much with Us" is a poem about vision, about lines of sight, about the debris of history that prevents the observer from seeing through to the real meaning and purpose of human life.

Throughout the first eight lines of the sonnet, two competing worldviews are silently compared before the poet explicitly declares in line 9 his allegiance to a modified Paganism that preserves nature's autonomy and authority apart from human control or divine manipulation. In short, the poet seeks to divorce Christian vice from Pagan virtue and form a hybrid ethic that permits the soul to return to its spiritual moorings.

The poet's intellectual vista envisions a decadent West poised on utter industrialization and eventually ruin. The incipient "environmentalism" found in the sonnet undergirds most of Wordsworth's other works, especially his long narrative poem, *The Prelude* (published posthumously in 1850), and his verse drama, *The Borderers* (1842). Nature is conceptualized as a willing teacher, a personified, secularized "Holy Spirit," who will "guide us into all truth."

The "world" that is "too much with us" is the world as stylized, fixed, unmalleable—the world of a sovereign deity who has placed humankind in a cosmos of his and not their making. Echoed here, then, is the poet's rebellion against this fixedness. The sonnet is thus a

## Notes

call to arms, a rallying cry to cease “getting and spending” with the coinage of heaven and to turn to a “creed outworn” for sustenance and guidance.

In this, the sonnet reflects the poet’s quite explicit preoccupation with expressing the nature and consequences of self-consciousness for an appreciation of nature’s role in forming the human spirit. In commenting upon his poetics, Wordsworth offered that “the study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities.” In other words, whatever merits Christian civilization may have presented, its excesses breed the very behaviours and social conditions that cause its dissolution.

This sentiment is in line with the sonnet’s poetic form and theme, and with the poet’s own testimony about his life in the autobiographical work, *The Prelude*. Therein Wordsworth suggests that he had sought a rudder for the future by attaining a clear sense of his own past, and not merely the historian’s pseudo-objective reconstruction of the past.

That past, the past of each person, is available for introspection, and thus evaluation, in the poet’s view only to the extent that one breaks free of the “world” as a prison house. To regain “our powers,” people must get “in tune” with nature’s melodies. The alternative—from the perspective of the sonnet and the poet himself—is to reap captivity of spirit and poverty of soul. Hence, “The World Is Too Much with Us” is a prototypical Romantic anthem, impishly prodding readers to reconsider the basis of their transcendent faith and their despair at reclaiming nature for their own purposes.

## Tone

.....The tone is angry, modulated with sarcasm and seeming vengefulness. First, the poet scolds society for devoting all its energies to material enterprises and pleasures. While pampering their bodies, he says, people are starving their souls. He next announces sarcastically that he would rather be a pagan; at least then he could appreciate nature through different eyes and even see Proteus rising from the sea perhaps to wreak vengeance on complacent humankind.

## Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay

There’s more to a poem than meets the eye.

## Nature

“The World is Too Much with Us” is obsessed with nature; in fact, the central complaint of the poem is that people are so consumed by consumerism that they are no longer moved by nature. But there...

## The Senses

In a poem concerned with our inability to be moved by nature, it is no surprise that the senses are invoked on several occasions. The speaker suggests that our obsession with “getting and spending”...

## Feelings

Wordsworth is one of the Romantic poets, and they were always talking about their feelings. This poem is no exception, only the rhetoric is more subtle than usual. It is not only humanity’s inabilities...

**Death****Notes**

There aren't any overt references to death in the poem, but the speaker imagines humanity's alienation from nature as a kind of death. In addition, nature has become so alien to mankind that it is...

**Paganism and Mythology**

The speaker complains that people are no longer moved by the sea and the winds, and he tells us that he'd rather be a pagan. At least that way he would be able to see something in nature less depre...

**8.5 Meter***Petrarchan Sonnet in Iambic Pentameter*

"The World is Too Much with Us" is a sonnet written (mostly) in iambic pentameter. A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem, the origins of which are attributed to the great Italian poet Petrarch. There are two main types of sonnets. The Petrarchan sonnet is structured as an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines). The octave often proposes a problem or concern that the sestet resolves or otherwise engages. The ninth line—the first line of the sestet—marks a shift in the direction of the poem and is called the "turn" or the volta (Italian). While the rhyme scheme of the octave is ABBA ABBA, the rhyme scheme of the sestet is more flexible; two of the most common are CDCDCD and CDECDE.

The other major sonnet form is the Shakespearean, or English, sonnet; it also has fourteen lines, but is structured as a series of three quatrains (four lines each) and a concluding couplet (that's two lines right next to each other that rhyme). The Shakespearean sonnet is in iambic pentameter and follows the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

Wordsworth's sonnet is of the Petrarchan variety; its rhyme scheme is ABBA ABBA CDCDCD. In the Petrarchan sonnet there is a noticeable shift in the ninth line (the turn or volta mentioned above). In the ninth line of Wordsworth's poem, the speaker starts to express his wish to be a Pagan because he's sick of the way things are; it's getting him down.

For the most part, Wordsworth's poem is in iambic pentameter, which means that each line contains five (pent) feet or groups that contain an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable (in that order). Take line 10 as an example:

A Pagan suckled in a creed out-worn.

While there are a lot of iambs in the poem, there are also several types of beats that give the poem a sense of variety. Often times, Wordsworth will begin a line with a stressed syllable, followed by an unstressed syllable, as in the first word of line 2:

**Speaker Point of View**

Who is the speaker, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him?

The speaker in "The World is Too Much with Us" resembles a really smart, environmental activist guy you'd meet at some remote beach that very few people know about. Somehow, you and your friends have managed to find this untouched paradise, only to discover that this guy has beat you to it. You start talking to him; after about five minutes of chit-chat, he starts going on about the horrible air quality in the nearby metropolis and about how there is so much noise he can't even hear the Grateful Dead song that is always playing in his head. After complaining about the city, he remarks on how beautiful the ocean is and how sad it is that people care more about their iPods than nature; the ocean and the beach are peaceful and you

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haven't seen anything, he tells you, until you've seen the sea by moonlight or felt the gentle breeze that comes in at dusk.

As your new friend continues to talk, he gets more animated, but also a little sad. He exclaims, "I'd rather be a pagan living in the dark ages with no electricity, no music, and no cities because then the whole world would look just like this beach, unpolluted by mankind; and plus, I might get to see some weird mythological monsters that they drew pictures of in their caves." But there's something funny about this little speech; it almost sounds as if he's trying to convince himself that he really loves nature. Why would he want to see monsters coming out of the ocean? The only explanation you can come up with is that he isn't satisfied with nature just being nature; it has to be full of strange deities associated with mythology to meet his standards. Weird, especially coming from someone who's so into nature.

### **8.6 Settings**

"The World is Too Much with Us" takes place near the ocean somewhere; in fact, it seems a lot like a little speech somebody would give while sitting around a campfire on a remote beach. It's quiet, you can hear the waves coming in, and you can see the moon reflecting off the water because you're so far away from civilization that no street lights prevent you from seeing this natural miracle. In fact, it's one of those places that is so remote (you had to hike over some rough terrain to get here, and all the mosquito bites will be a lasting reminder of the lengths you went to find it) you almost forget about modern technology and start to think about what the world used to look like before it became overpopulated and canvassed with cities.

You've made a camp for the night in a nearby meadow—no way you're walking back through those woods at night—that commands a remarkable view of the sea. If the beach weren't so remote, this meadow, or "lea" as your British friend insists on calling it, would surely have been turned into a parking lot by now. The grass is really soft—"pleasant" is the right word—like nothing you've ever felt before. The comfort of your seat near the fire, coupled with the great view and the perfect weather, cause you to exclaim to yourself, "This is so incredible I would exchange television, electricity, and indoor plumbing if only I could live here."

The title "The World is Too Much with Us" sounds funny – we usually say "The world is too much for me." Funny-sounding things can often be interpreted in several ways, and this one is no exception. First and foremost, it describes the condition of industrialized society. The experience of the modern city, with all its people and shops, is overpowering; for it to be "too much with" means something like "it's so much I can't handle it." Just think of it as analogous to how you feel when you see a really bright flash and have to close your eyes, or when you scowl because you just bit into something that's way too sour.

Two other possible interpretations depend on "world" referring not to industrialized society but to the natural world itself. From this perspective, the title could mean something like "human beings are a burden on the earth," a parasite that upsets a natural balance. Alternatively, it could mean that the natural world is "too much" for us because we have a lot of other things to worry about, as in "I have things to buy and worrying about nature is just too much for me to deal with right now." All of these different meanings of the title are activated in the poem, which is obsessed with the different ways in which people are too busy for nature and no longer have the time or the ability to experience it.

### **8.7 Analysis**

"The World is Too Much with Us," by William Wordsworth, written between 1802 and 1804, is a Petrarchan sonnet lamenting the loss of nature to modern society. It is a Petrarchan sonnet

because it has fourteen lines; is written in iambic pentameter, that is five feet; written in iambs; a unstressed followed by a stressed syllable. It begins with two quatrains in the octave, first eight lines, rhyming ABBAABBA; the sestet, final six lines, rhymes CDCDCD; it has a volta in line eight; and the theme is about nature.

Wordsworth intended to highlight the fact that we receive nature in its abundance but see very little, and have given our hearts away. We need to get up and pay attention because we are out of tune with nature. "Great God," how could we do such a thing. Wordsworth highlights that information be subtly varying the meter. As well, the poet symbolizes nature in the past by suggesting he would rather be "A Pagan," which is pre-Christian. Nature itself is symbolized in Proteus and Triton. Proteus is the shape-changing herdsman of the sea; Triton, usually depicted blowing a conch shell, is a sea deity. As with much of Wordsworth's work, he sees deity in nature.

Although this sonnet is written in iambic pentameter, it does have eight variations. The variations are purposeful; to obtain the attention of the reader. In this case, the variations are in line two, the word "Getting" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line three, the word "Little" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line four, the word "given" is a trochee; a stressed and unstressed syllable; line seven, the phrase "And are up" is an anapest; an unstressed, unstressed and stressed syllable; line eight, the words "we are" and "out of" represent two trochees; a stressed and unstressed syllable, and "tune" is a single spondee; a single stressed syllable; line nine "Great God" is a spondee; a stressed and stressed syllable.

## Self Assessment

### Choose the correct option:

- Unlike society, Wordsworth does not see nature as a
 

(a) beauty	(b) commodity
(c) companion	(d) none of these
- Water has always been a symbol of
 

(a) new beginnings	(b) new endings
(c) new hopes	(d) none of these
- Triton was a son of Poseidon, the Greek God of the
 

(a) heavan	(b) hell
(c) sea	(d) none of these
- "The World is Too Much with Us" is obsessed with
 

(a) God	(b) nature
(c) humans	(d) none of these.

## 8.8 Summary

- Angrily, the speaker accuses the modern age of having lost its connection to nature and to everything meaningful: "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: / Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" He says that even when the sea "bares her bosom to the moon" and the winds howl, humanity is still out of tune, and looks on uncaringly at the spectacle of the storm. The speaker wishes that he were a pagan raised according to a different vision of the world, so that,



3. What are some poetic devices used in “The World is Too Much With Us” that enhance the meaning of the poem?
4. What is the difference between dramatic situation and theme in “The World is Too Much with Us” by William Wordsworth?
5. How would you characterise the poem’s level of diction?

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### **8.11 Further Readings**



Books

“The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Fourth Edition,” Damrosch, David, and Kevin J.H. Dettmar, General Editors, Volume 2A, “The Romantics and their Contemporaries,” Wolfson, Susan and Peter Manning, Long Man, New York, 2010.



Online links [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 9: "If" by Rudyard Kipling

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about Rudyard Kipling;
- Understand the poem "If";
- Discuss the devices and theme of the poem;
- Make analysis of the poem.

### Introduction

Rudyard Kipling's "If" is perhaps his most famous poem. Kipling composed the poem in 1909 while living in Great Britain. It was first published in 1910 in Kipling's collection of children's stories, *Rewards and Fairies*, as a companion piece to the story "Brother Square Toes," which is an account of George Washington and his presidency during the French Revolution. The placement of the didactic poem after "Brother Square Toes" in the collection serves to distill a specific lesson from the story for its young readers.

"If" attracted immediate nationwide attention in Britain, and it was quickly adopted as a popular anthem. In the *Kipling Journal*, CE Carrington relates Kipling's own words of subtle displeasure regarding the unexpected rampant popularity of the poem:

Among the verses in *Rewards* ... was one set called "If," which escaped from the book, and for a while ran about the world ... Once started, the mechanisation of the age made them snowball themselves in a way that startled me ... Twenty-seven of the Nations of the Earth translated them into their seven-and-twenty tongues, and printed them on every sort of fabric.

"If" is a didactic poem, a work meant to give instruction. In this case, "If" serves as an instruction in several specific traits of a good leader. Kipling offers this instruction not through listing specific characteristics, but by providing concrete illustrations of the complex actions a man should or should not take which would reflect these characteristics.

In modern times, "If" remains widely anthologised and is regarded as a popular classic of English literature, not necessarily for a display of artistry but for its familiarity and inspiration.

## 9.1 Introduction to Author

Rudyard Kipling was born on December 30, 1865 in then Bombay, India. He was educated in England but returned to India in 1882. In 1892, Kipling married Caroline Balestier and settled in Brattleboro, Vermont where he wrote *The Jungle Book* and "Gunga Din." Eventually becoming the highest paid writer in the world, Kipling was recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907. He died in 1936.

### Quotes

*"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."*

—Rudyard Kipling

### Early Years

Considered one of the great English writers, Joseph Rudyard Kipling was born on December 30, 1865, in Bombay (now called Mumbai), India. At the time of his birth, his parents, John and Alice, were recent arrivals in India. They had come, like so many of their countrymen, with plans to start new lives and to help the British government run the continent. The family lived well, and Kipling was especially close to his mother. His father, an artist, was the head of the Department of Architectural Sculpture at the Jeejeebhoy School of Art in Bombay.

For Kipling, India was a wondrous place. Along with his younger sister, Alice, he revelled in exploring the local markets with his nanny. He learned the language, and in this bustling city of Anglos, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews, Kipling fell in love with the country and its culture.

However, at the age of 6, Kipling's life was torn apart when his mother, wanting her son to receive a formal British education, sent him to Southsea, England, where he attended school and lived with a foster family named the Holloways.

These were hard years for Kipling. Mrs. Holloway was a brutal woman, who quickly grew to despise her young foster son. She beat and bullied Kipling, who also struggled to fit in at school. His only break from the Holloways came in December, when Kipling, who told nobody of his problems at school or with his foster parents, travelled to London, where he stayed with relatives for the month.

Kipling's solace came in books and stories. With few friends, he devoted himself to reading. He particularly adored the work of Daniel Defoe, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Wilkie Collins. When Mrs. Holloway took away his books, Kipling snuck around her, pretending to play in his room by moving furniture along the floor while he read.

By the age of 11, Kipling was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. A visitor to his home saw his condition and immediately contacted his mother, who rushed back to England and rescued her son from the Holloways. To help relax his mind, Alice took her son on an extended vacation and then placed him in a new school in Devon. There, Kipling flourished and discovered his talent for writing, eventually becoming editor of the school newspaper.

### Kipling as a Young Writer

In 1882, Kipling was told by his parents that they didn't have enough money to send him to college. Instead, they had him return to India. It was a powerful moment in the young writer's

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life. The sights and sounds, even the language, which he'd believed he'd forgotten, rushed back to him upon his arrival.

Kipling made his home with his parents in Lahore and, with his father's help, found a job with a local newspaper. The job offered Kipling a good excuse to discover his surroundings. Nighttime, especially, proved to be valuable for the young writer. Kipling was a man of two worlds, somebody who was accepted by both his British counterparts and the local population. Suffering from insomnia, he roamed the city streets and gained access to the brothels and opium dens that rarely opened their doors to common Englishmen. Kipling's experiences during this time formed the backbone for a series of stories he began to write and publish. They were eventually assembled into a collection of 40 short stories called *Plain Tales from the Hills*, which gained wide popularity in England.

In 1889, seven years after he had left England, Kipling returned to its shores in hopes of leveraging the modest amount of celebrity his book of short stories had earned him. In London, he met Wolcott Balestier, an American agent and publisher who quickly became one of Kipling's great friends and supporters. The two men grew incredibly close, and even travelled together to the United States, where Balestier introduced his fellow writer to his childhood home of Brattleboro, Vermont.

Around this time, Kipling's star power started to grow. In addition to *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling also published a second collection of short stories, *Wee Willie Winkie* (1888), and *American Notes* (1891), which chronicled his early impressions of America. In 1892, he also published his first major poetry success, *Barrack-Room Ballads*.

Kipling's friendship with Balestier changed the young writer's life. He soon got to know Balestier's family, in particular his sister, Carrie. The two appeared to be just friends, but during the Christmas holiday in 1891, Kipling, who had travelled back to India to see his family, received an urgent cable from Carrie. Wolcott had died suddenly of typhoid fever and Carrie needed Kipling to be with her.

Kipling rushed back to England, and within eight days of his return, the two married at a small ceremony, attended by American writer Henry James.

**Life in America**

Following their wedding, the Kiplings set off on an adventurous honeymoon that took them to Canada and then on to Japan. But like so much of Kipling's life, good fortune was accompanied by hard luck. During the Japanese leg of the journey, Kipling learned that the New Oriental Banking Corporation had failed. The Kiplings were broke.

Left only with what they had with them, the young couple decided to travel to Brattleboro, Vermont, where much of Carrie's family still resided. Kipling fell in love with life in the States, and the two decided to settle there. In the spring of 1891, the Kiplings purchased from Carrie's brother, Beatty, a piece of land just north of Brattleboro and had a large home constructed, which they called "The Naulahka."

Kipling seemed to adore his new life, which soon saw the Kiplings welcome their first child, a daughter named Josephine (born in 1893), and a second daughter, Elsie (born in 1896). A third child, John, was born in 1897, after the Kiplings had left America.

As a writer, too, Kipling flourished. His work during this time included *The Jungle Book* (1894), *The Naulahka: A Story of the West and East* (1892) and *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), among others. Kipling was delighted to be around children—a characteristic that was apparent in his writing. His tales enchanted boys and girls all over the English-speaking world. By the age of 32, Kipling was the highest-paid writer in the world.

But life again took a dramatic turn for the family when Kipling had a major falling out with Carrie's brother, Beatty. The two men quarrelled, and when Kipling made noise about taking his brother-in-law to court because of threats Beatty had made to his life, newspapers across America broadcast the spat on their front pages.

The gentle Kipling was embarrassed by the attention, and about how his celebrity had turned against him. As a result, he and his family left Vermont for a new life back in England.

### Family Tragedy

In the winter of 1899, Carrie, who was homesick, decided that the whole family needed to travel back to New York to see her mother. But the journey across the Atlantic was brutal, and New York was frigid. Both Kipling and young Josephine arrived in the States gravely, ill with pneumonia. For days, the world kept careful watch on the state of Kipling's health as newspapers reported on his condition. *The New York Times* reported a front-page story on his health.

Kipling did recover, but his beloved Josephine did not. The family waited until Kipling was strong enough to hear the news, and even then, Carrie could not bear to break it to him, asking his publisher, Frank Doubleday, to do so. To those who knew him, it was clear that Kipling never recovered from her death. He vowed never to return to America.

### Life in England

In 1902, the Kiplings bought a large estate in Sussex known as Bateman's. The property had been erected in 1634, and for the private Kiplings, it offered the kind of isolation they now cherished. With its lush gardens and classic details, Kipling revered the new home.

"Behold us," he wrote in November 1902, "lawful owners of a grey stone, lichened house—A.D. 1634 over the door—beamed, paneled, with old oak staircase and all untouched and unfaked."

Here, Kipling found some of the happiness he thought he had forever lost, following the death of Josephine. He was dedicated as ever to his writing, something Carrie helped ensure. Adopting the role of the head of the household, she held reporters at bay when they came calling and was the person in the family who issued directions to both staff and children.

Kipling's books during his years at Bateman's included *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *Debts and Credits* (1926), *Thy Servant a Dog* (1930) and *Limits and Renewals* (1932).

The same year he purchased Bateman's, Kipling published his *Just So Stories*, which were greeted with wide acclaim. The book itself was in part a tribute to his late daughter, for whom Kipling had originally crafted the stories as he put her to bed.

The book's name had in fact come from Josephine, who told her father he had to repeat each tale as he always had, or "just so," as Josephine often said.

As much of Europe braced for war with Germany, Kipling proved to be an ardent supporter of the fight. In 1915, he even travelled to France to report on the war from the trenches. He also encouraged his son John to enlist. Since Josephine's death, Kipling and his son had grown tremendously close. It was for John that Kipling wrote one of his famous poems, "If."

Wanting to help his son enlist, Kipling drove John to several different military recruiters. But plagued with the same eyesight problems his father had, John was repeatedly turned down. Finally, Kipling made use of his connections and managed to get John enlisted with the Irish Guard as a second lieutenant.

In October of 1915, the Kiplings received word that John had gone missing in France. The news devastated the couple. Kipling, perhaps feeling guilty about his push to make his son

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a soldier, set off for France to find John. But nothing ever came of the search, and John's body was never recovered. A distraught and drained Kipling returned to England to once again mourn the loss of another child.

**Final Years**

While the last two decades continued to see Kipling write, he never again returned to the bright, cheery children's tales he had once so delighted in crafting. Health issues eventually caught up to both Kipling and Carrie, the result of age, but also of grief.

Over his last few years, Kipling suffered from a painful ulcer, which eventually took his life on January 18, 1936. Kipling's ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey in Poets' Corner next to the graves of Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens.

**9.2 "If"**

**"If"**

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too:  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;  
If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same:  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;  
If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss:  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
 Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,  
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
 If all men count with you, but none too much:  
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
 And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

**Explanation:** The first stanza touches on several character traits: self-confidence, courage, patience and honesty. His words "If you can keep your head," "If you can trust yourself," and "If you can wait and not be tired by waiting" show those traits. If these traits are absent then they would be the great obstacles for the leader.

These are as follows:-

- irrationality ("keep your head...")
- doubt in oneself ("trust yourself")
- impatience ("wait and not be tired by waiting")
- petty behaviour ("don't deal in lies")
- immoderation ("don't look too good...")

The second stanza deals with what you may do for the public, yet not have personal reasons or gain behind it. You can face trouble as easily as you face success, and you can take something that broke—even though you worked so hard for it—you can rebuild it all over again. That shows a hard work ethic. Thus from this stanza, the hindrances which have to be overcome are as follows:-

- being unrealistic ("not make dreams your master")
- postponing ("not make thoughts your aim")
- overreacting ("meet with triumph and disaster")
- weakness (be able to withstand misfortune)

The third stanza speaks of taking everything you've worked for and risk it all, and then lose it and have to start again. The key to that is not telling anyone of your loss. That shows integrity. That's in the line "And lose, and start again at your beginnings And never breath a word about your loss." Then it says you must take all you have within you, and when you are at your lowest point, you still have to have the will to try. This shows perseverance. Therefore this stanza shows following obstacles faced by a leader to become a man in the aggressive world:

- worry and fear ("risk...and lose and start again")
- being self-serving ("never breathe a word" about loss)
- quitting ("hold on when there is nothing in you")

The final stanza speaks of you being able to work with anyone and not change who you are or what you stand for. This poem says that if you can avoid all of these things, the world is yours and you can be truly called a Man. "Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, and—which is more—you'll be a Man my son!". Thus finally, obstacles which have to be removed for the survival in this pathetic world :

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- pride and arrogance (“keep virtue and common touch”)
- dependency (“If all men count with you, but none too much”)
- wasting time (“If you can fill the unforgiving minute”)

If he is able to overcome all the above obstacles, the poet is sure, he will be the master of this Earth and achieve everything in life. Moreover, he will, then, be able to earn the proud privilege of being called “MAN”.

### **9.3 Analysis**

Rudyard Kipling created a solution to life’s problems in his clever piece ‘IF’. Written to his son with tender care, he offers a variety of commonsensical advice that is practical which stands the test of time.

These wise words can be applied even now, almost a hundred years after they were penned, and by a greater audience than the one originally intended. The skillful manner in which the poem is written allows any reader to fall under the paternal spell created by Kipling.

His words feel as if one were embraced by understanding and concern. He lulls by simple repetition “If” and ties it up in 8 line stanzas; it makes for an easy-to-read, thought provoking piece. Because of Kipling’s style, many who typically dislike poetry find they are intrigued and pleasantly surprised after they read it.

The insight offered by the poet can be summarized in brief as: remain humble, avoid extremes, and enjoy the joys of life at every opportunity. Rise above the fray and find goodness in even the darkest circumstance! He wants to inspire and enlighten, he wants for the reader to see the possibilities, and he asks the reader to ponder the best of the best within that soul. After a hundred reads, new meanings and philosophies could be borne from this sage list of attributes given.

He sets the bar high when he defines what it means to him to be a man’, or what could be interpreted to an adult versus a child. It is about maturation and throwing aside the bad habits children often possess. The poet gives us a measure of how to see the difference between the selfishness of youth and the aspirations of adulthood.

This poem is a beautiful, personal goal for thoughtful readers and those who wish to be better people. An inspirational pat on the back, it acts as a light in a window on a dark night. Kipling, better known for his fictional works rather than his poetic endeavours, has written one the best poems ever penned, showing to all who have read it that his heart was, indeed, that of a poet.

I have to start off by saying that this is my favourite poem of all time! I think if we could strive to do even half the things he mentions in the poem, we would be far better people. There are so many lessons to be learned from the poem. Let’s analyse them in the hopes that we can come close to meeting their expectations.

The first section of the poem, in my opinion, is about being true to one’s self. There are always going to be people who think differently than you, or misjudge you for one reason or another. I think the poem is saying that we need to rise above this, and do what we know is right and just. Don’t let others provoke you into actions you know are wrong. Know the value of your self worth, but don’t become conceited.

The second section is about overcoming obstacles that get in your path, whether by others, or of your own making. Follow your dreams, but be realistic in the approach. I believe this section is teaching perseverance, to keep going, even when things get rough.

I believe that the most important lesson in the third section is never to give up! It is truly hard to get back up after life has beaten you into the ground. It can be done though, if we always

believe in ourselves and know that we did it once so we can do it again! This is a very important lesson, and one that we all should take to heart. Kipling knew how hard life can sometimes be, and I think this section of the poem is full of hope for all of us.

The last section has two important lessons. First, that we are all equal. Don't put yourself above anyone else, but know that you are just as good as everyone else. There are things to be admired in almost everyone if you look hard enough. The second lesson I take from this section, is to never waste time. Make every minute of every day count!

These are certainly lofty standards, but one's that we should try our best to attain. Read the poem, and really pay attention to what it's saying. See whether you are doing all of the positive things he describes. If not, work on it. I believe this poem is a road map to life, and we just have to learn to read the signs.

## **9.4 Poetic Devices in the Poem**

The three most common poetic devices that are presented in this poem are repetition, personification, and alliteration. Repetition is the repeated use of a word or phrase for a certain effect. In this poem, Kipling uses repetition with the word "you" throughout the entire poem to emphasize how important "you" is.

Personification is when a non human thing is given human qualities; there are three examples of personification here. The first is in Stanza 2, when he states,

"...make dreams your master..." (line 9)

The second example of personification also occurs in Stanza 2 when Kipling says,

"If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same."  
(lines 11–12)

The final example of personification is in Stanza 3, when Kipling states,

"If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew To serve your turn long after they are gone"  
(lines 21–22)

Finally, alliteration is the repetition of the consonant sound at the beginning of consecutive words. There are at least two examples of this. The first occurs in stanza 2:

"with wornout tools" (line 16)

And the second example is from stanza 4 and says:

"sixty seconds" (line 30)

"If" is written in iambic pentameter, a form readers of Shakespeare will be familiar with, as the bard most often wrote in this style. Iambic pentameter consists of lines of five "feet" (two-syllable units) formed from an initial unstressed syllable and a second stressed syllable, as in the word "because." The eleven-syllable lines each end with an extra, unstressed syllable.

The poem is also written in four stanzas of eight rhyming lines, according to the pattern abab cdcd. "If" takes its name from the repetition of the word "if" at the start of the "a" and "c" lines, each of which comprise eleven syllables. The "b" and "d" lines each contain ten syllables.

## **9.5 Theme**

The poem categorizes all the qualities that combine to make a man better than his fellow being. The poem is idealistic in nature because it is rare for a person to possess qualities like unlimited patience, tolerance and humanity when others hate you or misinterpret your words for their selfish gains. A man who is successful is mastering all the qualities listed in the poem, can call himself worthy of being a man. The poem is didactic in tone and content.

## Self Assessment

1. Why is the poem named "If"?
2. Is there a pattern in the poem If by Rudyard Kipling?
3. What was Rudyard Kipling's first poem?
4. Why did Rudyard Kipling write the poem "If"?

### 9.6 Summary

- "If—" is a poem written in 1895 by British Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling. It was first published in the "Brother Square Toes" chapter of Rewards and Fairies, Kipling's 1910 collection of short stories and poems. Like William Ernest Henley's "Invictus", it is a memorable evocation of Victorian stoicism, self-control and the "stiff upper lip" that popular culture has made into a traditional British virtue. Its status is confirmed both by the number of parodies it has inspired, and the widespread popularity it still enjoys amongst Britons. It is often voted Britain's favourite poem.
- The poem was printed, framed and fixed to the wall in front of the study desk in the officer cadets cabins at the National Defence Academy (NDA) at Pune, India. The poem's lines, "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / and treat those two impostors just the same" is written on the wall of the Centre Court players' entrance at the British tennis tournament Wimbledon.
- The poem "If" is inspirational motivational and a set of rules for grown up living. Kipling's "If" contains mottos and maxims for life and the poem is also a blueprint for personal integrity and self development. It is perhaps more relevant today than when Kipling wrote it as an ethos and personal philosophy!
- The first stanza of "If" illustrates the practice of self-confidence and expresses that, in being confident, the reader must have the courage to face unpopularity and disagreement. This stanza also, however, advises against a self-confidence that does not allow for the consideration of opposing ideas. In exhorting the reader to both ignore doubt and make allowance for doubt (lines 3 and 4), Kipling creates a paradox (the combination of mutually exclusive ideas that, while seemingly contradictory, serve to make a point in their contradiction) that is characteristic of the tone of the entire poem.
- Line 5 advises patience, line 6 advises honesty, and line 7 advises fortitude of character. These three lines, along with the first four lines of the poem, share a common thread: they provide instruction in the maintenance of righteous behaviour in the face of unrighteousness. However, in line 8, Kipling is quick to qualify.

### 9.7 Keywords

- Triumph and Disaster* : Victory, and an event that causes great damage.
- Knaves* : An old-fashioned word for dishonest men.
- Build 'em up* : Build them up; rebuild the broken parts of your life.
- Sinew* : A part of your body that connects a muscle to a bone; in a literary meaning, something that gives strength or support.

## 9.8 Review Questions

Notes

1. Who is referred to in the stanza? State the background of the writing of the poem 'If'.
2. What is the mood of this poem. Why?
3. Who do you think the poet is talking to and why?
4. Do you agree with the speaker? Explain
5. What does "if you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same" mean?

## Answers: Self Assessment

1. The poem is named "If-" because every sentence of this poem begins with the word "if".
2. Yes! It has a very set poem pattern.
3. It was either 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' or a fiction book called 'Plain Tales from the Hills'. Its still sketchy on which one is right but it is one of these.
4. Because he was bored that day and just remembered an inspirational speech his father gave him, and so he wrote it from that.

## 9.9 Further Readings



Books

Jaume Pujol-Galceran; Manel Serras (2008-08-14). *Rafael Nadal: Maître sur terre*. Editions Prolongations. p. 6. ISBN 978-2-916400-39-6.

René Stauffer (2007-06-25). *The Roger Federer Story: Quest for Perfection*. New Chapter Press. p. 104. ISBN 978-0-942257-39-7.

"Ayn Rand biography". *Jewish Women in America*. Jewish Virtual Library. Retrieved 6 September 2012.

"Crocker, Petraeus Address Report on Iraq 'Progress'". The Washington Post. 12 September 2007. Retrieved 6 September 2012.

"Rudyard Kipling Readings by Ralph Fiennes". Allmusic. Retrieved 11 November 2012.

"Boardwalk Empire Watch: Season 3, Episode 11 - Two Imposters". Cinema Blend.com. Retrieved 29 November 2012.



Online links [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 10: Indian Weavers by Sarojini Naidu

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Enjoy the rhythm of the poem;
- Discover the special use of language in poetry;
- Use comparisons for effective writing;
- Identify the use of words to create visual images.

### Introduction

Poetry is a pleasure-giving medium. This medium is handled by different poets in the world. Most of the poets in India present their poetry in their mother tongue only. Those who present poetry in languages other than their own have not succeeded so well as Sarojini Naidu. There are not many in India who have written poetry in English. Among them, Sarojini Naidu stands first. Her poems are praised not only in India, but all over the world. Though she has written poems on religion, country, women's freedom, etc., her poems on nature occupy the first place in her poetry. Even in sorrow, her nature poems glow with a touch of her suffering. To strengthen this idea, a detailed discussion is undertaken in this work.

#### 10.1 Introduction to Author

Sarojini Naidu, also known by the sobriquet The Nightingale of India, was a child prodigy, Indian independence activist and poet. Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the Governor of Uttar Pradesh state. She was a great patriot, politician, orator and administrator. Of all the famous women of India, Mrs. Sarojinidevi Naidu's name is at the top. Not only that, but she was truly one of the jewels of the world. Being one of the most famous heroines of the 20th century, her birthday is celebrated as "Women's Day."

## Early Life

## Notes

She was born in Hyderabad. Sarojini Chattopadhyay, later Naidu belonged to a Bengali family of Kulin Brahmins. But her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyay, after receiving a doctor of science degree from Edinburgh University, settled in Hyderabad State, where he founded and administered the Hyderabad College, which later became the Nizam's College in Hyderabad. Sarojini Naidu's mother Barada Sundari Devi or baji was a poetess. She used to write poetry in Bengali. Sarojini Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. One of her brothers Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor.

Sarojini Naidu was a brilliant student. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. At the age of twelve, Sarojini Naidu attained national fame when she topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Her father wanted her to become a mathematician or scientist but Sarojini Naidu was interested in poetry. Once she was working on an algebra problem. When she couldn't find the solution she decided to take a break, and in the same book she wrote her first inspired poetry. She got so enthused by this that she wrote "The Lady of the Lake", a poem 1300 lines long. When her father saw that she was more interested in poetry than mathematics or science, he decided to encourage her. With her father's support, she wrote the play "Maher Muneer" in the Persian language. Dr. Chattopadhyay distributed some copies among his friends and sent one copy to the Nizam of Hyderabad. Reading a beautiful play written by a young girl, the Nizam was very impressed. The college gave her a scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 16 she got admitted to King's College of England.

## England

At the age of 16, she travelled to England to study first at King's College London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. There she met famous laureates of her time such as Arthur Symons and Edmond Gosse. It was Gosse who convinced Sarojini to stick to Indian themes—India's great mountains, rivers, temples, social milieu, etc. to express her poetry. She depicted contemporary Indian life and events. Her collections "The golden threshold (1905)", "The bird of time (1912)", and "The broken wing (1912)" attracted huge Indian and English readership.

## Love and Marry

During her stay in England, Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a non-Brahmin and a doctor by profession, and fell in love with him. After finishing her studies at the age of 19, she got married to him during the time when inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Her father was a progressive thinking person, and he did not care what others said. Her marriage was a very happy one.

## Work

Her major contribution was also in the field of poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Soon she got recognition as the "Bul Bule Hind" when her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title Golden Threshold. After that, she published two other collections of poems—The Bird of Time and The Broken Wings. In 1918, Feast of Youth was published. Later, The Magic Tree, The Wizard Mask and A Treasury of Poems were published. Maharshee Arvind, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands of admirers of her work. Her poems had English words, but an Indian soul.

## Politics

One day she met Shree Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He said to her to use her poetry and her beautiful words to rejuvenate the spirit of Independence in the hearts of villagers. He asked her to use her talent to free Mother India.

**Notes**

Then in 1916, she met Mahatma Gandhi, and she totally directed her energy to the fight for freedom. She would roam around the country like a general of the army and pour enthusiasm among the hearts of Indians. The independence of India became the heart and soul of her work.

She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She travelled from state to state, city to city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India.

In 1925, she chaired the summit of Congress in Kanpur. In 1928, she came to the USA with the message of the non-violence movement from Gandhiji. When in 1930, Gandhiji was arrested for a protest, she took the helms of his movement. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Summit, along with Gandhiji and Pundit Malaviyaji. In 1942, she was arrested during the "Quit India" protest and stayed in jail for 21 months with Gandhiji.

After independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first woman governor in India.

**Sarojini Naidu's Works:**

The Golden Threshold, published in the United Kingdom, 1905.

The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring, published in London, 1912.

The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring, including "The Gift of India" (first read in public in 1915), 1917.

Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity, 1916.

The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India, Allahabad: Kitabistan, posthumously published, 1943.

The Feather of the Dawn, posthumously published, edited by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu, 1961.

**10.2 Indian Weavers**

We cannot think of life without clothes. They are responsible for our personality and our image in society. We wear clothes of different fabrics in different seasons: soft cotton in summer, thick, warm woollens in winters and silk on special occasions. Yet, do we ever think about those people who weave the fabrics for us? Here is a tribute to all weavers who produce fabric for different occasions.

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day,  
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .  
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,  
We weave the robes of a new-born child.  
Weavers, weaving at fall of night,  
Why do you weave a garment so bright? . . .  
Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,  
We weave the marriage-veils of a queen.  
Weavers, weaving solemn and still,  
What do you weave in the moonlight chill? . . .  
White as a feather and white as a cloud,  
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

### 10.3 Explanation

Notes

#### PART 1 (Stanza I)

*Weavers, weaving at break of day ..... a new-born child.*

Have you ever noticed the colours we choose for a new born baby's clothes? Why do you think we choose these colours? In the first stanza the poet, Sarojini Naidu describes weavers weaving cloth in the early morning. She asks the weavers why they are weaving a cloth of a particular colour. They say that the cloth that they are weaving is the colour of a halcyon's wings. It is beautiful and blue because it will be used for making the clothes of a newly born child.

#### PART 2 (Stanza II)

*Weavers, weaving at fall of night ..... veils of a queen*

In this stanza the poet asks the weavers why they are weaving a cloth late in the evening. She asks why it is so bright and colourful. The weavers tell her that the cloth is brightly and richly coloured like the feathers of a peacock because they are weaving it for a queen. The queen will use this cloth to make her marriage veil.

#### PART 3 (Stanza III)

*Weavers, weaving solemn and still ..... man's funeral shroud.*

You must have noticed people wearing white clothes to visit a friend who has lost a loved one. Why do we not wear bright clothes on such occasions? In the above stanza the poet asks the weavers what they are weaving late in the night. The weavers reply that they are weaving a thin white cloth to cover a dead body.

### Self Assessment

Complete the following summary of the poem by filling in each blank with words from the box below:

shroud	cheerful/gay	weavers	peacock	clouds	wedding dress
morning	night	feather	cloth	serious	blue

The narrator notices \_\_\_\_\_ busy weaving \_\_\_\_\_.

They do this from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. She wonders why they are weaving such a \_\_\_\_\_ fabric, early in the morning. The weavers tell her that they are weaving the \_\_\_\_\_ cloth for a newborn baby.

At the fall of \_\_\_\_\_ they are busy weaving a \_\_\_\_\_ for the queen. The colour of that cloth is similar to the feathers of a \_\_\_\_\_. The weavers are in a \_\_\_\_\_ mood late at night as they are weaving cloth for a dead man's \_\_\_\_\_. It is white like a \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_. In short, they weave for different occasions in a person's life.

### 10.4 Summary

- The poem describes the different stages of Human life, i.e. Birth, Marriage and Death. In another way it tells about the life-cycle of a human being which includes Childhood,

**Notes**

Youth and Old Age. The poetess asks three questions to Weavers and their answers are related to life.

- The poetess says that Weavers started their work in early morning and they make bright garments in blue colour like the wings of the Kingfisher. When the poetess asks the question, Weavers tell her that they are weaving the garment of a new born Child. It relates to the childhood of a person. The childhood is more attractive like blue colour.
- The night time the Weavers weave attractive garments in purple and green colour like the plumes of a peacock. When the poetess asks the question, they tell that it's a marriage veil of a Queen. This suggests the youth of a human being. Youth is the golden time of a life, energetic, enjoyable and attractive. So that's why here the expression 'The plumes of a peacock, purple and green' is used.
- In the moonlight night the Weaver's attitudes change, they become serious and calm. The garment is white colour like feather and cloud. They are weaving the cloths of a Dead man's funeral shroud. It clearly indicates the old age of a person. The white colour feather and cloud carry to the statement that the life has come to an end, feather has come out from the wing and now it has no use and the cloud is moving. After few minutes we can't see the cloud in the actual place.

**Sarojini Naidu** (1879–1949) was a freedom fighter and poet. Her poems depict the life and events of India of her time, and are read in India and abroad.

### 10.5 Keywords

**Words expressing happy feelings:**

- Glad* : Happy and pleased about something.
- Delighted* : Very happy, especially because something good has happened.
- Excited* : Very happy and enthusiastic because something good is going to happen, especially when this makes you unable to relax.
- Joyous* : Causing happy feelings
- Cheerful* : Behaving in a happy friendly way.
- Jubilant* : Extremely happy because something good has happened
- Thrilled* : Very pleased and excited

**Words expressing sad feelings:**

- Sad* : Feeling unhappy, especially because something bad has happened.
- Depressed* : If you are depressed, you feel very unhappy
- unpleasant* : Situation that you feel you cannot change.
- Gloomy* : Feeling sad and without hope.
- Dejected* : Someone who is dejected has lost all his hope or enthusiasm, especially because he has failed at something.
- Downcast* : Sad or upset

## 10.6 Review Questions

Notes

1. Which stage of life does the poet refer to in the first stanza?
2. Describe the type of cloth woven by the weavers, as mentioned in the first stanza.
3. Do you think there is a specific reason why the weavers have woven the marriage veils of the queen in purple colour?
4. Why are the weavers described as 'solemn and still' in the third stanza?
5. What is the significance of the white colour of a shroud?
6. The poem refers to three different stages of a person's life. What is typical of each of these stages?
7. Do you think that the weavers are hardworking people?
8. Explain the following expressions:
  - (a) a halcyon wild
  - (b) fall of night
  - (c) funeral shroud

## Answers: Self Assessment

weavers, cloth, morning, night, cheerful/gay, blue, night,  
wedding dress, peacock, serious, shroud, feather, clouds.

## 10.7 Further Readings



Books

"The Biography of Sarojini Naidu". Poem Hunter. Naravane, Vishwanath S. (1996). *Sarojini Naidu : An introduction to her life, work and poetry* ([Reprinted] ed.). New Delhi: Orient Longman..

"Indian Weavers". Poem Hunter. <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/indian-weavers/> . Retrieved 25 March 2012.

"About Sarojini Naidu". *Sarojini Naidu Government Girls Postgraduate (Autonomous) College Website*. Centre for Research and Industrial Staff Performance.



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Notes

## Unit 11: Where the Mind is Without Fear

### By Rabindranath Tagore

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#### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about Rabindranath Tagore;
- Enjoy the rhythm of the poem;
- Discover the special use of language in poetry;
- Use comparisons for effective writing;
- Identify the use of words to create visual images.

#### Introduction

If you had been schooled in India, you could have possibly read this in some English textbook or the other. I have always been captivated by the simplicity and economy of this poem; how, through exquisite imagery, Tagore expresses such profound thoughts. If you find that it reads more like a prayer chant from a religious book, you won't be far from the truth: the original Bengali poem which Tagore himself translated as above, was titled "Prayer". Though this poem was chosen because today is the 52nd anniversary of India's independence, it is really a plea, not for the political independence that was being sought early this century when it was written, but for freedom from parochialness and dogma, a prayer that is perhaps as relevant today as it was then. Maybe human nature itself is such that it always turns once-refreshing paradigms into stale tradition, forcing a Tagore in every generation to thus complain. This poem is from Gitanjali, lit. Offering of Songs, published in English in 1910.

## 11.1 Biography

Notes

Rabindranath Tagore was the first Asian to become Nobel laureate when he won Nobel Prize for his collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, in 1913. He was awarded Knighthood by the British King George V. He established Viswabharati University; two songs composed by him, viz, *Jana Gana Mana* and *Amar Shonar Bangla* are now the National Anthems of India and Bangladesh respectively.

Rabindranath Tagore was an icon of Indian culture. He was a poet, philosopher, musician, writer, and educationist. He was popularly called Gurudev and his songs were popularly known as Rabindrasangeet.

Rabindranath Tagore was born on May 7, 1861 in a wealthy Brahmin family in then Calcutta. He was the ninth son of Debendranath and Sarada Devi. His grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore was a rich landlord and social reformer. Rabindranath Tagore had his initial education in Oriental Seminary School. But he did not like the conventional education and started studying at home under several teachers. After undergoing his *upanayan* (coming-of-age) rite at the age of eleven, Tagore and his father left Calcutta in 1873 to tour India for several months, visiting his father's Santiniketan estate and Amritsar before reaching the Himalayan hill station of Dalhousie. There, Tagore read biographies, studied history, astronomy, modern science, and Sanskrit, and examined the classical poetry of Kalidasa.

In 1874, Tagore's poem *Abhilaash* (Desire) was published anonymously in a magazine called *Tattobodhini*. Tagore's mother Sarada Devi expired in 1875. Rabindranath's first book of poems, *Kabi Kahini* ( tale of a poet ) was published in 1878. In the same year Tagore sailed to England with his elder brother Satyandranath to study law. But he returned to India in 1880 and started his career as poet and writer. In 1883, Rabindranath Tagore married Mrinalini Devi Raichaudhuri, with whom he had two sons and three daughters.

In 1884, Tagore wrote a collection of poems *Kori-o-Komol* (*Sharp and Flats*). He also wrote dramas - *Raja-o-Rani* ( *King and Queen*) and *Visarjan* (*Sacrifice*). In 1890, Rabindranath Tagore moved to Shilaidaha (now in Bangladesh) to look after the family estate. Between 1893 and 1900 Tagore wrote seven volumes of poetry, which included *Sonar Tari* (*The Golden Boat*) and *Khanika*. In 1901, Rabindranath Tagore became the editor of the magazine *Bangadarshan*. He established Bolpur Bramhacharyaashram at Shantiniketan, a school based on the pattern of old Indian Ashrama. In 1902, his wife Mrinalini died. Tagore composed *Smaran* (*In Memoriam*), a collection of poems, dedicated to his wife.

In 1905, Lord Curzon decided to divide Bengal into two parts. Rabindranath Tagore strongly protested against this decision. Tagore wrote a number of national songs and attended protest meetings. He introduced the Rakhibandhan ceremony, symbolising the underlying unity of undivided Bengal.

In 1909, Rabindranath Tagore started writing *Gitanjali*. In 1912, Tagore went to Europe for the second time. On the journey to London he translated some of his poems/songs from *Gitanjali* to English. He met William Rothenstein, a noted British painter, in London. Rothenstein was impressed by the poems, made copies and gave to Yeats and other English poets. Yeats was enthralled. He later wrote the introduction to *Gitanjali* when it was published in September 1912 in a limited edition by the India Society in London. Rabindranath Tagore was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali*. In 1915 he was knighted by the British King George V.

**Notes**

In 1919, following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Tagore renounced his Knighthood. He was a supporter of Gandhiji but he stayed out of politics. He was opposed to nationalism and militarism as a matter of principle, and instead promoted spiritual values and the creation of a new world culture founded in multi-culturalism, diversity and tolerance. Unable to gain ideological support to his views, he retired into relative solitude. Between the years 1916 and 1934 he travelled widely.

In 1921, Rabindranath Tagore established Viswabharati University. He gave all his money from Nobel Prize and royalty from his books to this University. Tagore was not only a creative genius, but also quite knowledgeable of Western culture, especially Western poetry and science. Tagore had a good grasp of modern - post-Newtonian - physics, and was well able to hold his own in a debate with Einstein in 1930 on the newly emerging principles of quantum mechanics and chaos. His meetings and tape recorded conversations with his contemporaries such as Albert Einstein and H.G. Wells, epitomize his brilliance.

In 1940 Oxford University arranged a special ceremony in Santiniketan and awarded Rabindranath Tagore with Doctorate Of Literature. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore passed away on August 7, 1941 in his ancestral home in Calcutta.

## **11.2 Where the Mind is Without Fear**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

### **Explanations**

This poem was written when the British ruled our country. We were slaves to a foreign power. Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian nationalist and visionary wanted India to awaken to a bright dawn of freedom—freedom from slavery and our own mental chains. **These lines have been taken from the poem “Where the Mind is without Fear” by “Rabindranath Tagore”.** The poet prays to God that his country India should be a heaven of freedom. The poet prays to God that there should be an atmosphere of fearlessness.

Knowledge should be free for all. The country men should not be divided over caste and creed. People of the country should speak the truth and be God blessed to have a perfect life. They should not get tired of working. The poet prays to God that Indians should be logical & progressive in thoughts & actions. They should have the power to reason out the bad and useless customs. Only God can help by guiding the people. God should make India a paradise on earth.

### 11.3 Central Idea

Notes

This poem is a reflection of the poet's good and ideal nature. He has utmost faith in God. He prays to God with all his heart that He should guide the countrymen to work hard, speak the truth, be forward and logical in approach. Rabindranath Tagore aspires to see the country and his people to be in peace and prosper. He loves his country a lot and wishes for its welfare.

### 11.4 Theme

When we pray, if we pray for riches, certainly we are very poor. If we pray for health, we are then certainly sick. And if we pray for freedom, we are in shackles, bondage and our hands and feet are fettered. Rabindranath Tagore wrote his poem Where The Mind Is Without Fear in the first decade of the Twentieth century. It is the 35th song in his famous book Geethanjali which was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. He wrote this poem during the peak hours of the cruel and brutal British Rule in India. It is his Utopia, in a sense, in which he prays to God to let his country awake to a blissful heaven of freedom that is his dream. The distance between his dream and the real state of affairs in his country is far, and he skilfully brings to world's attention the state into which his great nation has been fell into by the mighty British Empire. He does this without offending anyone and as is expected from an England-educated noble genius. As an aftermath of the second world war and due to the severeness of the Indian Independence Movement, the British however were forced to leave India during 1947. But 6 years earlier, Tagore had died without seeing a free India. In the present times, this poem serves a dual purpose. It unveils the horrible downtrodden position to which his country and its heritage was brought to by Britain. At the same time it is a scale to measure whether India has progressed any after half a century of her independence.

By describing his visions of the characteristics of a glorious country, he emphasises the pitiful plight of his native land. He prays for a heaven of freedom, to denote the hell of submission and slavery prevailing then. People cannot express themselves fearlessly. The Nation's head is forced to be held low and stooping. Knowledge is not free. The Nation is broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, divided into isolated segments by geographical and politically induced barriers. It is true that Lord Curson's cunning partition in 1905 of his native Bengal into Muslim and Hindu Bengals as part of the notorious policy of Divide and Rule heart-broke and frustrated the poet, the strong emotions emanating from which are reflected here. It is relevant to note that Tagore was a dedicated and committed national leader too.

The poet then denotes that spoken words no more come out from the depth of truth, the meaning of which anyone can guess. The ancient stream of reason which once flowed clear and unhampered through the ages has now lost it's way into the desert sand of Unindian dead habits. A God-fearing nation has now become captainless and the once-ever widening thought and action of a mighty people, have stuck where it has been decades back. So he prays to God to raise his country into that heaven of freedom where everything is opposite. Even though disguisedly pungent, this poem contains exquisite music as was usual with all Tagore songs.

### 11.5 Critical Appreciation

Rabindranath Tagore's writing is highly imagistic, deeply religious and imbibed with his love of nature and his homeland. Rabindranath Tagore's poem, '**Where the Mind is Without Fear**' included in the volume called *Naibedya*, later published in English 'Gitanjali' is a prayer to a universal father-figure, presumably, God to elevate his country into a free land. Here Tagore defines Freedom as a fundamental system of reasoning of a sovereign state of mind, established

**Notes**

or accepted as a guide for governing the man in a nutshell. A freedom fixes the limits and defines the relations of the moral, ethical and powers of the state of mind, thus setting up the basis for life.

The first line of the poem is one of the most significant sub clauses which goes to build up the poem. The 'World of Freedom', which Tagore envisions for his countrymen, can only be attained if we possess a fearless mind. Only a fearless mind can hold its head upright. So, to attain true freedom one has to have a mind which is 'Without fear'. Thus, the poet wishes to be awakened to a heaven where the mind can work fearlessly and the spirit can hold its head high and again its knowledge is crystal clear reasoning:

*"Where the mind is without fear*

*and the head is held high;*

*Where knowledge is free;"*

A free country means where one can acquire knowledge in all freedom of choice. The big world of man is fragmented or restricted to small mutually exclusive compartments. The poet preaches that our minds, instead of being engulfed in such prejudices and narrow superstitions, must be enriched by thoughts and actions, which are worthy and beneficial for the sake of the country:

*"Where the world has not been*

*broken up into fragments by narrow*

*domestic walls;*

*Where words come out from*

*the depth of truth;"*

In an ideal free country everybody speaks his/her heart clear, where actions flow in the form of various streams moving from success to success, where petty conventions do not stagnant the course of judgment. Tagore entertains a system of thought that emphasizes the role of reason in obtaining knowledge. He also emphasizes the role of experience, especially sense perception. Tagore also attempts to tie various perceptions of the world together in some way. The comparative study of variegated knowledge would led to the reconstruction of a hypothetical parent Ideal to account for striking similarities among the various perceptions of East and West:

*"Where tireless striving stretches its*

*arms towards perfection;*

*Where the clear stream of reason*

*has not lost its way into the dreary*

*desert sand of dead habit;*

*Where the mind is led forward by*

*thee into ever-widening thought and*

*action..."*

According to Rabindranath Tagore, attainment of ideal freedom was definitely an arduous but the most dreamy of situation in our country, in the pre independent India. Studies commissioned by Tagore did determine with near certainty that declining moral values reflect cultural bias in the country, in the sense that post independent India scores such bloodshed in the name of religion. Here, Tagore remains an accurate predictor of Indian sociology. One must possess a fearless mind with one's head hold high in self-esteem. Knowledge gained by the countrymen

ought to be free from prejudices. The world should not become fragmented through internal strifes and feuds. The mental make-up should be free from the superstitious, narrow and gloomy practices. The poet, finally, conceives of a situation, where the mind is guided by the Divine One to awaken ourselves from the errors of our commitments.

## Self Assessment

1. What is meant by “mind is without fear and head is held high”. Tick the correct answer.
  - (i) to be fearless and self respecting
  - (ii) to be proud of one’s high position.
  - (iii) to stand straight and be carefree.
2. What does the poet mean by “where knowledge is free”?
3. The ‘domestic walls’ are usually associated with safety, comfort and love. Are these the feelings evoked by the phrase ‘narrow domestic walls’? If not, choose the correct answer from the ones given below:
  - (i) small houses which make us feel cramped.
  - (ii) ideas which are petty and narrow-minded.
  - (iii) a house divided into rooms by walls.

## 11.6 Summary

- This poem in this selection has been taken from his English ‘Gitanjali’. Tagore had a very deep religious caste of mind and profound humanism. He was both a patriot and an internationalist. In the poem, ‘Where The Mind Is Without Fear’, Tagore sketches a moving picture of the nation he would like India to be, where everyone within the fold of the brotherhood is free to hold up one’s head high and one’s voice to be heard without having any tension of fear of oppression or forced compulsion. Where the knowledge is not restricted by narrow ideas and loyalties. The British rule had robbed India of its pride and dignity by reducing it to a subject nation.
- The India of Tagore’s dream is a country where her people hold their heads high with their pride in knowledge and strength born of that knowledge. Where all countrymen must come out the aged-old world of people who have lost the vision of one humanity by the narrow loyalties of caste, creed and religion. Prejudice and superstitious which narrow the mind and divide people would be a thing of the past. Where the words of truth come out from the depths of the heart and are spoken out courageously in the open for the world to hear. People would work for perfections in the clear light of reason leaving aside all superstitious ritual.
- Where everyone is free to toil and work hard for anything they desire either for their own or for the good of the nation. Everyone is encouraged to strive tirelessly till they attain full satisfaction in reaching their goals and perfection. Where blind superstitious habits of thought and action have not put out the light of reason. Where people’s mind should not dwell in the mistakes of the past nor be possessed by it. On the other hand they should be led by the power of reasoning to be focused on the future by applying scientific thought and action. Tagore’s only prayer to the Supreme Ultimate is leading the nation to such an ideal state of heaven. It is only by the universality of outlook and an abiding passion for the realization of great human ideals that India will achieve her true freedom. This way alone she will realize her destiny.

Notes

### 11.7 Keywords

<i>Fragments</i>	: Pieces
<i>Head is held high</i>	: Self respect
<i>Domestic</i>	: Pertaining to family
<i>Striving</i>	: Try hard
<i>Tireless</i>	: Without getting tired
<i>Stream</i>	: River
<i>Dreary</i>	: Dull
<i>Reason</i>	: Intellect
<i>Dead habit</i>	: Old customs
<i>Desert</i>	: Dry area of land
<i>Awake</i>	: To get up from sleep

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (i)
2. In a free country where knowledge can be acquired is all freedom of choice
3. (ii)

### 11.8 Review Questions

1. How does the poet describe 'heaven of freedom'?
2. Who does the poet address as 'thee' and my father?
3. (a) Why is reason compared with 'clear stream'?  
(b) Where has reason lost its way?
4. Look at the line 'dreary desert sand of dead habit.' The sound 'd' is repeated four times. Why? The repetition of sound gives the line a musical quality.

### 11.9 Further Readings



*Books*      *Rabindranath Tagore* by Krishna Kripalani (1962);  
*Rabindranath Tagore* by H. Banerjee (1971); (1977);



*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 12: A Flight of Pigeons by Ruskin Bond

Notes

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12.9 Further Readings

### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about Ruskin Bond;
- Understand *A Flight of Pigeons*;
- Discuss the plot and characters of the story;
- Make analysis of *A Flight of Pigeons*.

### Introduction

*A Flight of Pigeons* is a novella by Indian author, Ruskin Bond. The story is set in 1857, and is about Ruth Labadoor and her family (who are British) who take help of Hindus and Muslims to reach their relatives when their father is killed in a church by the Indian rebels. The novella is a mix of fiction and non-fiction and was made into a film in 1978 called *Junoon* by Shyam Benegal, starring Shashi Kapoor, Nafisa Ali, and Jennifer Kendal.

Ruskin Bond's *A Flight of Pigeons* comes somewhere in between. The story is based on the life of Ruth Labadoor of Shahjahanpur who survived the mutiny of 1857 (First war of Independence). Just enough imagination is used to weave Ruth's life, accounts and records of the mutiny into a novella highlighting the lifestyle, politics, people of that era and, of course, humanity, which according to the author is what the book is all about.

### 12.1 Introduction to Author

Ruskin Bond, (born. 19 May 1934) is an Indian author of British descent.

In 1992, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his short story collection, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, given by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Literature. He was

**Notes**

awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for contributions to children's literature. He now lives with his adopted family in Landour near Mussoorie.

**Life and career**

Ruskin Bond was born in a military hospital in Kasauli to Edith Clerke and Aubrey Bond. His siblings were Ellen and William. Ruskin's father was with the Royal Air Force. When Bond was four years old, his mother was separated from his father and married a Punjabi-Hindu, Mr. Hari, who himself had been married once. Bond spent his early childhood in Jamnagar and Shimla. At the age of ten Ruskin went to live at his grandmother's house in Dehradun after his father's sudden death in 1944 from malaria. Ruskin was raised by his mother, who remarried an Indian businessman. He completed his schooling at Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, from where he graduated in 1952 after having been successful in winning several writing competitions in the school like Irwin Divinity Prize, Hailey Literature Prize. Ruskin's love for books and writing came early to him since his father had surrounded him with books and encouraged him to write little descriptions of nature and he took his son on hikes in the hills.

After his high school education he spent four years in England. In London he started writing his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, the semi-autobiographical story of the orphaned Anglo-Indian boy Rusty. It won the 1957 John Llewellyn Rhys prize, awarded to a British Commonwealth writer under 30. Bond used the advance money from the book to pay the sea passage to Bombay. He worked for some years as a journalist in Delhi and Dehradun. Since 1963 he has lived as a freelance writer in Mussoorie, a town in the Himalayan foothills. He wrote *Vagrants in the Valley*, as a sequel to *The Room on the Roof*. These two novels were published in one volume by Penguin India in 1993. The following year a collection of his non-fiction writings, *The Best Of Ruskin Bond* was published by Penguin India. His interest in the paranormal led him to write popular titles such as *Ghost Stories from the Raj*, *A Season of Ghosts*, *A Face in the Dark* and *Other Hauntings*.

The Indian Council for Child Education recognised his pioneering role in the growth of children's literature in India, and awarded him the Sahitya Academi Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He received the Padma Shri in 1999.

Media-shy, he currently lives in Landour, Mussoorie's Ivy Cottage, which has been his home since 1964.

**Filmography**

Based on Bond's historical novella *A Flight of Pigeons* (about an episode during the Indian Rebellion of 1857), the Hindi film *Junoon* was produced in 1978 by Shashi Kapoor and directed by Shyam Benegal). Ruskin Bond made his maiden big screen appearance with a cameo in Vishal Bhardwaj's film it based on his short story *Susanna s Seven Husbands*. Bond appears as a Bishop in the movie with Priyanka Chopra playing the title role. Bond had earlier collaborated with him in the *The Blue Umbrella* which was also based on his story.

**Literary style**

Most of his works are influenced by life in the hill stations at the foothills of the Himalayas, where he spent his childhood. His first novel, *The Room On the Roof*, was written when he was 17 and published when he was 21. It was partly based on his experiences at Dehra Dun, in his small rented room on the roof, and his friends. Since then he has written over three hundred short stories, essays and novels, including *Vagrants in The Valley*, *The Blue Umbrella*,

*Funny Side Up*, *A Flight of Pigeons* and more than 30 books for children. He has also published two volumes of autobiography. *Scenes from a Writer's Life* describes his formative years growing up in Anglo-India; *The Lamp is Lit* is a collection of essays and episodes from his journal.

Bond said that while his autobiographical work, *Rain in the Mountains*, was about his years spent in Mussoorie, *Scenes from a Writer's Life* described his first 21 years. *Scenes from a Writer's Life* focuses on Bond's trip to England, his struggle to find a publisher for his first book *The Room on the Roof* and his yearning to come back to India, particularly to Doon. "It also tells a lot about my parents," said Bond. "The book ends with the publication of my first novel and my decision to make writing my livelihood," Bond said, adding, "basically it describes how I became a writer".

His novel, *The Flight of Pigeons*, has been adapted into the Merchant Ivory film *Junoon*. *The Room on the Roof* has been adapted into a BBC-produced TV series. Several stories have been incorporated in the school curriculum in India, including "The Night Train at Deoli", "Time Stops at Shamlī", and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. In 2007, the Bollywood director Vishal Bharadwaj made a film based on his popular novel for children, *The Blue Umbrella*. The movie won the National Award for Best Children's film.

## 12.2 Brief Introduction to 'A Flight of Pigeons'

"In retelling the tale for today's reader I attempted to bring out the common humanity of most of the people involved—for in times of conflict and inter-religious or racial hatred, there are always a few (just a few) who are prepared to come to the aid of those unable to defend themselves."

"It was Pascal who wrote: 'Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.' Fortunately for civilization, there are exceptions."

As promised, the main theme in the book is how the defenseless members of an English family is protected by Hindu and Muslim families and later Sikh soldiers from the Indian rebels as they move from one house to another, one village to another till they reach their English relatives.

Some passages of the book make humorous reading and also give an insight to the people of that time, especially their creativity uninfluenced by western education and Bollywood:

"Having heard about his whereabouts, the second wife had a petition writer draw up a letter for her, which she asked me to read to her, as I knew Urdu. It went something like this—'O thou who hast vanished like mustard oil which, when absorbed by the skin, leaves only its odor behind; thou with the rotund form dancing before my eyes which were wont to stare at me vacantly; wilt thou still snap thy fingers at me when this letter is evidence of my unceasing thoughts of thee? Why did you call me your lado, your loved one, when you had no love for me? And why have you left me to the taunts of that stick of a woman whom you in your perversity used to call a precious stone, your Ratna? Who has proved untrue, you or I? Why have you sported thus with my feelings? Drown yourself in a handful of water, or return and make my hated rival an ornament for your neck, or wear her effigy nine times around your arm as a charm against my longings for you.'

A vivid account of the battle of Bichpuri goes like this:

'And who was it who got the worst of the fight?'

'Why, the Kafirs, of course, Chachi. We made a clean sweep of them,'

'There was not one man left, Chachi, so do you know what they did? They sent their women out to fight us!'

**Notes**

'This becomes more intriguing,' said Kothiwali. 'You are a gifted boy, Faisullah—you have a wonderful imagination! Tell us, what did their women look like?'

'Well, they were rather big for women. Some of them wore false beards and moustaches. But each one of them had a high skirt with a metal disc hanging down in front.' (It suddenly dawned on me that Faisullah was describing a Scots regiment of Highlanders.) 'Such horrid-looking women, I assure you. Of course, there was no question of fighting them. I don't lift my hand against women and out of sheer disgust I left the camp and came away.'

Read the book for more such dialogues and situations of quaint humour.

The second reason for reading the book is self-education. The western world is just as much a mystery to me as is the Muslim psyche. I think understanding them both is part of solving some global problems.

"While most of the British wives in the cantonment thought it beneath their dignity to gossip with servants, Mariam Labadoor, who made few social calls, enjoyed these conversations of hers. Often they enlivened her day by reporting the juiciest scandals on which they were always well-informed. But from what Mariam had heard recently, she was convinced that it was only a matter of hours before rioting broke out in the city."

It is this wisdom of hers which helps Mariam save her family and herself from rebels time and again. It brought to mind how advantageous it is to mingle with sections beyond your social circle, especially those belonging to your rivals, anti-social elements and rebels, because who else will have a better knowledge of them.

Wonder if this is why diplomats and their spouses are regularly found in Page 3 parties? Nothing better than good old gossip to bind (and spy on) friendly countries and enemy countries.

Another interesting point is the way a lot of the Indian rebels or freedom fighters of 1847 believed that they could wipe out the Firangis off the face of India, typical of misplaced optimism created by misinformation and emotion over intelligence. Some may say they tried at least but I wonder if any good came out of it. I suspect it only worsened the situation and eventually led to partition.

'Only yesterday the fakir was saying that the Firangis had been wiped off the face of the land'.

'I am not so sure of that,' Remarked Hafizullah.

'Nor I,' said Qamran. 'The fact is, we do not get much news here.'

'Though my uncle did boast the other day that there were no Firangis left, I overheard him whispering to Sarfaraz Khan that they were not yet totally extinct. The hills are full of them.'

'It is foolish to expect that the Firangis will be victorious. Have I not seen a score of them running for their lives pursued by one of our soldiers?'

People start coming back to senses after the news of Delhi being taken over by Firangis reach Shahjahanpur.

'Javed Khan will look quite small now, won't he?' said Kothiwali merrily. Apparently the news did not affect her one way or the other: she dealt in individuals, not in communities.

'And so much for the rebellion,' said Sarfaraz Khan philosophically. 'The city of Delhi was a garden of flowers, and now it is a ruined country; the stranger is not my enemy, nor is anyone my friend...'

The Notes section of the book had interesting references to the records and accounts of that time and later. Some of the enlightening ones were:

“Pathans formed thirty per cent of the Muslim population of Shahjahanpur (Muslims forming twenty-three per cent of the entire population) according to the 1901 census. Most were cultivators although many were landed proprietors of the district. (True Pathans are descendents of Afghan immigrants.) “Their attitude during the Mutiny cost them dear, as many estates were forfeited for rebellion.” (Gazetteer)

Muslims seemed to be better off at that time than 100 years later when India gained independence. Urdu was more popular for one. I think the grandeur of Urdu went out of the country with Pakistan. For their massive role in India’s first war of independence, the British clipped the wings of Muslims by taking their property and riches. Add to it their adamant and resistant attitude to the laws and systems of whoever is governing the country apart from those of the Ulema.

“The number of Muslims whose services (to the British) were recognized are extremely small, as, apart from the two men who sheltered their Eutopoean kinsman, Mr Maclean, in pargana Tilhar, the only persons recognized were Nasir Khan and Amir Ali of Shahjahanpur, who buried the bodies of the Englishmen murdered on the occasion of the outbreak and Ghulam Husain, who saved the commissariat buildings from destruction and for some time protected several Hindis on the district staff.” (Gazetteer, 1900)

I perceived from the book that Hindu-Muslim unity and respect for each other was existent, and more so perhaps, despite the absence of current liberal and global education systems. It might be true because of less economic disparity. The accounts do talk about instances of Muslim tyranny and Rajputs putting up resistance as a result. A unifying factor between Muslims and Hindus at that time could be the common enemy-the British.

I am ending the review in a romantic note, the whole truth of which only Ruth Labadoor knows: “Secretly, I have always hoped that he (Javed Khan) succeeded in escaping. Looking back on those months when we were his prisoners, I cannot help feeling a sneaking admiration for him. He was very wild and muddle-headed, and often cruel, but he was also very handsome and gallant, and there was in him a streak of nobility which he did his best to conceal.”

### **12.3 Plot**

The novel starts with the death of the father of Ruth Labadoor in front of her eyes in a church. This murder is committed by the Indian rebels who are a part of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and who have decided to kill all the Britishers of the small town Shahjahanpur. It is then that Mariam Labadoor, who is the mother of the narrator, Ruth Labadoor comes into action. She takes their entire family of 6 to their trusted friend Lala Ramjimal who keeps them at his home and gives them the maximum security and shelter he can give. The Pathan leader Javed Khan comes to know that there are a few foreigners living in Lala’s home and he suddenly comes into their house and forcefully takes away Ruth and Mariam Labadoor to his home. The rest of the book is followed by the various happening in the Labadoor family, who are very warmly welcomed by different family members of Javed Khan. But, Javed Khan himself is a cunning man and he pleads to marry Ruth Labadoor. Mariam saves her daughter many times as she does not want her to marry Javed Khan. She keeps a condition that if the British are able to take on the country once again, then she would not let him marry her daughter and if they lose from the rebels, then she would give her daughter to him. The British are able to take the hold of the country and Javed Khan is killed in one of the fights with the Britishers. With lots of help and support, the Labadoor family finally reaches the relatives.

## 12.4 Main Characters

### **Ruth Labadoor**

She is the narrator of the novel and the eye witness of the death of her father.

### **Mariam Labadoor**

She is a strong-from-the-heart lady and saves her family from any harm. It is her stern behaviour that makes Javed Khan change his mind to kill the Labadoor family. She also saves her daughter from being married to Javed Khan. She is a very good knitter and knits beautiful clothes for the kind family members of Javed Khan. She is a very courageous girl who fought against Javed Khan. She is smart and always cares of her daughter and has a very merciful behaviour.

### **Lala Ramjimal**

He is the most trusted friend of the Labadoor family and he gives them shelter when Mr. Labadoor passes away.

### **Javed Khan**

He is a courageous Pathan. His commitment goes loose when he finds Ruth Labadoor and falls in love with her, although despite many pleas, he is not able to please Mariam Labadoor to marry her daughter with him.

## 12.5 Analysis

In any instance of violence, war, etc, there are the active participants-those that actually go out to war, actually take part in the violence as the perpetrators or as the victims, who die in battle. And then there are those behind the scenes, who are equal stakeholders in the fallout of the war, those who do not actually take up arms, but are silent sufferers as a result of it. Those who need to survive it all, with dignity, and re-build their lives. Those who have no wish for the violence around them, and who would rather go quietly about their lives in peace. The civilian victims, the women and the children. Often those who lose the most.

This book deals with some such survivors. It is a historical fiction, which, according to the writer, may be based on facts on actual events that probably took place during the 1857 uprising against British rule.

A study of the 1857 uprising is usually from the point of view of the Indian participants. We speak about Mangal Pandey, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Nana Saheb, and the like. And that is but natural when we speak of it as an uprising. But the British looked at it as the mutiny, being the rulers at the time.

In this book, the story is told from the point of view of Ruth Labadoor, a teenage British girl, who witnesses the massacre of British civilians in the church in the town of Shahjahanpur, including that of her father, at the hands of Indian militants.

Ruth and her mother, Miriam, grandmother, aunt and cousins are given refuge in Lala Ramjimal's house. They are tracked down there by Javed Khan, who has been enamoured of Ruth, since before her father's assassination. He forces the women to come to stay in his household, much to the chagrin of his wife, who is aware of his intentions. Which according to what he tells Ruth's mother, are honourable. He intends to marry Ruth, but he is willing to wait till Miriam gives her permission.

Javed Khan thus becomes an unlikely hero, whose passion for Ruth, combined with the surprising restraint he shows in waiting for her mother's permission keeps them safe through the days of peril for the British women. Mariam does the best thing that she could do as a mother fighting for her and her daughter's survival - keeps him at bay with the assurance that he could marry her daughter if the British fail in taking over Delhi, all the time hoping for the victory of the British, as that would ensure their safety. She knows that if she had stood up in open rebellion of him, she and her daughter would lose all chance of surviving honourably.

They had to spend the whole of 1857, and many months into 1858, in Javed Khan's household. We are told early on in the book, that Miriam's mother is a girl from a *Nawab* family from Rohilon-ka-Rampur, married to a British officer. They therefore have Indian cultural roots, and integrate quite easily. They spend all their time in the *zenana* of Javed Khan, working as members of the household.

Except for Javed Khan's wife, Khan-Begum, who dislikes their presence for obvious reasons, the rest of the women of the household soon get attached to them. They get invited to spend a few months at Khan-Begum's sister Qamran's and Javed Khan's aunt Kothiwali's place. Miriam is very happy to take them up on their invitations, as it means that she can be safe, yet not be worried about Javed Khan's repeated proposals for Ruth's hand.

It is at Qamran's place that a relative comes with the news of a prophecy made by Mian Saheb, a *Pir* (holy man).

**'...that the restoration of the Firangi rule was as certain as the coming of doomsday. It would be another hundred years, he said, before the foreigners could be made to leave. "See, here they come!" he cried, pointing to the north where a flock of white pigeons could be seen hovering over the city. "They come flying like white pigeons which, when disturbed, fly away and circle, and come down to rest again. White pigeons from the hills!" ...'**

This prediction of Mian Saheb comes true, luckily for Miriam and Ruth. The British take over Delhi, and the uprising is put down. The British army then moves to take back every town, every post from where it has been ousted.

True to his word, Javed Khan releases the women from his bondage, and they are free to go and join the British, no longer needing to be in hiding from the militants. But not before he gets Ruth to come before him, so that he could gaze on her face once, something he has not done till now, in spite of his passion for her.

A very perceptive, wonderfully written book, complete with a detailed look into the mechanisms of the *zenana* or women's quarters in a segregated household. A tale of survival of the refugee women who probably did so only because of a mother playing by her wits, guts and an ability to adapt and accept her circumstances.

The detailed and very perceptive (considering that Ruskin Bond is a man, and culturally a British one, at that!) portrayal of the camaraderie and internal politics inside an all women Indian Muslim household from a hundred years ago.

## Self Assessment

- The story starts with the capture of Shahjahanpur, a small town village in
  - Bihar
  - Uttar Pradesh
  - Madhya Pradesh
  - None of these

**Notes**

2. Lala Ramjimal is the most trusted friend of the
  - (a) Labadoor family
  - (b) Javed family
  - (c) both
  - (d) none of these.
3. The novel starts with the death of the father of
  - (a) Ruth Labadoor
  - (b) Javed
  - (c) Lala Ramjimal
  - (d) None of these
4. Pathan named Javed Khan, one of the men of then ..... of that area,
  - (a) king
  - (b) punch
  - (c) nawab
  - (d) major

### **12.6 Summary**

- The story starts with the capture of Shahjahanpur, a small town village in U. P., from English army by Indian Freedom fighters. With that starts killing and looting of English people settled over there with burning out their houses and capturing and imprisoning their women, if there were any. Ruth, her mother (Mariam) and rest of her family, all women, were one such group. First they take refugee in the house Lala Ramjimal, a friend of her father, but soon people around find out that there is a group of English women hiding in his house. Then a Pathan named Javed Khan, one of the men of then Nawab of that area, takes them to his house. He puts the proposal of marrying Ruth before her mother, though he can have her forcibly, but he wants to do so with the will of the girl. Well, it is hard to know whether he loves her not, but surely he likes her very much and is *kaayal* of her beauty. Mariam being a captive under Javed didn't have much options but somehow manages to save her daughter from the Pathan using one excuse or the other. In the backdrop of this story the events of the Revolt of 1857 is presented beautifully in bits and pieces. Finally, the story ends with English army once again taking over the city almost after an year in 1858.
- The story is narrated by the lead character Ruth. There are two main characters leaving Ruth—Javed Khan and Mariam, her mother. The character of Mariam is the one which is most impactful and strong, so much so that it makes you admire her. A strong willed woman with a great presence of mind. The way she saves her daughter from Javed is very impressive. Then Javed Khan a strong and powerful Pathan who can possess the girl any time he wants, but he waits for the agreement of Mariam. You like him somehow, like Ruth, though it is a negative character. The story is a real one told to Ruskin by his father and to him by someone.

### **12.7 Keywords**

- Segregated* : Separated or isolated from others or from a main body or group.
- Rebellion* : An act of violent or open resistance to an established government or ruler.

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. (b)                      2. (a)                      3. (a)                      4. (c)

## 12.8 Review Questions

Notes

1. Give a brief introduction to Ruskin Bond.
2. What does Ruskin Bond try to convey in *A Flight of Pigeons*? Discuss.
3. Briefly explain the story *A Flight of Pigeons*.

## 12.9 Further Readings



Books

Sinha, Arpita (18 May 2010). "The name is Bond, Ruskin Bond". Retrieved 3 March 2011.

"Ruskin Bond to do a cameo in 'Saat Khoon...'" . The Times Of India.

Ruskin Bond celebrates 25th anniversary of Penguin in Bangalore EF News International



Online links [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Notes

**Unit 13: My Vision for India by APJ Abdul Kalam****CONTENTS**

Objectives

Introduction

13.1 My Vision for India

13.2 Understanding the Text

13.3 Analysis

13.4 Summary

13.5 Keywords

13.6 Review Questions

13.7. Further Readings

**Objectives**

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Appreciate the former President Dr. Kalam's vision for India;
- Identify an individual's role in India's development;
- Use identical pairs of words having different meanings in sentences of their own;
- Use modals appropriately; and
- Write a descriptive paragraph.

**Introduction**

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, usually referred to as Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam is an Indian scientist and administrator who served as the 11th President of India. Kalam was born and raised in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, studied physics at the St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, and aerospace engineering at the Madras Institute of Technology (MIT), Chennai.

Before his term as President, he worked as an aerospace engineer with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Kalam is popularly known as the Missile Man of India for his work on the development of ballistic missile and launch vehicle technology. He played a pivotal organisational, technical and political role in India's Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998, the first since the original nuclear test by India in 1974. Some scientific experts have however called Kalam a man with no authority over nuclear physics but who just carried on the works of Homi J. Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai.

Kalam was elected the President of India in 2002, defeating Lakshmi Sehgal and was supported by both Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party, the major political parties of India. He is currently a visiting professor at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Management Indore, Chancellor of the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology Thiruvananthapuram, a professor of Aerospace Engineering at Anna University (Chennai), JSS University (Mysore) and an adjunct/visiting faculty at many other academic and research institutions across India.

Kalam advocated plans to develop India into a developed nation by 2020 in his book *India 2020*. Books authored by him have received considerable demands in South Korea for the translated versions. He has received several prestigious awards, including the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. Kalam is known for his motivational speeches and interaction with the student-community in India. He launched his mission for the youth of the nation in 2011 called What Can I Give with a central theme to defeat corruption in India. Kalam was also criticised for inaction as a president on the pending mercy plea petitions, that delayed prosecution of the convicts.

### Early life and education

APJ ABDUL KALAM was born on 15 October 1931 in a Muslim family to Jainulabdeen, a boat owner and Ashiamma, a housewife, at Rameswaram, located in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. He came from a poor background and started working at an early age to supplement his family's income. After completing school, Kalam distributed newspapers in order to financially contribute to his father's income. In his school years, he had average grades, but was described as a bright and hardworking student who had a strong desire to learn and spend hours on his studies, especially mathematics.

"I inherited honesty and self-discipline from my father; from my mother, I inherited faith in goodness and deep kindness as did my three brothers and sisters."

After completing his school education at the Rameshwaram Elementary School, Kalam went on to attend Saint Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, then affiliated with the University of Madras, from where he graduated in physics in 1954. Towards the end of the course, he was not enthusiastic about the subject and would later regret the four years he studied it. He then moved to Madras in 1955 to study aerospace engineering. While Kalam was working on a senior class project, the Dean was dissatisfied with the lack of progress and threatened revoking his scholarship unless the project was finished within the next two days. He worked tirelessly on his project and met the deadline, impressing the Dean who later said, "I [Dean] was putting you [Kalam] under stress and asking you to meet a difficult deadline".

### Career as a scientist

"This was my first stage, in which I learnt leadership from three great teachers—Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Prof. Satish Dhawan and Dr. Brahm Prakash. This was the time of learning and acquisition of knowledge for me".

After graduating from Madras Institute of Technology (MIT-Chennai) in 1960, Kalam joined Aeronautical Development Establishment of Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) as a chief scientist. Kalam started his career by designing a small helicopter for the Indian Army, but remained unconvinced with the choice of his job at DRDO. Kalam was also a part of the INCOSPAR committee working under Vikram Sarabhai, the renowned space scientist. In 1969, Kalam was transferred to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) where he was the project director of India's first indigenous Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-III) which successfully deployed the Rohini satellite in near earth orbit in July 1980. Joining ISRO was one of Kalam's biggest achievements in life and he is said to have found himself when he started to work on the SLV project. Kalam first started work on an expandable rocket project independently at DRDO in 1965. In 1969, Kalam received the government's approval and expanded the programme to include more engineers.

**Notes**

In 1963–64, he visited Nasa’s Langley Research Center in Hampton Virginia, Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland and Wallops Flight Facility situated at Eastern Shore of Virginia. During the period between 1970s and 1990s, Kalam made an effort to develop the Polar SLV and SLV-III projects, both of which proved to be success.

Kalam was invited by Raja Ramanna to witness the country’s first nuclear test Smiling Buddha as the representative of TBRL, even though he had not participated in the development, test site preparation and weapon designing. In the 1970s, a landmark was achieved by ISRO when the locally built Rohini-1 was launched into space, using the SLV rocket. In the 1970s, Kalam also directed two projects, namely, Project Devil and Project Valiant , which sought to develop ballistic missiles from the technology of the successful SLV programme. Despite the disapproval of Union Cabinet, Premier Indira Gandhi allotted secret funds for these aerospace projects through her discretionary powers under Kalam’s directorship. Kalam played an integral role convincing the Union Cabinet to conceal the true nature of these classified aerospace projects. His research and educational leadership brought him great laurels and prestige in 1980s, which prompted the government to initiate an advanced missile program under his directorship. Kalam and Dr. VS Arunachalam, metallurgist and scientific adviser to the Defense Minister, worked on the suggestion by the then Defense Minister, R. Venkataraman on a proposal for simultaneous development of a quiver of missiles instead of taking planned missiles one by one. R Venkatraman was instrumental in getting the cabinet approval for allocating 388 crore rupees for the mission, named Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (I.G.M.D.P) and appointed Kalam as the Chief Executive. Kalam played a major part in developing many missiles under the mission including Agni, an intermediate range ballistic missile and Prithvi, the tactical surface-to-surface missile, although the projects have been criticised for mismanagement and cost and time overruns. He was the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of Defence Research and Development Organisation from July 1992 to December 1999. The Pokhran-II nuclear tests were conducted during this period where he played an intensive political and technological role. Kalam served as the Chief Project Coordinator, along with R. Chidambaram during the testing phase. Photos and snapshots of him taken by the media elevated Kalam as the country’s top nuclear scientist.

In 1998, along with cardiologist Dr.Soma Raju, Kalam developed a low cost Coronary stent. It was named as “Kalam-Raju Stent” honouring them. In 2012, the duo, designed a rugged tablet PC for health care in rural areas, which was named as “Kalam-Raju Tablet”.

**Presidency**

Abdul Kalam served as the 11th President of India, succeeding KR Narayanan. He won the 2002 presidential election with an electoral vote of 922,884, surpassing 107,366 votes won by Lakshmi Sahgal. He served from 25 July 2002 to 25 July 2007.

On 10 June 2002, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was in power at the time, expressed to the leader of opposition, Indian National Congress president Sonia Gandhi that they would propose Kalam for the post of President. The Samajwadi Party and the Nationalist Congress Party backed his candidacy. After the Samajwadi Party announced its support for him, President KR Narayanan chose not to seek a second term in office and hence left the field clear for Kalam to become the 11th President of India.

I am really overwhelmed. Everywhere both in Internet and in other media, I have been asked for a message. I was thinking what message I can give to the people of the country at this juncture.

On 18 June, Kalam filed his nomination papers in the Parliament of India, accompanied by Vajpayee and his senior Cabinet colleagues.

The polling for the Presidential election began on 15 July 2002 in the Parliament and the state assemblies with media claiming that the election was a one-sided affair and Kalam's victory was a foregone conclusion. The counting was held on 18 July. Kalam won the Presidential election in a highly one-sided contest. He became the 11th President of the Republic of India. He moved into the Rashtrapati Bhavan after he was sworn in on 25 July. Kalam was the third President of India to have been honoured with a Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, before becoming the President. Dr. Sarvapali Radhakrishnan (1954) and Dr. Zakir Hussain (1963) were the earlier recipients of Bharat Ratna who later became the President of India. He was also the first scientist and the first bachelor to occupy Rashtrapati Bhawan.

During his term as President, he was affectionately known as the People's President. In his words, signing the Office of Profit Bill was the toughest decision he had taken during his tenure.

Kalam is criticized for inaction as a President in deciding the fate of 20 out of the 21 mercy petitions. Article 72 of the Constitution of India empowers the President of India to grant pardon, suspend and remit death sentences and commute the death sentence of convicts on death row. Kalam acted on only one mercy plea in his 5 year tenure as a President, rejecting the plea of rapist Dhananjay Chatterjee, who was hanged thereafter. The most important of the 20 pleas is thought to be that of Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri terrorist who was convicted of conspiracy in the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament and was sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of India in 2004. While the sentence was scheduled to be carried out on 20 October 2006, the pending action on the mercy plea resulted in him continuing in the death row.

At the end of his term, on 20 June 2007, Kalam expressed his willingness to consider a second term in office provided there was certainty about his victory in the 2007 Presidential election. However, two days later, he decided not to contest the Presidential election again stating that he wanted to avoid involving Rashtrapati Bhavan from any political processes. He did not have the support of the Left parties, Shiv Sena and UPA constituents to receive a renewed mandate.

Nearing the term expiry of the 12th President Pratibha Patil, whose tenure ended on 24 July 2012, media reports in April claimed that Kalam was likely to be nominated for his second term. After the reports, social networking sites were abuzz with activities extending their support for his candidature. BJP potentially backed his nomination, saying that the party will lend their support if Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and Indian National Congress propose his name for the 2012 Presidential election. Just a month ahead of the election, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mamata Banerjee also expressed their support to Kalam and revealed that they both would suggest his name. Days after expressing support, Mulayam Singh Yadav backed out, leaving Mamata Banerjee as a solitary supporter. On 18 June 2012, Kalam refused to contest 2012 Presidential poll after much speculations.

"Many citizens have also expressed the same wish. It only reflects their love and affection for me and the aspiration of the people. I am really overwhelmed by this support. This being their wish, I respect it. I want to thank them for the trust they have in me."

### Criticisms and controversies

The controversy that surrounds Kalam's role as a nuclear scientist, is the lack of reliable and factual reporting of the yield of Pokhran-II tests. The director of the site test, K. Santhanam, publicly admitted that the thermonuclear bomb was a "fizzle" test, criticising Kalam for issuing the wrong report. However, Kalam dismissed the claims and R. Chidambaram, a key associate of Pokhran-II, also described these claims as incorrect.

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**Personal attacks**

In spite of his leading role in the development of Indian nuclear programme, Kalam has received criticism from many of his peers who claimed that he had “no authority” over nuclear science. Homi Sethna, a chemical engineer criticised Kalam claiming that Kalam had no background in publishing articles in nuclear science, even in nuclear physics. Sethna maintained that Kalam received his masters degree in aerospace engineering, which is a completely different discipline from nuclear engineering, and what various universities awarded him for his achievements had nothing to do with nuclear physics. Sethna, in his last interview, maintained that in the 1950s, Kalam had failed advanced physics courses during his college life and quoted “What does he know (about [nuclear] physics)....?”, on the national television. Homi Sethna also accused Kalam of using his Presidency to gain a national stature of a nuclear scientist.

Others felt that Kalam had never worked in any of the Indian nuclear power plants and had no role in developing the nuclear weapon which was completed under Raja Ramanna. Kalam worked as an aerospace engineer in an SLV project in the 1970s and from the 1980s onwards, as a project director before he moved to Defence Research and Development Organisation, Sethna concluded. The prestigious IISc, Bangalore rejected Kalam’s application as they felt that he lacked scientific credentials.

In 2008, Indian media questioned his claims about his personal contributions to missile inventions while working in a classified missile programme. Kalam had taken credit of inventing the Agni, Prithvi and Aakash missile system. All of these were developed, researched and designed by other scientists whereas Kalam was involved in getting the funds and other logistic tasks. As a director of DRDO, a lot of credit had gone to Kalam. R. N. Agarwal, former director, Advanced System Laboratory and former Programme Director of Agni missile was considered to be the real architect behind the successful design of Agni Missile. In his own biography, Kalam credited the development of Agni missile to Dr Ram Narayan Agarwal, an alumnus of MIT. For the Prithvi missile project, he named Col VJ Sundaram as the brain behind this project and for the Trishul missile, he gave credit to Commander SR Mohan. In 2006, senior media correspondent Praful Bidwai, in The Daily Star, wrote that two aerospace projects, Project Valiant and Project Devil, which were authorised by former Premier Indira Gandhi under the directorship of Abdul Kalam, resulted in “total failure”. In the 1980s, these projects were ultimately cancelled by the government under the pressure of the Indian Army. Kalam was also criticised by civil groups over his stand on the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant, where he supported setting up of the nuclear power plant and never spoke with the local people. The protesters were hostile to his visit as they perceived to him to be a pro-nuclear scientist and were unimpressed by the assurance provided by him on the safety features of the plant.

**Frisking by American security authorities**

Abdul Kalam was frisked at the JFK Airport in New York, while boarding a plane on 29 September 2011. He was subjected to “private screening” as he does not come under the category of dignitaries exempt from security screening procedures under American guidelines. He was frisked again after boarding the Air India aircraft with the US security officials asking for his jacket and shoes, claiming that these items were not checked according to the prescribed procedures during the “private screening”, despite protests from the airline crew confirming him as India’s President. The incident was not reported until 13 November 2011. India threatened retaliatory action as there was a “general sense of outrage” around the country. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs protested over this incident and a statement by the ministry said that the US Government had written a letter to Kalam, expressing its deep regret for the inconvenience.

Kalam was previously frisked by the ground staff of the Continental Airlines at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi in July 2009 and was treated like an ordinary passenger, despite him being on the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security's list of people exempted from security screening in India.

In his book *India 2020*, Kalam strongly advocates an action plan to develop India into a knowledge superpower and a developed nation by the year 2020. He regards his work on India's nuclear weapons programme as a way to assert India's place as a future superpower.

It was reported that, there was a considerable demand in South Korea for translated versions of books authored by him.

Kalam continues to take an active interest in other developments in the field of science and technology. He has proposed a research programme for developing bio-implants. He is a supporter of Open Source over proprietary solutions and believes that the use of free software on a large scale will bring the benefits of information technology to more people.

Kalam set a target of interacting with 100,000 students during the two years after his resignation from the post of scientific adviser in 1999. In his own words, "I feel comfortable in the company of young people, particularly high school students. Henceforth, I intend to share with them experiences, helping them to ignite their imagination and preparing them to work for a developed India for which the road map is already available." He continued to interact with students during his term as a President and also during his post-Presidency period as a visiting professor at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Management Indore, Chancellor of Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology Thiruvananthapuram, a professor of Aerospace Engineering at Anna University (Chennai), JSS University (Mysore), and an adjunct/visiting faculty at many other academic and research institutions across India.

### Popular culture

In May 2011, Kalam launched his mission for the youth of the nation called *What Can I Give* with a central theme to defeat corruption. He also has interests in writing Tamil poetry and in playing veenai, a South Indian string instrument.

He was nominated for the MTV Youth Icon of the Year award in 2003 and in 2006. In the 2011 Hindi film *I Am Kalam*, Kalam is portrayed as an extremely positive influence to the poor. A bright Rajasthani boy named Chhotu, has renamed himself Kalam in honour of his idol.

### Awards and honours

APJ Abdul Kalam's 79th birthday was recognised as World Students' Day by United Nations. He has also received honorary doctoral degrees from 40 universities. The Government of India has honoured him with the Padma Bhushan in 1981 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1990 for his work with ISRO and DRDO and his role as a scientific advisor to the Government. In 1997, Kalam received India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, for his immense and valuable contribution to the scientific research and modernisation of defence technology in India.

## 13.1 My Vision for India

I have three visions for India. In 3000 years of our history people from all over the world have come and invaded us, captured our lands, conquered our minds. From Alexander onwards the Greeks, the Turks, the Moguls, the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Dutch, all of them came and looted us, took over what was ours. Yet we have not done this to any other nation. We have not conquered anyone. We have not grabbed their land, their culture and their

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history and tried to enforce our way of life on them. Why? Because we respect the freedom of others. That is why my FIRST VISION is that of FREEDOM. I believe that India got its first vision of this in 1857, when we started the war of Independence. It is this freedom that we must protect and nurture and build on. If we are not free, no one will respect us.

We have 10 per cent growth rate in most areas. Our poverty levels are falling. Our achievements are being globally recognised today. Yet we lack the self-confidence to see ourselves as a developed nation, self-reliant and self-assured. Isn't this incorrect? MY SECOND VISION for India is DEVELOPMENT. For fifty years we have been a developing nation. It is time we see ourselves as a developed nation. We are among top five nations in the world in terms of GDP.

I have a THIRD VISION. India must stand up to the world. Because I believe that unless India stands up to the world, no one will respect us. Only strength respects strength. We must be strong not only as a military power but also as an economic power. Both must go hand-in-hand. My good fortune was to have worked with three great minds. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, of the Dept. of Space, Professor Satish Dhawan, who succeeded him and Dr. Brahm Prakash, father of nuclear material. I was lucky to have worked with all three of them closely and consider this the great opportunity of my life.

I was in Hyderabad giving this lecture, when a 14 year-old girl asked me for my autograph. I asked her what her goal in life is. She replied: I want to live in a developed India. For her, you and I will have to build this developed India. You must proclaim India is not an underdeveloped nation; it is a highly developed nation.

You say that our government is inefficient. You say that our laws are too old. You say that the municipality does not pick up the garbage. You say that the phones don't work, the railways are a joke, the airline is the worst in the world, and mails never reach their destination. You say that our country has been fed to the dogs and is the absolute pits. You say, say and say. What do you do about it?

Dear Indians, I am echoing JF Kennedy's words to his fellow Americans to relate to Indians ..... "ASK WHAT WE CAN DO FOR INDIA AND DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE TO MAKE INDIA WHAT AMERICA AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES ARE TODAY."

**13.2 Understanding the Text**

**PART 1**

*I have ..... will respect us.*

Our country has been invaded and controlled by many different rulers during our 3000-year old history. You must have heard about the British rule in India. But you would have never heard of India attacking another nation or conquering it. This is because we fought very hard to win our own freedom and so we respect others' freedom. Now that we have our freedom we must value it. Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam says that by protecting our freedom we can get the respect of other nations.

**PART 2**

*We have ..... terms of GDP.*

Dr. Kalam eludes being in the top five positions of the world. According to Dr Kalam, although our nation has been developing continuously and we are recognised globally, we unfortunately are not confident about ourselves. We need to believe in our own ability to become a developed nation.

**PART 3**

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*I have a third vision ..... opportunity of my life.*

In this section Dr Kalam tells the Indians to work together to empower India to become a developed nation. He says India will have to stand upto the world not only as the military power but also as an economic and scientific power.

**PART 4**

*I was in Hyderabad ..... Western Countries are today.*

People constantly complain about the government and its functioning. Dr. Kalam says that we need to stop complaining, and be responsible citizens and work towards creating a better India for ourselves and our future generations.

**13.3 Analysis**

“Sight is about what lies right in front of us. Vision is what lies ahead” goes the old adage. India is an old civilization and an extremely complex society. Her glorious past, natural beauty, resources, vast size and above all her unique geographical location has always given her the pride of place in the world. With the ups and downs of history it has retained its vibrancy. Yet, due to callousness and lethargy on our part and due to the negative slant of the media here, we as a nation have not been able to attain the status of a developed nation thus far.

**The People’s President**

In this famous speech delivered in Hyderabad, Dr.APJ Abdul Kalam outlines his three visions for his motherland India and pleads for Indians to be involved in the nation-building process and to make India a developed nation.

**Dr. Kalam’s First Vision: Freedom**

In 3000 years of our history, people from all over the world have come and invaded us, captured our lands and conquered our minds. Yet, we have not conquered anyone. Because, we respect the freedom of others, and that is the reason for his first vision of Freedom. India got its first vision of this in the Indian Rebellion in the year 1857, when we started the war of Independence. It is this freedom that we must protect and nurture and build on.

**His Second Vision: Development**

We have been a developing nation for fifty years, and so it is time we see ourselves as a developed nation. In terms of GDP, we are among the top five nations of the world. Our poverty levels are falling. Our achievements are being globally recognised today. Yet we lack the self-confidence to see ourselves as a developed nation.

**His Third Vision: India must stand up to the World**

India must stand up to the world. Unless India stands up to the world, no one will respect us. Only strength respects strength. We must be strong not only as a military power but also as an economic power. Both must go hand-in-hand.

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**Four Milestones in Dr. Kalam's Career**

Dr.Kalam says that being the project director for India's first satellite launch vehicle, SLV3, was the first milestone in his career. Second was when Agni met its mission requirements in 1994. Third came the partnership between DRDO and the Dept of Atomic Energy. Removing the pain of little boys and girls in hospital, by replacing heavy metallic callipers weighing over three kg each with 300-gram callipers, was the fourth bliss or milestone of his career.



*Did u know?* **Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam**

- Born in the island town of Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu on October 15, 1931.
- Became the 11th President of India, serving from 2002—2007 and was popularly known as the People's President.
- Spent most of his childhood in financial problems and worked at an early age to supplement his family's income.
- Was the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of Defence Research and Development Organisation from July 1992 to December 1999.
- Project Director for (SLV-II) and Chief Executive of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (I.G.M.D.P).
- Patronised grassroots innovations.
- Closely associated with the Honey Bee Network and The National Innovation Foundation.
- An iconic and inspirational figure among the masses, he is immensely loved and adored by the children of India.
- His clean image and ability to inspire the youths in India made him the **Bharat Ka Paryavaran Ambassador**.
- The first Asian to be bestowed upon with **Hoover Medal**, America's top engineering prize, for outstanding contribution to public service on April 29, 2009.
- Was honoured with the nation's highest civilian honours: the **Padma Bhushan** in 1981, the **Padma Vibhushan** in 1990 and the **Bharat Ratna** in 1997 for his work with ISRO and DRDO and his role as a scientific advisor to the Indian government.

**The Media's Obsession with Bad News, Failures and Disasters**

Dr.Kalam wonders how the media in India could be so negative. Giving the example of Dr.Sudarshan, who has transferred the tribal village into a self-sustaining, self-driving unit, Dr.Kalam says that there are millions of such achievements in India but our media is only obsessed with only the bad news and failures and disasters.

In Tel Aviv, where gory killings, deaths and bombardments take place every now and then, the front page of the newspaper had the picture of a Jewish gentleman who in five years had transformed his desert land into an orchid and a granary. It was this inspiring picture that everyone woke up to.

### The Nation's Obsession with Foreign Things

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Dr.Kalam is surprised at the people's obsession with foreign things. We want foreign TVs, foreign shirts, foreign technology. There is an obsession for everything that is imported. According to Dr.Kalam, self respect comes only with self-reliance.

### Conformity in Foreign Countries but Detached in Motherland

In India, we the people blame the government for being inefficient, the laws for being too old, the municipality for not picking up the garbage etc. But what do we do about it? In Singapore, you don't throw cigarette butts on the roads. You wouldn't dare to speed beyond 55mph in Washington and tell the traffic cop about your heavy political connections. You wouldn't spit *paan* on the streets of Tokyo. When the same Indian can respect and conform to a foreign system in other countries, he cannot do that in his own. You will throw papers and cigarettes on the road the moment you touch Indian ground. If you can be an involved and appreciative citizen in an alien country, why cannot you be the same here in India?

### The Easy Way Out: Blame it on the System

We sit back wanting the government to do everything for us, while our contribution is totally negative. We expect the government to clean up but we are not going to stop chucking garbage all over the place, nor are we going to stop to pick up a stray piece of paper and throw it in the bin. We expect the railways to provide clean bathrooms but we are not going to learn the proper use of bathrooms. When it comes to social issues like women, dowry, girl child etc., we make loud drawing room protestations and do the reverse at home.

And for all these negatives on our part, we blame on the system. The whole system has to change, we seem to justify. For us, the system consists of everyone else except me and YOU. When it comes to make a positive contribution to the system we lock ourselves along with our families into a safe cocoon and wait for a Mr.Clean to come along and work miracles for us, or we leave the country and run away.

Like lazy cowards hounded by our fears we run to America to bask in their glory and praise their system. When New York becomes insecure we run to England. When England experiences unemployment, we take the next flight out to the Gulf. When the Gulf is war struck, we demand to be rescued and brought home by the Indian government. Everybody is out to abuse and rape the country. Nobody thinks of feeding the system, because our conscience is mortgaged to money.

### Self Assessment

1. Who is 'I' in the above passage?
2. State the impact that the invaders had on India.
3. Why have we never invaded other countries?
4. "I believe that India got its first vision of this in 1857." What is Dr. Kalam referring to?
5. What according to Dr. Kalam should Indians protect, nurture and build on?

### 13.4 Summary

- Dr. APJ Kalam has three goals that he would like India to achieve. All the three goals are related to each other. **Freedom** and independence will have real meaning if we develop economically.

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- **Economic development** will help us to be strong and will make other countries **respect** us. But we the people of India are responsible for the development of our country, and for making it one of the leading nations of the world. Each one of us needs to do whatever is necessary to make Dr. Kalam’s VISION come true. It is time to stop complaining about the problems in our country and to start doing something about them. In this lesson we have learnt to evaluate and reflect on our contributions towards the development of India.

### 13.5 Keywords

- Conquered* : Overcame and take control of (a place or people) by use of military force
- Looted* : Stole goods from (a place), typically during a war or riot: “rioters were looting shops”.
- Grabbed* : Grasped or seized suddenly and roughly.

### 13.6 Review Questions

1. According to you what is the importance of freedom?
2. If you had been asked about your goal in life by Dr. Kalam, what would have been your reply?
3. Why must India be strong both as a military and an economic power?

### **Answers: Self Assessment**

1. Professor Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam
2. The invaders captured our lands, took away our riches and conquered our minds.
3. We have never invaded another country because we respect the freedom of others.
4. Dr. Kalam is referring to the uprising of 1857. He says so because the uprising is considered as the first war of Indian Independence.
5. We should protect, nurture and build on our freedom.

### 13.7 Further Readings



*Books*

Eternal Quest: Life and Times of Dr. Kalam by S. Chandra; Pentagon Publishers, 2002. [112]

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APJ Abdul Kalam: The Visionary of India by K. Bhushan, G. Katyal; A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002. [114]

A Little Dream (documentary film) by P. Dhanapal; Minveli Media Works Private Limited, 2008. [115]



*Online links* [www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/considerations.html)

## Unit 14: Ode to the West Wind by PB Shelley

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### Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Know about PB Shelley;
- Understand the poem *Ode to the West Wind*;
- Discuss the devices and themes of the poem;
- Make analysis of the poem.

### Introduction

This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which poured down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.

The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it.

### 14.1 Introduction to the Poet

**Percy Bysshe Shelley** was one of the major English Romantic poets and is critically regarded as among the finest lyric poets in the English language. Considered too radical in his poetry

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and his political and social views to achieve fame during his lifetime, recognition of his significance grew steadily following his death. PB Shelley was a key member of a close circle of visionary poets and writers that included Lord Byron, Leigh, Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock and his second wife, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*.

Shelley is perhaps best known for such classic poems as *Ozymandias*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, *Music*, *When Soft Voices Die*, *The Cloud* and *The Masque of Anarchy*, etc. which are among the most popular and critically acclaimed poems in the English language. His major works, however, are long visionary poems that include *Queen Mab* (later reworked as *The Daemon of the World*), *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Adonais*, the unfinished work *The Triumph of Life*; and the visionary verse dramas *The Cenci* (1819) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). The latter is widely considered one of Shelley's most fully realised works.

Shelley's early profession of atheism (in the tract "The Necessity of Atheism") led to his expulsion from Oxford and branded him as a radical agitator and thinker, setting an early pattern of marginalisation and ostracism from the intellectual and political circles of his time. His close circle of admirers, however, included the most progressive thinkers of the day, including his future father-in-law, philosopher William Godwin. Though Shelley's poetry and prose output remained steady throughout his life, most publishers and journals declined to publish his work for fear of being arrested themselves for blasphemy or sedition. Shelley never lived to see the extent of his success and influence, which would reach down to the present day not only in the literary canon, but in major movements in social and political thought.

Shelley became an idol of the next three or four generations of poets, including important Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets such as Robert Browning, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He was admired by Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, W. B. Yeats, Karl Marx, Upton Sinclair and Isadora Duncan. Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's passive resistance were apparently influenced and inspired by Shelley's non-violence in protest and political action, although Gandhi does not include him in his list of mentors.

## About his Life

### Education

The eldest legitimate son of Timothy on Shelley—a Whig Member of Parliament—and his wife, a Sussex landowner, Shelley was born on 4 August 1792 at Field Place, Broadbridge Heath, near Horsham, West Sussex, England. He had four younger sisters and one much younger brother. He received his early education at home, tutored by Reverend Evan Edwards of nearby Warnham. His cousin and lifelong friend Thomas Medwin, who lived nearby, recounted his early childhood in his "The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley". It was a happy and contented childhood spent largely in country pursuits such as fishing and hunting.

In 1802, he entered the Syon House Academy of Brentford, Middlesex. In 1804, Shelley entered Eton College, where he fared poorly, subjected to an almost daily mob torment his classmates called "Shelley-baits". Surrounded, the young Shelley would have his books torn from his hands and his clothes pulled at and torn until he cried out madly in his high-pitched "cracked soprano" of a voice.

On 10 April 1810, he matriculated at University College, Oxford. Legend has it that Shelley attended only one lecture while at Oxford, but frequently read sixteen hours a day. His first publication was a Gothic novel, *Zastrozzi* (1810), in which he vented his early atheistic worldview through the villain Zastrozzi. In the same year, Shelley, together with his sister Elizabeth, published *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*. While at Oxford, he issued a collection of verses

(ostensibly burlesque but quite subversive), *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, with Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

In 1811, Shelley published his second Gothic novel, *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian*, and a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. This latter gained the attention of the university administration and he was called to appear before the College's fellows, including the Dean, George Rowley. His refusal to repudiate the authorship of the pamphlet resulted in his being expelled from Oxford on 25 March 1811, along with Hogg. The rediscovery in mid-2006 of Shelley's long-lost "Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things"—a long, strident anti-monarchical and anti-war poem printed in 1811 in London by Crosby and Company as "by a gentleman of the University of Oxford"—gives a new dimension to the expulsion, reinforcing Hogg's implication of political motives ("an affair of party"). Shelley was given the choice to be reinstated after his father intervened, on the condition that he would have to recant his avowed views. His refusal to do so led to a falling-out with his father.

### Marriage

Four months after being expelled, on 28 August 1811, the 19-year-old Shelley eloped to Scotland with the 16-year-old Harriet Westbrook, a pupil at the same boarding school where Shelley's sisters were pupils. Shelley's father had forbidden him to see that girl. Harriet Westbrook had been writing Shelley passionate letters threatening to kill herself because of her unhappiness at the school and at home. Shelley, heartbroken after the failure of his romance with his cousin, Harriet Grove, cut off from his mother and sisters, and convinced he had not long to live, impulsively decided to rescue Harriet Westbrook and make her his beneficiary. Harriet Westbrook's 28-year-old sister Eliza, to whom Harriet was very close, appears to have encouraged the young girl's infatuation with the future baronet. The Westbrooks pretended to disapprove but secretly encouraged the elopement. Sir Timothy Shelley, however, outraged that his son had married beneath him (Harriet's father, though prosperous, had kept a tavern) revoked Shelley's allowance and refused ever to receive the couple at Field Place. Shelley invited his friend Hogg to share his ménage but asked him to leave when Hogg made advances to Harriet. Harriet also insisted that her sister Eliza, whom Shelley detested, live with them. Shelley was also at this time increasingly involved in an intense platonic relationship with Elizabeth Hitchener, a 28-year-old unmarried schoolteacher of advanced views, with whom he had been corresponding. Hitchener, whom Shelley called the "sister of my soul" and "my second self", became his muse and confidante in the writing of his philosophical poem *Queen Mab*, a Utopian allegory.

During this period, Shelley travelled to Keswick in England's Lake District, where he visited the poet Robert Southey, under the mistaken impression that Southey was still a political radical. Southey, who had himself been expelled from the Westminster School for opposing flogging, was taken with Shelley and predicted great things for him as a poet. He also informed Shelley that William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*, which had greatly influenced him in his youth, and which Shelley also admired, was still alive. Shelley wrote to Godwin, offering himself as his devoted disciple and informing Godwin that he was "the son of a man of fortune in Sussex" and "heir by entail to an estate of 6,000 £ per an." Godwin, who supported a large family and was chronically penniless, immediately saw in Shelley a source of his financial salvation. He wrote asking for more particulars about Shelley's income and began advising him to reconcile with Sir Timothy. Meanwhile, Sir Timothy's patron, the Duke of Norfolk, a former Catholic who favoured Catholic Emancipation, was also vainly trying to reconcile Sir Timothy and his son, whose political career the Duke wished to encourage. A maternal uncle ultimately supplied money to pay Shelley's debts, but Shelley's relationship with the Duke may have influenced his decision to travel to Ireland. In Dublin Shelley published

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his *Address to the Irish People*, priced at fivepence, “the lowest possible price” in order to “awaken in the minds of the Irish poor a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state and suggesting a rational means of remedy—Catholic Emancipation and a repeal of the Union Act (the latter the most successful engine that England ever wielded over the misery of fallen Ireland).”. His activities earned him the unfavourable attention of the British government.

Shelley was increasingly unhappy in his marriage to Harriet and particularly resented the influence of her older sister Eliza, who discouraged Harriet from breastfeeding their baby daughter (Elizabeth Ianthe Shelley [1813–76]). Shelley accused Harriet of having married him for his money. Craving more intellectual female companionship, he began spending more time away from home, among other things, studying Italian with Cornelia Turner and visiting the home and bookshop of William Godwin. Eliza and Harriet moved back with their parents.

Richard Rothwell’s portrait of Mary Shelley in later life was shown at the Royal Academy in 1840, accompanied by lines from Percy Shelley’s poem *The Revolt of Islam* calling her a “child of love and light”.

Shelley’s mentor Godwin had three highly educated daughters, two of whom, Fanny Imlay and Claire Clairmont, were his adopted step-daughters. Godwin’s first wife, the celebrated feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, had died giving birth to Godwin’s biological daughter, Mary, named for her mother. Fanny had been the illegitimate daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and her lover, the diplomat speculator and writer, Gilbert Imlay. Claire was the illegitimate daughter of Godwin’s much younger second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont Godwin, whom Shelley considered a vulgar woman—“not a proper person to form the mind of a young girl”, he is supposed to have said. The brilliant Mary was being educated in Scotland when Shelley first became acquainted with the Godwins family. When she returned Shelley fell madly in love with her, repeatedly threatening to commit suicide if she didn’t return his affections.

On 28 July 1814, Shelley abandoned Harriet, now pregnant with their son Charles (b. Nov. 1814-d. 1826) and (in imitation of the hero of one of Godwin’s novels) he ran away to Switzerland with Mary, then 16, inviting her stepsister Claire Clairmont (also 16) along because she could speak French. The older sister Fanny, was left behind, to her great dismay, for she, too, had fallen in love with Shelley. The three sailed to Europe, and made their way across France to Switzerland on foot, reading aloud from the works of Rousseau, Shakespeare, and Mary’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (an account of their travels was subsequently published by the Shelleys).

After six weeks, homesick and destitute, the three young people returned to England. The enraged William Godwin refused to see them, though he still demanded money, to be given to him under another name, to avoid scandal. In late 1815, while living close to London with Mary and avoiding creditors, Shelley wrote *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude*. It attracted little attention at the time, but has now come to be recognised as his first major achievement. At this point in his writing career, Shelley was deeply influenced by the poetry of Wordsworth.

**Byron**

In mid-1816, Shelley and Mary made a second trip to Switzerland. They were prompted to do this by Mary’s stepsister Claire Clairmont, who, in competition with her sister, had initiated a liaison with Lord Byron the previous April just before his self-exile on the continent. Byron’s interest in her had waned and Claire used the opportunity of introducing him to the Shelleys to act as bait to lure him to Geneva. The Shelleys and Byron rented neighbouring houses on the shores of Lake Geneva. Regular conversation with Byron had an invigorating effect on Shelley’s output of poetry. While on a boating tour the two took together, Shelley was inspired

to write his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, often considered his first significant production since *Alastor*. A tour of Chamonix in the French Alps inspired *Mont Blanc*, a poem in which Shelley claims to have pondered questions of historical inevitability (determinism) and the relationship between the human mind and external nature. Shelley also encouraged Byron to begin an epic poem on a contemporary subject, advice that resulted in Byron's composition of *Don Juan*. In 1817, Claire gave birth to a daughter by Byron, Alba, later renamed Allegra, whom Shelley offered to support, making provisions for her and for Claire in his will.

### Two suicides and a second marriage

After Shelley and Mary's return to England, Fanny Imley, Mary's half-sister and Claire's step-sister, despondent over her exclusion from the Shelley household and perhaps unhappy at being omitted from Shelley's will, travelled from Godwin's household in London to kill herself in Wales in early October. On 10 December 1816, the body of Shelley's estranged wife Harriet was found in an advanced state of pregnancy, drowned in the Serpentine in Hyde Park, London. Shelley had generously provided for her and their children in his will and had given her a monthly allowance as had her father. It is thought that Harriet, who had left her children with her sister Eliza and had been living alone under the name of Harriet Smith, mistakenly believed herself to have been abandoned by her new lover, 36-year-old, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Maxwell, who had been deployed abroad, after a landlady refused to forward his letters to her. On 30 December 1816, a few weeks after Harriet's body was recovered, Shelley and Mary Godwin were married. The marriage was intended, in part, to help secure Shelley's custody of his children by Harriet and also to placate Godwin, who had coldly refused to speak to his daughter for two years, and who now effusively received the couple. The courts, however, awarded custody of Shelley and Harriet's children to foster parents.

The Shelleys took up residence in the village of Marlow, Buckinghamshire, where a friend of Percy's, Thomas Love Peacock, lived. Shelley took part in the literary circle that surrounded Leigh Hunt, and during this period he met John Keats. Shelley's major production during this time was *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City*, a long narrative poem in which he attacked religion and featured a pair of incestuous lovers. It was hastily withdrawn after only a few copies were published. It was later edited and reissued as *The Revolt of Islam* in 1818. Shelley wrote two revolutionary political tracts under the *nom de plume*, "The Hermit of Marlow." On Boxing Day 1817, presumably prompted by travellers' reports of Belzoni's success (where the French had failed) in removing the 'half sunk and shattered visage' of the so-called 'Young Memnon' from the Ramesseum at Thebes, Shelley and his friend Horace Smith began a poem each about the Memnon or 'Ozymandias,' Diodorus's 'King of Kings' who in an inscription on the base of his statue challenged all comers to 'surpass my works'. Within four months of the publication of *Ozymandias* (or Rameses II) his seven-and-a-quarter ton bust arrived in London, just too late for Shelley to have seen it.

### Italy

Early in 1818, the Shelleys and Claire left England in order to take Claire's daughter, Allegra, to her father Byron, who had taken up residence in Venice. Contact with the older and more established poet encouraged Shelley to write once again. During the latter part of the year, he wrote *Julian and Maddalo*, a lightly disguised rendering of his boat trips and conversations with Byron in Venice, finishing with a visit to a madhouse. This poem marked the appearance of Shelley's "urbane style". He then began the long verse drama *Prometheus Unbound*, a re-writing of the lost play by the ancient Greek poet Aeschylus, which features talking mountains and a petulant spirit who overthrows Jupiter. Tragedy struck in 1818 and 1819, when Shelley's

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son Will died of fever in Rome, and his infant daughter Clara Everina died during yet another household move.

A baby girl, Elena Adelaide Shelley, was born on 27 December 1818 in Naples, Italy and registered there as the daughter of Shelley and a woman named "Marina Padurin". However, the identity of the mother is an unsolved mystery. Some scholars speculate that her true mother was actually Claire Clairmont or Elise Foggi, a nursemaid for the Shelley family. Other scholars postulate that she was a foundling Shelley adopted in hopes of distracting Mary after the deaths of William and Clara. Shelley referred to Elena in letters as his "Neapolitan ward". However, Elena was placed with foster parents a few days after her birth and the Shelley family moved on to yet another Italian city, leaving her behind. Elena died 17 months later, on 10 June 1820.

The Shelleys moved around various Italian cities during these years; in later 1818 they were living in a pensione on the Via Valfonde. This street now runs alongside Florence's railway station and the building now on the site, the original having been destroyed in World War II, carries a plaque recording the poet's stay. Here they received two visitors, a Miss Sophia Stacey and her much older travelling companion, Miss Corbet Parry-Jones (to be described by Mary as "an ignorant little Welshwoman"). Sophia had for three years in her youth been ward of the poet's aunt and uncle. The pair moved into the same pensione and stayed for about two months. During this period Mary gave birth to another son; Sophia is credited with suggesting that he be named after the city of his birth, so he became Percy Florence Shelley, later Sir Percy. Shelley also wrote his "Ode to Sophia Stacey" during this time. They then moved to Pisa, largely at the suggestion of its resident Margaret King, who, as a former pupil of Mary Wollstonecraft, took a maternal interest in the younger Mary and her companions. This "no nonsense *grande dame*" and her common-law husband George William Tighe inspired the poet with "a new-found sense of radicalism". Tighe was an agricultural theorist, and provided the younger man with a great deal of material on chemistry, biology and statistics.

Shelley completed *Prometheus Unbound* in Rome, and he spent mid-1819 writing a tragedy, *The Cenci*, in Leghorn (Livorno). In this year, prompted among other causes by the Peterloo massacre, he wrote his best-known political poems: *The Masque of Anarchy* and *Men of England*. These were probably his best-remembered works during the 19th century. Around this time period, he wrote the essay *The Philosophical View of Reform*, which was his most thorough exposition of his political views to that date.

In 1820, hearing of John Keats' illness from a friend, Shelley wrote him a letter inviting him to join him at his residence at Pisa. Keats replied with hopes of seeing him, but instead, arrangements were made for Keats to travel to Rome with the artist Joseph Severn. Inspired by the death of Keats, in 1821 Shelley wrote the elegy *Adonais*.

In 1821, Shelley met Edward Ellerker Williams, a British naval officer, and his wife Jane Williams. Shelley developed a very strong affection towards Jane and addressed a number of poems to her. In the poems addressed to Jane, such as *With a Guitar*, *To Jane* and *One Word is Too Often Profaned*, he elevates her to an exalted position worthy of worship.

In 1822, Shelley arranged for Leigh Hunt, the British poet and editor who had been one of his chief supporters in England, to come to Italy with his family. He meant for the three of them—himself, Byron and Hunt—to create a journal, which would be called *The Liberal*. With Hunt as editor, their controversial writings would be disseminated, and the journal would act as a counter-blast to conservative periodicals such as *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review*.

Leigh Hunt's son, the editor Thornton Leigh Hunt, when later asked whether he preferred Shelley or Byron as a man, replied:

“On one occasion I had to fetch or take to Byron some copy for the paper which my father, himself and Shelley, jointly conducted. I found him seated on a lounge feasting himself from a drum of figs. He asked me if I would like a fig. Now, in that, Leno, consists the difference, Shelley would have handed me the drum and allowed me to help myself.”

## Death

On 8 July 1822, less than a month before his 30th birthday, Shelley drowned in a sudden storm while sailing back from Leghorn (Livorno) to Lerici in his schooner, *Don Juan*. Shelley claimed to have met his Doppelgänger, foreboding his own death. He was returning from having set up *The Liberal* with the newly arrived Leigh Hunt. The name “Don Juan”, a compliment to Byron, was chosen by Edward John Trelawny, a member of the Shelley-Byron Pisan circle. However, according to Mary Shelley’s testimony, Shelley changed it to “Ariel”. This annoyed Byron, who forced the painting of the words “Don Juan” on the mainsail. This offended the Shelleys, who felt that the boat was made to look much like a coal barge. The vessel, an open boat, was custom-built in Genoa for Shelley. It did not capsize but sank; Mary Shelley declared in her “Note on Poems of 1822” (1839) that the design had a defect and that the boat was never seaworthy. In fact the *Don Juan* was seaworthy; the sinking was due to a severe storm and poor seamanship of the three men on board.

There were those who believed his death was not accidental. Some said that Shelley was depressed in those days and that he wanted to die; others say that he did not know how to navigate; others believed that some pirates mistook the boat for Byron’s and attacked him, and others have even more fantastical stories. There is a mass of evidence, though scattered and contradictory, that Shelley may have been murdered for political reasons. Previously, at Plas Tan-Yr-Allt, the Regency house he rented at Tremadog, near Porthmadog, north-west Wales, from 1812 to 1813, he had allegedly been surprised and apparently attacked during the night by a man who may have been, according to some later writers, an intelligence agent. Shelley, who was in financial difficulties, left forthwith leaving rent unpaid and without contributing to the fund to support the house owner, William Madocks; this may provide another, more plausible explanation for this story.

Two other Englishmen were with Shelley on the boat. One was a retired Navy officer, Edward Ellerker Williams; the other was a boatboy, Charles Vivien. The boat was found ten miles (16 km) offshore, and it was suggested that one side of the boat had been rammed and staved in by a much stronger vessel. However, the liferaft was unused and still attached to the boat. The bodies were found completely clothed, including boots.

In his “Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron”, Trelawny noted that the shirt in which Williams’s body was clad was “partly drawn over the head, as if the wearer had been in the act of taking it off [...] and [he was missing] one boot, indicating also that he had attempted to strip.” Trelawny also relates a supposed deathbed confession by an Italian fisherman who claimed to have rammed Shelley’s boat in order to rob him, a plan confounded by the rapid sinking of the vessel. Shelley’s body washed ashore and later, in keeping with quarantine regulations, was cremated on the beach near Viareggio. The day after the news of his death reached England, the Tory newspaper *The Courier* gloated: “Shelley, the writer of some infidel poetry, has been drowned, now he knows whether there is God or no.” A reclining statue of Shelley’s body, depicting him washed up onto the shore, created by sculptor Edward Onslow Ford at the behest of Shelley’s daughter-in-law, Jane, Lady Shelley, is the centerpiece of the Shelley Memorial at University College, Oxford. An 1889 painting by Louis Édouard Fournier, *The Funeral of Shelley* (also known as *The Cremation of Shelley*), contains inaccuracies. In pre-Victorian times it was English custom that women would not attend funerals for health reasons. Mary Shelley did not attend, but was featured in the painting, kneeling at the left-hand side. Leigh

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Hunt stayed in the carriage during the ceremony but is also pictured. Also, Trelawney, in his account of the recovery of Shelley's body, records that "the face and hands, and parts of the body not protected by the dress, were fleshless," and by the time that the party returned to the beach for the cremation, the body was even further decomposed. In his graphic account of the cremation, he writes of Byron being unable to face the scene, and withdrawing to the beach.

Shelley's ashes were interred in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome, near an ancient pyramid in the city walls. His grave bears the Latin inscription, *Cor Cordium* ("Heart of Hearts"), and, in reference to his death at sea, a few lines of "Ariel's Song" from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange." The grave site is the second in the cemetery. Some weeks after Shelley had been put to rest, Trelawny had come to Rome, had not liked his friend's position among a number of other graves, and had purchased what seemed to him a better plot near the old wall. The ashes were exhumed and moved to their present location. Trelawny had purchased the adjacent plot, and over sixty years later his remains were placed there.

A memorial was eventually created for Shelley at the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey, along with his old friends, Lord Byron and John Keats.

### Shelley's Heart

Shelley's widow Mary bought a cliff top home at Boscombe, Bournemouth in 1851. She intended to live there with her son, Percy, and his wife Jane, and had her own parents moved to an underground mausoleum in the town. The property is now known as Shelley Manor. When Lady Jane Shelley was to be buried in the family vault, it was discovered that in her copy of *Adonais* was an envelope containing ashes, which she had identified as belonging to Shelley the poet. The family had preserved the story that when Shelley's body had been burned, his friend Edward Trelawny had taken the ashes of his heart and kept them himself; some more dramatic accounts suggest that Trelawny snatched the whole heart from the pyre. These same accounts claim that the heart was buried with Shelley's son Sir Percy Florence Shelley. All accounts agree, however, that the remains now lie in the vault in the churchyard of St Peter's Church, Bournemouth.

For several years in the 20th century some of Trelawny's collection of Shelley ephemera, including a painting of Shelley as a child, a jacket, and a lock of his hair were on display in 'The Shelley Rooms' a small museum at Shelley Manor. When the museum finally closed these items were returned to Lord Abinger, who descends from a niece of Lady Jane Shelley.

### Ancestry

Shelley was a seventeenth-generation descendant of Richard FitzAlan, 10th Earl of Arundel, through his son John FitzAlan, Marshal of England (d. 1379). John was married to Baroness Eleanor Maltravers (1345–10 January 1404/1405). Their eldest son succeeded them as John FitzAlan, 2nd Baron Arundel (1365–1391). He was himself married to Elizabeth le Despenser (d. 1 April/10 April 1408).

Elizabeth was a great-granddaughter of Hugh the younger Despenser by his second son Edward Despenser of Buckland (d. 30 September 1342). Her parents were Sir Edward Despenser, 1st Lord Despenser (24 March 1336–11 November 1375) and Elizabeth Burghersh (d. 26 July 1409).

The eldest son of Elizabeth by Baron Maltravers was John FitzAlan, 13th Earl of Arundel. Their third son was Sir Thomas FitzAlan of Beechwood. His own daughter Eleanor FitzAlan was married to Sir Thomas Browne of Beechworth Castle. They had four sons and one daughter, Katherine Browne, who in 1471 married Humphrey Sackville (1426–24 January 1488), a member of the powerful Sackville family that had been living at Buckhurst, near Withyham, Kent, since 1068.

Their oldest son, Richard Sackville (1472–18 July 1524), was married in 1492 to Isabel Dyggs. Their oldest son, Sir John Sackville (1492–5 October 1557), was married to Margaret Boleyn, a member of the Boleyn family at nearby Hever, Kent. Margaret was a sister to Thomas Boleyn, 1st Earl of Wiltshire. His younger brother Richard Sackville had a less prominent marriage which resulted in the birth of Elizabeth Sackville. Elizabeth herself was later married to Henry Shelley.

Henry became father to a younger Henry Shelley. This younger Henry had at least three sons. The youngest of them Richard Shelley was later married to Joan Fuste, daughter of John Fuste from Itchingfield, near Horsham, West Sussex. Their grandson John Shelley of Fen Place, Turners Hill, West Sussex, was married himself to Helen Bysshe, daughter of Roger Bysshe. Their son Timothy Shelley of Fen Place (born c. 1700) married widow Johanna Plum from New York City. Timothy and Johanna were the great-grandparents of Percy.

### Family

Percy was born to Sir Timothy Shelley (7 September 1753—24 April 1844) and his wife Elizabeth Pilfold following their marriage in October 1791. His father was son and heir to Sir Bysshe Shelley, 1st Baronet of Castle Goring (21 June 1731—6 January 1815) by his wife Mary Catherine Michell (d. 7 November 1760). His mother was daughter of Charles Pilfold of Effingham. Through his paternal grandmother, Percy was a great-grandson to Reverend Theobald Michell of Horsham. Through his maternal lineage, he was a cousin of Thomas Medwin—a childhood friend and Shelley's biographer.

Percy was the eldest of six children. His younger siblings were:

John Shelley of Avington House (15 March 1806 – 11 November 1866; married on 24 March 1827 Elizabeth Bowen (d. 28 November 1889));

Mary Shelley (NB. not to be confused with his wife);

Elizabeth Shelley (d. 1831);

Hellen Shelley (d. 10 May 1885);

Margaret Shelley (d. 9 July 1887).

Shelley's uncle, brother to his mother Elizabeth Pilfold, was Captain John Pilfold, a famous Naval Commander who served under Admiral Nelson during the Battle of Trafalgar.

### Descendants

Three children survived Shelley: Ianthe and Charles, his daughter and son by Harriet; and Percy Florence, his son by Mary. Charles, who suffered from tuberculosis, died in 1826 after being struck by lightning during a rain storm. Percy Florence, who eventually inherited the baronetcy in 1844, died without children. The only lineal descendants of the poet are therefore the children of Ianthe.

Ianthe Eliza Shelley was married in 1837 to Edward Jeffries Esdaile of Cothelstone Manor. The marriage resulted in the birth of one daughter, Una Deane Esdaile, who married Campbell Carlston Thurston and had two children by him. Several members of the Scarlett family were born at Percy Florence's seaside home "Boscombe Manor" in Bournemouth. The 1891 census shows Lady Shelley living at Boscombe Manor with several great nephews.

Notes

**Idealism**

Shelley's unconventional life and uncompromising idealism, combined with his strong disapproving voice, made him an authoritative and much-denigrated figure during his life and afterward. He became an idol of the next two or three or even four generations of poets, including the important Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, as well as Lord Byron, Henry David Thoreau, WB Yeats, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, and poets in other languages such as Jan Kasprowicz, Jibanananda Das and Subramanya Bharathy.

**Non-violence**

Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's passive resistance were influenced and inspired by Shelley's non-violence in protest and political action. It is known that Gandhi would often quote Shelley's *Masque of Anarchy*, which has been called "perhaps the first modern statement of the principle of non-violent resistance."

**Vegetarianism**

Shelley wrote several essays on the subject of vegetarianism, the most prominent of which were "A Vindication of Natural Diet" (1813) and "On the Vegetable System of Diet".

Shelley, in heartfelt dedication to sentient beings, wrote: "If the use of animal food be, in consequence, subversive to the peace of human society, how unwarrantable is the injustice and the barbarity which is exercised toward these miserable victims. They are called into existence by human artifice that they may drag out a short and miserable existence of slavery and disease, that their bodies may be mutilated, their social feelings outraged. It were much better that a sentient being should never have existed, than that it should have existed only to endure unmitigated misery"; "Never again may blood of bird or beast/Stain with its venomous stream a human feast,/To the pure skies in accusation steaming"; and "It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion, and that the sight of its bloody juices and raw horror does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust." In *Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem* (1813) he wrote about the change to a vegetarian diet: "And man ... no longer now/He slays the lamb that looks him in the face,/And horribly devours his mangled flesh."

Shelley was a strong advocate of social justice for the "lower classes". He witnessed many of the same mistreatments occurring in the domestication and slaughtering of animals, and he became a fighter for the rights of all living creatures that he saw being treated unjustly.

**Legacy**

Shelley's mainstream following did not develop until a generation after his death, unlike Lord Byron, who was popular among all classes during his lifetime despite his radical views. For decades after his death, Shelley was mainly appreciated by only the major Victorian poets, the pre-Raphaelites, the socialists and the labour movement. One reason for this was the extreme discomfort with Shelley's political radicalism which led popular anthologists to confine Shelley's reputation to the relatively sanitised "magazine" pieces such as "Ozymandias" or "Lines to an Indian Air".

He was admired by CS Lewis, Karl Marx, Henry Stephens Salt, Gregory Corso, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, Isadora Duncan, Upton Sinclair, Gabriele d'Annunzio and WB Yeats. Samuel Barber, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Roger Quilter, Howard Skempton, John Vanderslice and Ralph Vaughan Williams composed music based on his poems.

Critics such as Matthew Arnold endeavoured to rewrite Shelley's legacy to make him seem a lyricist and a dilettante who had no serious intellectual position and whose longer poems were not worth study. Matthew Arnold famously described Shelley as a "beautiful and ineffectual angel". This position contrasted strongly with the judgement of the previous generation who knew Shelley as a sceptic and radical.

Many of Shelley's works remained unpublished or little known after his death, with longer pieces such as *A Philosophical View of Reform* existing only in manuscript till the 1920s. This contributed to the Victorian idea of him as a minor lyricist. With the inception of formal literary studies in the early twentieth century and the slow rediscovery and re-evaluation of his *oeuvre* by scholars such as KN Cameron, Donald H. Reiman and Harold Bloom, the modern idea of Shelley could not be more different.

Paul Foot, in his *Red Shelley*, has documented the pivotal role Shelley's works—especially *Queen Mab*—have played in the genesis of British radicalism. Although Shelley's works were banned from respectable Victorian households, his political writings were pirated by men such as Richard Carlile who regularly went to jail for printing "seditious and blasphemous libel" (i.e. material proscribed by the government), and these cheap pirate editions reached hundreds of activists and workers throughout the nineteenth century.

In other countries such as India, Shelley's works both in the original and in translation have influenced poets such as Rabindranath Tagore and Jibanananda Das. A pirated copy of *Prometheus Unbound* dated 1835 is said to have been seized in that year by customs at Bombay.

The 1970s and 1980s Thames Television sitcom *Shelley* made many references to the poet.

Paul Johnson, in his book *Intellectuals*, describes Shelley in a chapter titled "Shelley or the Heartlessness of Ideas ". In the book Johnson describes Shelley as a moral-less person, who by borrowing money which he did not intend to return, and by seducing young innocent women who fell for him, destroyed the lives of everybody with whom he had interacted, including himself. However, while reading the book one should keep in mind Johnson's conservative and religious agenda.

In 2005 the University of Delaware Press published an extensive two-volume biography by James Bieri. In 2008 the Johns Hopkins University Press published Bieri's 856-page one-volume biography, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography*.

The rediscovery in mid-2006 of Shelley's long-lost "Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things", as noted above and in footnote 6 below, has not been followed up by the works being published or being made generally available on the internet or anywhere else. At present (November 2009), its whereabouts are not generally known. An analysis of the poem by the only person known to have examined the whole work appeared in the Times Literary Supplement: HR Woudhuysen, "Shelley's Fantastic Prank", 12 July 2006.

In 2007, John Lauritsen published his book *The Man Who Wrote "Frankenstein"* in which he argued that Percy Bysshe Shelley's contributions to the novel were much more extensive than had previously been assumed. It has been known and not disputed that Shelley wrote the Preface—although uncredited—and that he contributed at least 4,000–5,000 words to the novel. Lauritsen sought to show that Shelley was the primary author of the novel.

In 2008, Percy Bysshe Shelley was credited as the co-author of "Frankenstein" by Charles E. Robinson in a new edition of the novel entitled *The Original Frankenstein* published by the Bodleian Library in Oxford and by Random House in the US. Charles E. Robinson determined that Percy Bysshe Shelley was the co-author of the novel: "He made very significant changes in words, themes and style. The book should now be credited as 'by Mary Shelley with Percy Shelley'.

Notes

The Poem

**14.2 Ode to the West Wind**

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being—  
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,  
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes!—O thou 5  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed  
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow  
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill 10  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill—  
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere—  
Destroyer and Preserver—hear, O hear!  
Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion, 15  
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,  
Angels of rain and lightning! they are spread  
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head 20  
Of some fierce Mænad, ev'n from the dim verge  
Of the horizon to the zenith's height—  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge  
Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre, 25  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might  
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst:—O hear!  
Thou who didst waken from his summer-dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, 30  
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,  
Beside a pumice isle in Baïæ's bay,  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

## Notes

All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers  
 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers  
 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40  
 Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear  
 And tremble and despoil themselves:—O hear!  
 If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share 45  
 The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
 Than thou, O uncontrollable!—if even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be  
 The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed 50  
 Scarce seem'd a vision,—I would ne'er have striven  
 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
 O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!  
 A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd 55  
 One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.  
 Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is:  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies  
 Will take from both a deep autumnal tone, 60  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
 My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one!  
 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
 Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
 And, by the incantation of this verse,  
 Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth  
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
 Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth  
 The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

### 14.3 Detailed Explanations

#### Lines 1-5

*O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,  
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes:*

- The speaker appeals to the West Wind four times in this first canto, or section, of the poem. (We don't find out what he's actually asking the wind to do for him until the end of the canto.)
- Lines 1-5 are the first appeal, in which the speaker describes the West Wind as the breath of Autumn.
- Like a magician banishing ghosts or evil spirits, the West Wind sweeps away the dead leaves. These dead leaves are multi-coloured, but not beautiful in the way we usually think of autumn leaves – their colours are weird and ominous and seem almost diseased (like "pestilence-stricken multitudes").

#### Lines 5-8

*O Thou,  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed  
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until*

- The speaker appeals to the West Wind a second time.
- This time, the West Wind is described as carrying seeds to their grave-like places in the ground, where they'll stay until the spring wind comes and revives them. The wind burying seeds in the ground is like a charioteer driving corpses to their graves.

#### Lines 8-12

*Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow  
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill:*

- Once the West Wind has carried the seeds into the ground, they lie there all winter, and then are woken by the spring wind.
- Shelley thinks of the spring wind as blue (or, to be specific, "azure").
- The spring wind seems to be the cause of all the regeneration and flowering that takes place in that season. It blows a "clarion" (a kind of trumpet) and causes all the seeds to bloom. It fills both "plain and hill" with "living hues and odours." It also opens buds into flowers the way a shepherd drives sheep.

**Lines 13-14****Notes**

*Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;*

*Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear!*

- The speaker appeals to the West Wind twice more, describing it as a “Wild Spirit” that’s everywhere at once.
- The West Wind is both “Destroyer and Preserver”; it brings the death of winter, but also makes possible the regeneration of spring.
- Now we find out (sort of) what the speaker wants the wind to do: “hear, oh, hear!” For the moment, that’s all he’s asking – just to be listened to. By the wind.

**Lines 15-18**

*Thou on whose stream, ‘mid the steep sky’s commotion,*

*Loose clouds like Earth’s decaying leaves are shed,*

*Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,*

*Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread*

- The speaker continues to describe the West Wind.
- This time, he describes the wind as having clouds spread through it the way dead leaves float in a stream. Leaves fall from the branches of trees, and these clouds fall from the “branches” of the sky and the sea, which work together like “angels of rain and lightning” to create clouds and weather systems.
- Yep, there’s a storm coming!

**Lines 18-23**

*Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread*

*On the blue surface of thine airy surge,*

*Like the bright hair uplifted from the head*

*Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge*

*Of the horizon to the zenith’s height,*

*The locks of the approaching storm.*

- The speaker creates a complex simile describing the storm that the West Wind is bringing. The “locks of the approaching storm”—the thunderclouds, that is—are spread through the airy “blue surface” of the West Wind in the same way that the wild locks of hair on a Mænad wave around in the air. Got that?
- Let’s put it in SAT analogy form: thunderclouds are to the West Wind as a Mænad’s locks of hair are to the air.
- A Mænad is one of the wild, savage women who hang out with the god Dionysus in Greek mythology. The point here about Mænads is that, being wild and crazy, they don’t brush their hair much.
- Oh, and the poet reminds us that these Mænad-hair-like clouds go vertically all the way through the sky, from the horizon to the centre.

Notes

**Lines 23-28**

*Thou Dirge*

*Of the dying year, to which this closing night*

*Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,*

*Vaulted with all thy congregated might*

*Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere*

*Black rain and fire and hail will burst: O hear!*

- The speaker develops a morbid metaphor to describe the power of the West Wind. The wind is described as a “dirge,” or funeral song, to mark the death of the old year. The night that’s falling as the storm comes is going to be like a dark-domed tomb constructed of thunderclouds, lightning, and rain.
- The poet ends by asking the West Wind once again to “hear” him, but we don’t know yet what exactly he wants it to listen to.

**Lines 29-32**

*Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams*

*The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,*

*Lulled by the coil of his chrystalline streams,*

*Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ’s bay,*

- The speaker tells us more about the West Wind’s wacky exploits: the Mediterranean Sea has lain calm and still during the summer, almost as though on vacation “beside a pumice isle in Baiæ’s bay,” a holiday spot for the ancient Romans. But the West Wind has woken the Mediterranean, presumably by stirring him up and making the sea choppy and storm-tossed.
- The Mediterranean is personified here as male.

**Lines 33-36**

*And saw in sleep old palaces and towers*

*Quivering within the wave’s intenser day,*

*All overgrown with azure moss, and flower*

*So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!*

- During his summertime drowsiness, the Mediterranean has seen in his dreams the “old palaces and towers” along Baiæ’s bay, places that are now overgrown with plants so that they have become heartbreakingly picturesque.

**Lines 36-38**

*Thou*

*For whose path the Atlantic’s level powers*

*Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below*

- The speaker claims that the “level” Atlantic Ocean breaks itself into “chasms” for the West Wind.
- This is a poetic way of saying the wind disturbs the water, making waves, but it also suggests that the ocean is subservient to the West Wind’s amazing powers.

**Lines 38-42**

*Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know  
Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!*

- In the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, the different kinds of marine plants hear the West Wind high above and “suddenly grow gray with fear” and thrash around, harming themselves in the process.
- Once again, the speaker ends all these descriptions of the West Wind by asking it to “hear” him.

**Lines 43-47**

*If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share  
The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O Uncontrollable!*

- The speaker begins to describe his own desires more clearly. He wishes he were a “dead leaf” or a “swift cloud” that the West Wind could carry, or a wave that would feel its “power” and “strength.”
- He imagines this would make him almost as free as the “uncontrollable” West Wind itself.

**Lines 47-51**

*If even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be  
The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
Scarce seemed a vision;*

- The speaker is willing to compromise: even if he can’t be a leaf or a cloud, he wishes he could at least have the same relationship to the wind that he had when he was young, when the two were “comrade[s].”
- When he was young, the speaker felt like it was possible for him to be faster and more powerful than the West Wind.

Notes

**Lines 51-53**

*I would ne'er have striven*

*As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.*

*Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!*

- The speaker claims that, if he could have been a leaf or cloud on the West Wind, or felt young and powerful again, he wouldn't be appealing to the West Wind now for its help.
- He begs the wind to treat him the way it does natural objects like waves, leaves and clouds.

**Lines 54-56**

*I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!*

*A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed*

*One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.*

- The speaker exclaims, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!"
- He explains that the passage of time has weighed him down and bowed (but not yet broken) his spirit, which started out "tameless, and swift, and proud," just like the West Wind itself.

**Lines 57-58**

*Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:*

*What if my leaves are falling like its own!*

- Finally, the speaker asks the West Wind for something: he wants the wind to turn him into its lyre.
- This image is related to the aëolian harp, a common metaphor in Romantic poetry. The aëolian harp is a sort of stringed version of a wind chime; it's an instrument that you only have to put out in the breeze and nature will play its own tunes.
- Here Shelley's speaker describes himself as the harp, or "lyre," that the wind will play. He'll be the instrument, and the West Wind will play its own music on him, just as it does in the branches of trees in the forest. That way, it won't matter that he's metaphorically losing his leaves.

**Lines 59-61**

*The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*

*Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,*

*Sweet though in sadness.*

- The speaker and the trees of the forest are both decaying—the trees are losing their leaves, and he's been bowed down by life.
- But that doesn't matter; if the wind plays both of them as instruments, they'll make sweet, melancholy, autumn-ish music.

**Lines 61-62**

*Be thou, Spirit fierce,*

*My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*

- Now the speaker changes tactics; instead of asking the wind to play him like an instrument, he asks the wind to become him. He wants the wind's "fierce" spirit to unite with him entirely, or maybe even replace his own spirit.

**Lines 63-64**

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,*

*Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth!*

- The speaker compares his thoughts to the dead leaves; perhaps the West Wind can drive his thoughts all over the world in the same way it moves the leaves, and they'll become like a rich compost or mulch from which new growth can come in the spring. That way, even if his thoughts are garbage, at least that garbage can fertilize something better.

**Lines 65-67**

*And, by the incantation of this verse,*

*Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth*

*Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!*

- The speaker comes up with another metaphor to describe what he wants the wind to do to his thoughts, and this one isn't about fertilizer. He describes his own words—perhaps the words of this very poem—as sparks and ashes that the wind will blow out into the world.
- The speaker himself is the "unextinguish'd hearth" from which the sparks fly; he's a fire that hasn't gone out yet, but is definitely waning.

**Lines 68-69**

*Be through my lips to unawaken'd Earth*

*The trumpet of a prophecy!*

The speaker returns to the metaphor of the wind playing him as an instrument, but this time he describes his mouth as a trumpet through which the wind will blow its own prophecy.

**Lines 69-70**

*O Wind,*

*If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*

- The speaker ends by asking the wind a question that seems very simple: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"
- The symbolic weight that he's attached to the seasons, however, makes us realize that this is more than a question about the wheel of the year. He's asking whether or not the death and decay that come at the end of something always mean that a rebirth is around the corner.
- He's hoping that's true, because he can feel himself decaying.

Notes

## 14.4 Commentary

The wispy, fluid *terza rima* of "Ode to the West Wind" finds Shelley taking a long thematic leap beyond the scope of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and incorporating his own art into his meditation on beauty and the natural world. Shelley invokes the wind magically, describing its power and its role as both "destroyer and preserver," and asks the wind to sweep him out of his torpor "as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!" In the fifth section, the poet then takes a remarkable turn, transforming the wind into a metaphor for his own art, the expressive capacity that drives "dead thoughts" like "withered leaves" over the universe, to "quicken a new birth"—that is, to quicken the coming of the spring. Here the spring season is a metaphor for a "spring" of human consciousness, imagination, liberty, or morality—all the things Shelley hoped his art could help to bring about in the human mind. Shelley asks the wind to be his spirit, and in the same movement he makes it his metaphorical spirit, his poetic faculty, which will play him like a musical instrument, the way the wind strums the leaves of the trees. The thematic implication is significant: whereas the older generation of Romantic poets viewed nature as a source of truth and authentic experience, the younger generation largely viewed nature as a source of beauty and aesthetic experience. In this poem, Shelley explicitly links nature with art by finding powerful natural metaphors with which to express his ideas about the power, import, quality, and ultimate effect of aesthetic expression.

## 14.5 Analysis

Symbols

### **The West Wind**

The West Wind is the object of the speaker's plea in this poem, the powerful force that could deliver him from his inability to make himself heard or to communicate his ideas to others. Blow...

### **Dead Leaves**

Dead leaves are referenced no less than five times in this short lyric poem. Dead leaves are the remnants of the previous season which the wind clears away; they're also a metaphorical representa...

### **Funerals**

Although there aren't any literal funerals in "Ode to the West Wind," there's plenty of funereal imagery and symbolism. We've got dirges, corpses, the "dying year," a sepulcher, a...

### **The Æolian Harp**

The æolian harp was a common parlour instrument in the nineteenth century. Sort of like a wind chime, the æolian harp (or "æolian lyre" or "wind harp") was meant to be left in a windy...

### **Bodies of Water**

Although "Ode to the West Wind" is mostly about, well, the wind, the middle of the poem moves away from the airy breezes and considers a different element: water. This slippage starts to happen in...

## 14.6 Rhyme, Form and Meter

Notes

### Form

Each of the seven parts of “Ode to the West Wind” contains five stanzas—four three-line stanzas and a two-line couplet, all metered in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme in each part follows a pattern known as *terza rima*, the three-line rhyme scheme employed by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*. In the three-line *terza rima* stanza, the first and third lines rhyme, and the middle line does not; then the end sound of that middle line is employed as the rhyme for the first and third lines in the next stanza. The final couplet rhymes with the middle line of the last three-line stanza. Thus each of the seven parts of “Ode to the West Wind” follows this scheme: ABA BCB CDC DED EE.

### Ode, *terza rima*, and more

The most important form here is the ode. We talked about that in the “What’s Up With the Title?” section, so you can go and read about it there. Let’s think about the rhyme scheme and meter in this poem. A lot of, ahem, *other* study sites will tell you that “Ode to the West Wind” is written in *terza rima* and leave it at that. That’s true, but *terza rima* is just one of the traditional poetic forms that Shelley is playing with here. Let’s cover both of them. Ready?

First, there’s *terza rima*, or “third rhyme,” an Italian rhyme scheme most famously used by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. (Go check out what Shmoop has to say about Dante’s *Inferno*.) Shelley’s grabbing some extra poetic street cred by using a form associated with the great Italian poet who came before him.

The idea with *terza rima* is that the lines are in groups of three, and the middle rhyme of one set of three becomes the outside rhyme of the next set. Handbooks of literary terms will tell you that this means the rhyme scheme is “ABA, BCB, CDC” and so on. We prefer to think of it in a sandwich metaphor: the filling of each “sandwich” (or stanza) becomes the bread of the next one. Of course, it’s hard to end this form, because every set of three lines has a new middle that demands another set of three lines to use its rhyme. Shelley fixes this problem by following each set of four three-line stanzas with a couplet.

As if using *terza rima* weren’t enough to make “Ode to the West Wind” remind us of Dante, Shelley also divides the poem into cantos, the Italian poetry equivalent of chapters.

In this poem, Shelley also plays with another form: the sonnet. “Wait a minute,” we hear you saying. “This doesn’t look like a sonnet. For one thing, a sonnet is a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter.” Not too fast: “Ode to the West Wind” has five cantos, each of which is fourteen lines and ends in a couplet. That sounds suspiciously like an English sonnet. (Italian sonnets often don’t end in couplets.) And even though there’s a lot of variation in the number of syllables in each line, one could maybe generally call this iambic pentameter. Think about lines seven and eight: “The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low, / Each like a corpse within its grave, until”—hear that? Some iambic pentameter is peeking through here. So “Ode to the West Wind” is almost like a miniature sonnet sequence of five sonnets.

OK, so what’s the take-away message about the form and meter of this ode? Well, don’t forget that Shelley is an English expatriate living in Italy, writing, at least in part, about how frustrating it is for him to feel totally out of sorts in a different country. The poem imagines one solution to an individual feeling weak in the face of the world: unity between Man and Nature. But the form creates another solution: unity between a prestigious Italian rhyme scheme and a famous English style of sonnet writing. That way, Shelley the Englishman in Italy brings his two countries closer together with the structure of the poem.

Notes

## 14.7 Speaker Point of View

Who is the speaker, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him?

The speaker in this poem is almost, but not quite, a fully-fledged character; he's somewhere between the shadowy impersonal speaker that we assume is between the poet and the poem every time we read poetry and find an actual character who interacts with other characters in the poem. Even before the speaker starts talking about himself by saying, "I this" and "I that," we know that there is a speaker here. Not only does every poem have a speaker, but this speaker is addressing the West Wind, calling it "thou" and invoking its aid. That must mean there's someone doing the invoking, someone talking to the "thou" – an "I." In fact, we could make that a rule: for every "thou," there's an "I" lurking somewhere.

We know that this speaker is concerned about sending his ideas out into the world for other people to experience. He knows, or thinks, that his ideas aren't any good; in fact, he describes them as "dead" and "withered." But he still wants to get them out there, because they might provide an opportunity for other people to develop their own ideas. He feels incapable of doing this on his own because of something that has happened to him. It might be some specific traumatic thing, but it might just be the general pain of living. He only refers to it as "the thorns of life" (54).

We also suspect the speaker might be a writer or even a poet, because he likes to pun on the word "leaves," which could be things that fall off trees but could also be pages of books. He also refers directly to the poem itself within the poem: "by the incantation of this verse / Scatter...my words among mankind!" (65-6, 67). So it's not just Shelley writing a poem about this speaker – the speaker himself knows about and is composing the poem.

## 14.8 Theme

### **Theme of Man and the Natural World**

In "Ode to the West Wind," Nature is grander and more powerful than man can hope to be. The natural world is especially powerful because it contains elements like the West Wind and the Spring Wind, which can travel invisibly across the globe, affecting every cloud, leaf, and wave as they go. Man may be able to increase his status by allowing Nature to channel itself through him.

### **Theme of Transformation**

As the speaker of "Ode to the West Wind" feels himself waning and decaying, he begs the wind to use him as an instrument, inhabit him, distribute his ideas, or prophesy through his mouth. He hopes to transform himself by uniting his own spirit with the larger "Spirit" of the West Wind and of Nature itself.

### **Theme of Mortality**

The West Wind in Shelley's ode is depicted as an autumnal wind, preparing the world for winter. As a result, the poem is filled with images of death and decay, reminders of both natural and human mortality. The speaker hopes that the death of one world will be inevitably followed by a new rebirth and a new spring, but the poem leaves this rebirth uncertain.

## Theme of Language and Communication

## Notes

At the end of "Ode to the West Wind," the speaker betrays his deepest concern: the fate of his ideas. He hopes that his words and thoughts will be spread throughout the world. He's not sure of the quality of his thinking, but at least it can provide a starting point for other thinkers.

## Self Assessment

## Choose the correct options

- Where was Shelley born?
 

(a) Bee Hive	(b) Rose Garden
(c) Field Place	(d) Hill Place
- "Pourest thy full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art." To which bird are these lines addressed by Shelley?
 

(a) Raven	(b) Nightingale
(c) Skylark	(d) Cuckoo
- Which text that Shelley wrote shocked the Oxford University where he studied?
 

(a) The Defense Of Poetry	(b) A Declaration of Rights
(c) Ode to the West Wind	(d) The Necessity of Atheism
- "Poets are the \_\_\_\_\_ of unapprehended inspiration." according to Shelley.
 

(a) Sycophants	(b) Hierophants
(c) Revealers	(d) Seekers
- In "Ode To The West Wind" what does Shelley call 'leaves'?
 

(a) Green and purple seaweeds	(b) Veined fringes
(c) Pestilence-stricken multitudes	(d) Autumn's eternal victims
- "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, king of kings:"- Who is this "king of kings"?
 

(a) Prometheus	(b) Ozymandias
(c) Pan	(d) West Wind
- In 1822, which journal did Shelley publish along with Leigh Hunt and Lord Byron?
 

(a) The Revolutionary	(b) Atheism Redefined
(c) The Reformer	(d) The Liberal
- How is Shelley supposed to have died?
 

(a) He was assassinated.	(b) He drowned in the sea.
(c) He died a natural death.	(d) He died of consumption

14.9 Summary

- The speaker invokes the "wild West Wind" of autumn, which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they may be nurtured by the spring, and asks that the wind, a "destroyer and preserver," hear him. The speaker calls the wind the "dirge/Of the dying year," and describes how it stirs up violent storms, and again implores it to hear

**Notes**

him. The speaker says that the wind stirs the Mediterranean from “his summer dreams,” and cleaves the Atlantic into choppy chasms, making the “sapless foliage” of the ocean tremble, and asks for a third time that it hears him.

- The speaker says that if he were a dead leaf that the wind could bear, or a cloud it could carry, or a wave it could push, or even if he were, as a boy, “the comrade” of the wind’s “wandering over heaven,” then he would never have needed to pray to the wind and invoke its powers. He pleads with the wind to lift him “as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!”—for though he is like the wind at heart, untamable and proud—he is now chained and bowed with the weight of his hours upon the earth.
- The speaker asks the wind to “make me thy lyre,” to be his own Spirit, and to drive his thoughts across the universe, “like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth.” He asks the wind, by the incantation of this verse, to scatter his words among mankind, to be the “trumpet of a prophecy.” Speaking both in regard to the season and in regard to its effect upon mankind that he hopes his words to have, the speaker asks: “If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

**14.10 Keywords**

<i>Incantation</i>	: Spell-charm-conjuration-enchantment-magic
<i>Infiltrated</i>	: Gain access to (an organisation, place, etc.) furtively and gradually, esp. in order to acquire secret information
<i>Animates</i>	: Full of life or excitement; lively
<i>Transcend</i>	: Be or go beyond the range or limits of something abstract, typically a conceptual field or division

**Answers: Self Assessment**

- |        |        |        |        |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. (c) | 2. (c) | 3. (d) | 4. (b) |
| 5. (c) | 6. (b) | 7. (d) | 8. (b) |

**14.11 Review Questions**

1. Why is Nature more powerful than Man in “Ode to the West Wind”? Why must the speaker turn to the West Wind to help him?
2. What does the speaker want the West Wind to do for him? What relationship does he want to establish between the wind and himself?
3. Why are wind and water the most commonly described parts of the natural world here? Why is the poem more concerned with seas, oceans, bays, and breezes than, say, fields and mountains and wildfires?
4. Dead leaves get mentioned, not once, not twice, but five times in this poem. Why is this speaker so obsessed with dead leaves? (Hint: maybe there’s a pun on the word “leaf.”)
5. Is the speaker in “Ode to the West Wind” a representative of all mankind, or is he unique or special in some way?
6. The poem itself ends with a question – “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” (70). Well, can it? What about in a metaphorical sense...can we assume that every kind of decay and death that we compare to the desolation of winter will always result in a rebirth?

7. Why is wildness so important here? The West Wind is wild, the clouds it blows around are like the hair of crazy Mænads, and the speaker wishes he were also “uncontrollable.” What can be created through wildness that isn’t possible with control? Why does a poem that emphasizes wildness have such a controlled form and meter?
8. Why does this poem praise the *West* Wind? (As opposed to the East Wind, the North Wind, or the Winter Wind...)

Notes

### 14.12 Further Readings



Books

The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Medwin (London, 1847), p. 323

*Bysshe* is pronounced as if written *bish*.

Isadora Duncan, “My Life “, W. W. Norton & Co.,1996, pp. 15, 134.

Thomas Weber, “Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor,” Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 28–29. Print.

The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Medwin (London, 1847)

Coleman, Elliott, editor: Poems of Byron, Keats, and Shelley. New York: International Collectors Library, 1967.



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