स्व–निर्देशित अध्ययन सामग्री
Self-Instructional Learning Material

# Master of Arts (English)

## (M.A. English)

## First Year

# Eighteenth Century Literature

## Paper-III

दूरवर्ती अध्ययन एवं सतत् शिक्षा केन्द्र
महात्मा गाँधी चित्रकूट ग्रामोदय विश्वविद्यालय
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**M.A. English (Paper-III)**

**Eighteenth Century Literature**

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I have the pleasure to elucidate that Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya established by Govt. of Madhya Pradesh by an enactment Act. No. 9, 1991 in the year 1991, with a mandate for rural development. Infact, it is the first Rural University of the country implementing the recommendations of Radha Krishnan Committee, 1948. The proposal was piloted by **Padam Vibhushan Shri Nanaji Deshmukh** to materialize the vision of **Mahatma Gandhi** regarding the development of rural India.

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**(Naresh Chandra Gautam)**

# EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

**SECTION A : Authors/texts for Detailed Study**

**UNIT I:**

Thomas Gray : Elegy, Hymn to Adversity

Collins : Ode to Evening, The Passions

**UNIT II:**

Pope : The Rape of the Lock

**UNIT III:**

Addison : Coverly Papers, ed. Myers (O.U.P.) Essay Nos. 1, 112, 117, 130, 196 and 518.

Richard Steele : The Spectator : Essay Nos. 2, 107, 113, 117.

**SECTION B : Authors/texts for Non-detailed Study**

**UNIT IV:**

Fielding : Joseph Andrews

**UNIT V:**

Peacock, ed. : English Verse, Vol. III. The following poems ;
1. Blake : 1. Songs of Innocence;
2. Songs of Experience

Dr. Johnson : Preface to Shakespeare

# BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In Unit I we shall introduce you to Thomas Gray and Collins. We shall be discussing their life and works in general. But for special consideration we have selected Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and 'Hymn to Adversity'. Collins has been discussed as the precursor of Romantic Movement. For further study we have selected two of his poems: 'Ode to Evening' and 'The Passions'.

In Unit II the aim is to introduce you to Alexander Pope, his life and works, and the social background in which he worked. For a fair appraisal of his abiding popularity we have selected his classic *The Rape of the Lock.*

In Unit III the objective is to acquaint you with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and also to discuss their craftsmanship as prose writers. We will further bring into discussion some of their more popular essays for their critical study.

In Unit IV we shall familiarize you with Henry Fielding and his classic *Joseph Andrews*. We will discuss with you about his life and works with special reference to *Joseph Andrews*.

In Unit V our objective is to make you acquainted with William Blake and Dr Samuel Johnson. We have selected Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* for critical appreciation. To study Dr Samuel Johnson we have selected his *Preface to Shakespeare*.

# UNIT-I THOMAS GRAY, WILLIAM COLLINS

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## Structure



## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit I we have chosen Thomas Gray and Collins. We shall be discussing their life and works in general. But for special consideration we have selected Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and 'Hymn to Adversity'. Collins has been discussed as the precursor of Romantic Movement. For further study we have selected two of his poems: 'Ode to Evening' and 'The Passions'. You will be able to:

- Talk on the authors and their works.
- Give an outline of the prescribed poems.
- Critically evaluate the poems.

# 1.1 THOMAS GRAY

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**Childhood**

Thomas Gray was the son of Philip Gray, a wealthy scrivener in the city of London. Born in Cornhill on December 26, 1716, he was a delicate boy, the only one of a large family who survived his infancy. He had a troubled childhood on account of his father's harsh and at times violent treatment of his mother, who was obliged to run a milliner's shop in order to pay for the boy's education.

**Education**

Thomas was sent to Eton in 1725, and was extremely happy there. His closest friends were Horace Walpole (a son of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister) and Richard West, whose father was an eminent lawyer. The influence of Eton, with its beauty and its ancient traditions, remained with him throughout his life. In 1734 he became a scholar at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and left without earning a degree in 1738. Studious and reflective he began to write Latin verse of considerable merit.

**Foreign tour**

Early in 1739 he set out with Walpole on a long tour. They spent the remainder of that year in France, and crossed the Alps in November. The whole of 1740 was passed in Italy, with a prolonged stay in Rome and shorter excursions to Naples and elsewhere. In 1741, on the way to Venice, the two friends quarrelled and parted in anger and did not reconcile until 1745. Gray spent a few weeks at Venice and went back to England alone.

**Impressions of France and Italy**

Gray was not much impressed by Versailles, but enjoyed a lot at an alfresco party at Rheims. On his way up to the Grande Chartreuse he saw "one of the most solemn, the most romantic and the most astonishing scenes I ever beheld…not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry." He was very much pleased with many things in Italy, his historic sense being strongly appealed to by the rich antiquity he found almost everywhere. At

Turin he enjoyed the balls of the carnival season with more pleasure than he could have expected.



**Reading for the Bar**

During his years abroad, Gray had continued with his studies, and had acquired an intimate knowledge of classical and modern art. But at the age of twenty-five he had not prepared himself for any kind of career. He spent the first few months after his return to England at Stoke-Poges in Buckinghamshire, where his mother and her sisters had settled to live after his father's death. He then took up residence as a fellow commoner at his old college of Peterhouse, with the purpose of reading for the degree of bachelor of laws, with a not very serious intention of an eventual career at the Bar.

**Early Poems and the "Elegy"**

The spring and summer of 1742—the interval between his return from abroad and his establishment at Peterhouse (Cambridge)—witnessed a noteworthy spell of creative activity. The sights and sounds of the Buckinghamshire countryside inspired him to write the Ode on the Spring. Almost immediately after this he received the news of the death of Richard West, who had been his only intimate friend, especially after his quarrel with Walpole. His sorrow and loneliness found expression in the poems which now followed in close succession—the Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College, the Hymn to Adversity, and the Sonnet on the Death of Richard West. He also added to the ambitious philosophical poem De Principis Cogitandi, which had been begun at Florence, some lines of remarkable intensity of feeling and beauty of expression. This passage was the climax and the close of his Latin writing. In 1751 appeared the Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, composed perhaps in 1742 and, which received instant success.

**Friendship with Miss Speed**

Among the admirers of his Elegy were the Dowager Viscountess Gobham, the grand dame of Stoke-Poges, and her young relation and companion, Miss Henrietta Jane Speed. They introduced themselves to Gray, and he celebrated their first meeting in a poem entitled A Long Story, a gay and fanciful example of the humorous vein in which he too seldom indulged. Affection developed between

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him and Miss Speed, and at one time it was rumoured that they intended to marry. But she eventually married someone more suited to her nature and temperament. The success of the Elegy led also to the publication in 1753 of the first collected edition of Gray's poems, in a handsome volume with remarkable illustrations by Walpole's friend Richard Bentley.

**Continued Residence at Peterhouse**

All these years Gray had been living quietly at Peterhouse, reading, taking short summer tours about England, cultivating his modest circle of friends, and writing his admirable letters. He did not participate in university or college business, but simply resided in college as a gentleman of leisure. In 1756 he moved from Peterhouse across the street to Pembroke Hall where he continued with his usual way of life for the rest of his days.

**Interest in Celtic and Scandinavian antiquity**

In 1757 were published the two Pindaric odes—*The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* which met with a mixed reception and which were widely criticized for their alleged obscurity. But his reputation was now so high that, after the death of Cibber (1757), he was offered the office of the poet laureate, which owing to some reason he declined. Thereafter Gray virtually ceased to write poetry. He buried himself completely in private study, and especially in English antiquities and in natural history. He greatly admired the productions, which that dubious figure, James Macpherson, published as *The Poems of Ossian*, and made investigations of his own into the Celtic and Scandinavian Past.

**Professor of Modern History**

In 1768, Gray was appointed as the professor of modern history at Cambridge. He treated this office as a sinecure, delivering no lectures. He expressed his gratitude to the Duke of Grafton, who had bestowed the honour upon him by writing an ode which was sung at the ceremony of his installation. This ode contained some noble passages and was in reality a return to the grand manner which he had abandoned after the failure of his Pindarics twelve years ago.

**The Last Decade**

In the last decade of his life, Gray's summer tours sometimes took him further a field than had previously been his custom. He visited Scotland in 1765, and the English lakes in 1767 and 1769, describing the landscapes, through which he passed, in some of his finest letters. Late in 1769 he made the acquaintance of a young Swiss nobleman, Charles Victor de Bonstetten, and developed a romantic devotion towards him, the most profound emotional experience of his life. Gray's health, which was never sound, had now been declining for some years; and he died in his room at Pembroke, after a sudden illness, on July 30, 1771 at the age of fifty-five. He was buried in the churchyard of Stoke-Poges.

**The Character of Thomas Gray**

Possibly he was the most learned man in Europe. He was similarly acquainted with the elegant and profound parts of science, and that too thoroughly. He knew every branch of history, both natural and civil; had read all the original historians of England, France, and Italy and was a great antiquarian. Criticism, metaphysics, morals, politics, made a principal part of his study; voyages and travels of all sorts were his favourite amusements; and he had a fine taste in painting, prints, architecture, and gardening. With such a fund of knowledge, his conversation must have been equally instructing and entertaining; but he was also a good man, a man of virtue and humanity. There is no character without some speck, some imperfection; and I think the greatest flaw in him was an affectation in delicacy, or rather effeminacy, and a visible fastidiousness, or dislike of his inferiors in science. In some degree he also had that limitation which disgusted Voltaire very much in Congreve though he seemed to value others chiefly according to the progress they had made in knowledge, yet he could not bear to be considered himself as a man of letters; and though without birth, or fortune, or station, his desire was to be looked upon as a private independent gentleman, who read for amusement. His time passed agreeably. He was every day making some new acquisition in science; his mind was enlarged, his heart softened, his virtue strengthened; the world and mankind were shown to him without a mask; and he was taught to consider everything as trifling, and not worthy of the attention of a wise man, except pursuit of knowledge and practice of virtue in that state wherein God hath placed us.

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Some critics have remarked that Gray's effeminacy was affected most "before those whom he did not wish to please", and that he was unreasonably charged with making knowledge his sole reason of preference, as he paid his esteem to none whom he did not likewise believe to be equal or good. Gray's mind had a great grasp; his curiosity was limitless, and his judgment cultivated; he was a man likely to love much where he loved at all; but was fastidious and hard to please. His contempt was, however, employed upon scepticism and infidelity.

Gray had this speciality that he first wrote an unrefined draft and then corrected them, and then laboured over every line as it arose in the train of composition

**His Letters**

Gray's poetic work is not much. But there is, in addition, a man in Gray, whom only his letters disclose in his totality. Now published in a three volume edition, the letters, written to intimate friends, show a sensitive, percipient traveller, an omnivorous reader with a highly developed critical faculty, and a somewhat pedantic humourist not unaware that he may at times be ridiculous himself. A recluse, he does not reveal the wide pattern of the 18th century society as Horace Walpole does, but his letters do have a remarkable charm:

Here one enjoys the charm of a real spontaneousness that is witty without effort; of an affectionate nature, made for friendship; susceptible, as well, to the comic side of things; free from any Puritan narrowness, and on the lookout for the picturesque trait; nervous, and one would like to say feminine, endowed with a lovable and simple grace; in no wise insular, but fashioned by travel and study open to the appreciation of French classics as well as to an inquisitive taste for the archaic and the Gothic. The literary opinions of which these letters are full form one of their principal attractions. Above all, they give to the feeling for landscape a franker and more complete expression than that which is found in the poems; and one is astonished to read, at a date as early as 1739, about the sublimity of the Alps, and the religious horror of high mountains, effusions which outdistance the stage marked by Thomson in the progress towards the love of wild nature. The diary of the journey to the English Lake District, thirty years later, is full of an intelligent and precise passion for the nobility and austerity of the horizons that Wordsworth was later to love. The modernity of these impressions is surprising;

but they contain a soberness of line, even in the noting of the most indeterminate flights of the soul, which is the special mark of Gray.



**PRINCIPAL POETIC WORKS**

1. Ode on Spring
2. Sonnet on the Death of Richard West.
3. Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College.
4. Hymn to Adversity.
5. Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.
6. A Long Story.
7. Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat.
8. *The Progress of Poesy*-a Pindaric Ode.
9. *The Bard*— Pindaric ode.
10. Ode on the Installation of the Duke of Grafton.

**Translations**

1. The Fatal Sisters: an Ode
2. The Descent of Odin: an Ode
3. The Triumph of Owen.

## 1.1.1 GRAY AND THE PINDARIC ODE

*Gray and the Pindaric Ode*

**Cowley's Misconception**

Both *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy* are "Pindaric" odes. The successful introduction of this form of poetry into English literature has generally been attributed to Cowley, whose Pindarique Odes were published in 1656. Cowley was not aware of the metrical and structural principles of Pindar's poetry,

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and the irregular stanzaic forms of his imitations did much to promulgate what swiftly became a universal misconception of Pindar as an impassioned poet, whose genius was not restrained by normal rules. This misconception, as well as the popularity of the Pindaric ode itself, was furthered by Dryden's effective use of the irregular stanza in his *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* and *Alexander's Feast*. As a vehicle for "enthusiastic" religious and patriotic poetry, the Pindaric ode became a popular form, supposedly permitting virtually any type of metrical and thematic irregularity and providing an attractive alternative to the logical and metrical demands of stricter verse forms.

**Congreve's Protest**

William Congreve made a strong protest against this misconception about Pindar in 1706, in the preface to his *Pindaric Ode to the Queen*. Congreve made the objection that the supposed imitations of Pindar were merely "a bundle of rambling incoherent thoughts, expressed in a like parcel of irregular stanzas, which also consist of such another complication of disproportioned, uncertain, and perplexed verses and rhymes". Congreve further went on to expound the exact principles of Pindar's odes and to show that "there is nothing more regular than the odes of Pindar, both as to the exact observation of the measures and numbers of his stanzas and verses, and the perpetual coherence of his thoughts." Congreve clarifies that the ode usually consisted of three stanzas—the strophe, the antistrophe, and the epode. The poet fixed the metre and stanzaic form of the strophe, which varied from ode to ode, and which had to be duplicated precisely in the antistrophe. In the epode the poet devised another, usually contrasting, stanzaic form. The ode could consist of several sets of three stanzas, but the stanzaic forms established in the first tripartite set had to be duplicated exactly thereafter. Pindar himself varies this basic form which is, however, followed scrupulously by Gray. Although it gave considerable scope for metrical variation within the symmetrical pattern, it was never irregular.

**Gray's Handling of the Pindaric Ode**

Congreve's protest could not instantly dispose of the misconception of Pindar as an artless genius or halt the flow of the irregular ode. But Collins's Odes represent an attempt to compromise more closely with Greek principles, and the argument for the regularity of Pindar was firmly repeated by Gilbert West in the

*Preface to his Odes of Pindar*, translated from the Greek, in 1749. In any case, Gray had already investigated the principles of Pindar's odes for himself. A letter to Wharton of 17th March 1747 shows that he was studying Pindar at that time; and a notebook now in the British Museum contains his notes on the poet, dated 20th March 1747. Gray transcribed several of the passages from Pindar which he was to imitate in *The Progress of Poesy* and cautiously analysed the metre. It is not surprising, therefore, that Gray observed the principle of Pindar's verse in his imitations more faithfully than any earlier English poet. In addition, Gray attempted to capture the manner of Pindar's odes by imitating the highly allusive and concise narrative technique and the swift transitions from one topic to another which characterize them. Gray's repeated emphasis on the learned character of his Pindaric poems points to his desire to dissociate himself from the decadent irregular form which had, moreover, lost much of its popularity by the mid-century. Mason states unequivocally that "there was nothing which Gray more disliked than that chain of irregular stanzas which Cowley introduced, and falsely called Pindaric; and which, from the extreme facility of execution, produced a number of miserable imitators." He stated these in a note to a letter from Gray to Wharton, in which Gray discusses the length of stanza desirable in the strophe and antistrophe. If it is too great, he believed, "it has little or no effect upon the ear which scarce perceives the regular return of metres at so great distance from one another. To make it succeed, I am persuaded that the stanzas must not consist of above nine lines each at the most." Paradoxically, it was specifically on these grounds that Johnson was to criticize the stanzas of *The Bard*: "The ode is finished before, the ear has learned its measures, and consequently before it can receive pleasure from their consonance and recurrence."

A renowned literary historian comments on *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* thus: "Their form is not one that really suits English, the elaborate correspondences escape attention, or when attended to produce an uneasy effect of constraint and mechanism, from which one flies for relief to the *Epithalamion* or *Lycidas*, to the *Grecian Urn* or *The Lotus-Eaters*, nay in comparison with which one finds more satisfaction even in Mrs Anne Killigrew. To this stiffness of form they add another, not indeed of thought (as some of their contemporary readers strangely fancied), but of diction and phrase. It is basically rhetorical poetry; and some of the figures and 'machines' which it employs are rather childish, especially the behaviour of Gloucester and Mortimer, the latter of whom seems to

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have had an attack of nerves. But as a sort of poetical feu d' artifice the things are fine."

Yet another well-known critic writes: "In *The Progress of Poesy* he set himself to glorify, with every adornment of rhetoric and eloquence, the poet's high calling. In *The Bard* he depicted a traditional episode during the final conquest of Wales. An ancient seer curses the invading forces and foretells the doom of the English monarchs who are to come, until a Welsh dynasty in the persons of the Tudor sovereigns ruled over the whole land of Britain. During the composition of this ode Gray was seized with an unwonted fervour of inspiration so that, as he said later, 'I felt myself *The Bard*'."

The odes were published together in 1757 in a slender volume which was the first production of Walpole's private press at Strawberry Hill. They met with a mixed reaction, and were also widely condemned for their obscurity. Indisputably they are difficult poems and were still more difficult without the aid of the footnotes, which Gray refused to provide in the original edition. They are full of metaphor and veiled allusion, rhapsody, and incantation. Nonetheless certain passages have an authentic note of mystery and romance, a foreshadowing of Coleridge and Keats. By contrast, melodies almost Wordsworthian in their pure simplicity were sounded in a poem of this time which Gray left unfinished, and to which his editor, W. Mason, gave the title of *Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude*".

## 1.1.2 ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

### Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share,

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.

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The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:-
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbad: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.

Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

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On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate, --

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn;

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

'One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

'The next with dirges due in sad array
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne,-
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'

The Epitaph

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melacholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
The bosom of his Father and his God.

**Introduction**

This celebrated poem was begun in the year 1742 and finished in 1749. It was written or meditated in the churchyard at Stoke-Poges where Gray's mother and aunt settled after his father's death. However, there is little in the poem to 'localize' it. The ambience and theme is such as any country churchyard could have inspired it. The emotions and thoughts expressed in this poem are permanent and universal. There is nothing exceptional here, for Gray is the singer of the humble, poor, neglected folk of the village. The poem has a simple philosophy and a calmness of emotion. "To what greatness might these villagers have aspired?" is the poet's theme. Around this he has built a perfect poem which has become an integral part of the English language, full of sympathy, sincerity, and simplicity. It is indisputably one of the five greatest English elegies. It brought immediate recognition to Gray but no money. It has retained a higher reputation in literature than any other English poem written between Milton and Wordsworth.

## CRITICAL SUMMARY

**The Atmosphere of Evening**

In the opening stanza of the Elegy, the poet creates an atmosphere of evening. The curfew is tolling; the herd is seen leisurely winding over the lea; the ploughman is returning homewards, tired of his day's exertions; the landscape is fading in the

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deepening darkness; and the only sounds that break the stillness of this hour are the droning of the beetle, the tinkling of bells from distant folds, and the infrequent cry of the owl. Every line in the first three stanzas contributes to the creating of the atmosphere of evening, an atmosphere which is most suitable to the reflections that follow.

(Stanzas 1-3)

**The Irrevocable Nature of Death**

The poet then refers to "the rude forefathers of the hamlet" who lie buried in the village churchyard of Stoke-Poges and who are presently beyond recall. Neither the morning air laden with sweet smells, the twittering of swallows, nor the crowing of the cock will wake them up from their eternal sleep. No more will the housewife attend to their needs at home and no more will children greet them on their return from work. How often did they reap the harvest; how often did they plough the land; and how often did they cut down trees! In these lines the poet, after referring to the irrevocable nature of death, gives a retrospective picture of the occupations and simple pleasures of these humble men.

(Stanzas 4-7)

**Death is Inevitable**

The four stanzas that follow are written in a tone of moralizing. The poet says that the proud and ambitious people should not mock at the humble lives and simple joys of these men or disparage their unspectacular labours. All men are subject to death. Death has no respect for high birth, worldly power, beauty, or wealth. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." This moral is followed by another. No monuments or memorials were raised over these dead men, but what purpose can monuments serve? It is not possible to transport the departed soul back to its body by way of monuments or memorials like the "storied urn" or "animated bust". The dead are deaf to all words of praise or flattery that their friends may speak.

(Stanzas 8-11)

**The Handicaps they Suffered from**

In the next four stanzas another important idea is developed. These men

led obscure and unknown lives. They did not get occasion for education or for self-development. Their latent abilities and gifts could not find scope for outlet or expression. There might have been among these dead men someone whose heart was full of a religious ardour which remained suppressed, someone who was fit to rule an empire, or someone who could have become a great musician if chance had favoured him. Extreme poverty made it impossible for them to acquire knowledge or to display their religious zeal or to cultivate the generous impulses of their souls. They lived and died unknown like the many exquisite gems that lie in the depths of the sea or like the lovely flowers that bloom and fade away unknown in a desert. There might have been among these men someone who had the daring and fearlessness of John Hampden, someone with the poetic gift of Milton, or someone with the war-like and belligerent nature of Cromwell. Except, for want of opportunity and owing to the crushing effect of poverty, their capabilities remained suppressed and unknown. The poet has surely expressed a convincing idea here. There is no doubt that many talented persons in this world find no opportunity for the development or display of their talents. On the other hand, it may be argued that real talent cannot remain hidden for long and that nobody with the poetic gift of Milton can remain mute all his life.



(Stanzas 12-15)

**Advantages of Poverty and Obscurity**

The poet then discovers much good in the very obscurity and poverty of these men. True that they found no occasion to display their oratorical powers or their capacities for the uplift of their nation. But, if their humble destiny did not permit them to develop and display their virtues and abilities, it likewise curbed their potentialities for mischief. Their humble destiny prohibited them from plunging the world into war, or from deteriorating into unscrupulous and seasoned rogues, or from humiliating themselves by offering extravagant and exaggerated flattery to men of position and rank. These men had love for peaceful, tranquil, and retired lives and they did not take to any evil courses. Undoubtedly there is much truth in what the poet says here because, if the essential greatness and virtue of some of these men found no scope, the capacity for mischief and wickedness of others remained also unknown. But one wonders if this can be any consolation to those men who have real worth but upon whom poverty acts as an oppressive influence.

(Stanzas 16-19)

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**The Desire to be Remembered after Death**

The poet next refers to the humble tombstones on which the names and - ages of the dead are engraved. These engravings and inscriptions, though awkwardly executed, serve to commemorate the dead men and fulfil an essential need. Everybody, while dying, casts a regretful eye upon this world and feels a strong desire to be remembered lovingly after he is gone. A dying man finds much comfort in seeing a dear friend with tears of sympathy and affection in his eyes. Even after death when all is dust and ashes, this desire for loving remembrance is keenly felt. The inscriptions on the tombstones in this churchyard are thus a fulfilment of that natural desire. Here the poet has stated a deep psychological fact. Undeniably, such is human nature that, when dying, we wish to be remembered lovingly.

(Stanzas 20-23)

**Self-portrait**

Having informed the readers the "artless tale of the unhonoured dead", the poet turns to himself. He tells us of the daily routine that he followed at Stoke-Poges where he was living when this elegy was written or meditated. We learn that he used to greet the sunrise from the top of a hill, that at noontime he used to stretch himself beneath a beech tree in a contemplative mood, and that he used to roam about, close to the wood, in a variety of moods. But this life, says the poet, would one day end and he would then be buried in the same churchyard.

(Stanzas 24-29)

**The Epitaph**

The poem finishes off with the poet's epitaph written by the poet himself. He refers to himself as a melancholy and scholarly person, with a generous, sympathetic, sincere heart, and with full confidence in Almighty God in whose bosom he will rest after death.

(Stanzas 30-32)

## III. CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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### Widely Admired

Perhaps in 1742 or at a later date, Gray started writing a long meditative elegy. Divergent views have been expressed about the progress and the numerous stages of this poem's composition; but it was completed in its final form, and sent to Walpole, in the summer of 1750. In order to forestall its publication in a periodical magazine, the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* was hurriedly printed in the following year. It received an instantaneous and overwhelming success. It remains the most celebrated poem of its century, the most familiar perhaps of all English poems, the most frequently quoted, and one the most loved by the ordinary man. Tennyson, a century later, spoke of its "divine truisms that make us weep". The voice of Johnson, a critic not known for being cordial towards Gray, summed up the contemporary reaction: "It abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo." The poem has become widespread and has exercised an influence on the poetry of Europe. No English poem has been so universally admired and imitated. It is a perfect model of its kind. Not even Milton's *Il Penseroso*, which it strongly suggests, outshines it in beauty and appeal. To read Milton's *Il Penseroso* and Gray's *Elegy* is to see the beginning and the perfection of that literature of melancholy which for the most part occupied English poets for more than a century.

### Its Universality

The most remarkable quality of the *Elegy* is its permanent and universal appeal. The emotions and thoughts expressed are widely understood and have a popular quality. Take, for example, the idea that nothing can bring back the dead to life, that the familiar sounds of dawn cannot awaken the dead, and that monuments or memorials cannot call "the fleeting breath back to its mansion". Again, Death has no regards for high position or birth or of beauty and wealth. Death snatches away everyone from this world. Convincing also is the idea that among the humble dead there might have been someone who could have become another Hampden, someone who might have proved equivalent to Milton, someone who could have emulated Cromwell's example. It is very true that a dying man finds comfort in the tears of a dear friend and that he feels an intense

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desire to be remembered lovingly after death. Thus the poem's universality is its most important characteristic.

**Its Imagery**

The first three stanzas are remarkable for their vivid imagery. The atmosphere of evening has very successfully been produced with such pictures as the herd winding leisurely over the lea, the ploughman returning home with a weary step, the landscape fading, the beetle flying round and round, the owl occasionally crying and complaining to the moon. Remarkable also are the retrospective pictures of the occupations and innocent and tender joys of the life of the dead men.

**Its Melancholy**

The whole poem is pervaded by an atmosphere of melancholy, which lends to the poem a romantic character. The irreversible nature of Death, the extinction of gifts and abilities which never found a chance to reveal themselves, and the poet's anticipation of his own death are full of pathos. The poem is indeed steeped in melancholy. The poem is an elegy not only on the death of the humble villagers who lie buried in the churchyard but also, towards the close, an elegy on the poet's own death.

**Moralizing**

The poem is also noteworthy for its moralizing and philosophical reflection. Neither power, nor glory, nor wealth, nor beauty can prevail upon Death. Let not the proud and the mighty mock at the humble dead, for they too will invariably meet the same fate. The poet also teaches the lesson that by leading an obscure and poor life one is saved from the difficulties and temptations of life.

**Felicity of Diction, and Oft-quoted lines**

One of the most important qualities of this poem is the aptness of words used. Indeed, it is a "word-perfect poem" and this quality constitutes its prime beauty. Several lines have become well-known and are often quoted. For instance:

(1) The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

(2) Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

(3) Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

(4) Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
Ev'n in our Ashes live their wonted Fires.

The phrase "far from the madding crowd" which occurs in line 73 was used by Hardy as a title for one of his novels.

**Its Classical Stamp**

The poem, though possessing romantic qualities (like melancholy, an emotional appeal, and suggestiveness), bears also the stamp of the 18th century neo-classical influences. Its moralizing is a neo-classical quality and its frequent use of personification—Ambition, Grandeur, Memory, Honour, Flattery, Knowledge, Penury, Luxury, Pride, Forgetfulness—all these are personifications. The use of capital letters for certain words is also frequent ("Ye Proud", "Tyrant", "Ashes", etc.).

## 1.1.3 HYMN TO ADVERSITY

### Hymn to Adversity

Daughter of Jove, relentless power,
Thou tamer of the human breast,
Whose iron scourge and tort'ring hour
The bad affright, afflict the best!

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Bound in thy adamantine chain,
The proud are taught to taste of pain,
And purple tyrants vainly groan
With pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone.
When first thy sire to send on earth
Virtue, his darling child, design'd,
To thee he gave the heav'nly birth,
And bade to form her infant mind.
Stern rugged nurse! thy rigid lore
With patience many a year she bore:
What sorrow was, thou bad'st her know,
And from her own she learn'd to melt at others' woe.
Scar'd at thy frown terrific, fly
Self-pleasing Folly's idle brood,
Wild Laughter, Noise, and thoughtless Joy,
And leave us leisure to be good.
Light they disperse, and with them go
The summer friend, the flattering foe;
By vain Prosperity receiv'd,
To her they vow their truth, and are again believ'd.
Wisdom in sable garb array'd,
Immers'd in rapt'rous thought profound,
And Melancholy, silent maid,
With leaden eye that loves the ground,
Still on thy solemn steps attend:
Warm Charity, the gen'ral friend,

With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.
Oh! gently on thy suppliant's head,
Dread goddess, lay thy chast'ning hand!
Not in thy Gorgon terrors clad,
Not circled with the vengeful band
(As by the impious thou art seen)
With thund'ring voice, and threat'ning mien,
With screaming Horror's fun'rai cry,
Despair, and fell Disease, and ghastly Poverty:
Thy form benign, oh goddess, wear,
Thy milder influence impart,
Thy philosophic train be there
To soften, not to wound, my heart.
The gen'rous spark extinct revive
Teach me to love, and to forgive,
Exact my own defects to scan,
What others are to feel, and know myself a Man.

## Introduction

### Written in Praise of Adversity in 1742

Written in 1742, this poem, like the *Ode on Spring* and the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, belongs to the first period of Gray's poetic career. The first period extends from 1742 to 1747. The word "hymn" means a song in praise of God; but here this word has been used to mean a song in praise of Adversity which has been personified, and to which the poet has attributed certain divine qualities. Here Adversity has been regarded as a daughter of Jove (or Jupiter) who was, in ancient classical mythology, the supreme god. This poem,

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written in praise of Adversity looks forward to a similar poem written by Wordsworth. The poem by Wordsworth is entitled *Ode to Duty*, Wordsworth also has personified Duty in his poem and has treated Duty as an awful power which can exert its influence upon all kinds of human beings and direct their thoughts and actions into the right channels so as to force them to discharge their duties scrupulously and efficiently. It is believed that Gray's tone of bitterness in his poem was caused by his quarrel with Robert Walpole who had been a friend of his. Though the first four stanzas of this poem are impersonal and objective, the last two stanzas are personal and subjective. While in the first four stanzas the poet describes how Adversity deals with, or should deal with, the other people, in the last two stanzas he describes the manner in which Adversity should deal with the poet. He wants that Adversity should treat him gently and mildly, meaning that his circumstances in life should not become so adverse or unfavourable as to make him feel miserable. The underlying idea of the poem, to use Shakespeare's famous dictum: "Sweet are the uses of adversity." The poem is Gray's tribute, couched in rhetorical and eloquent words, to Adversity.

**Critical Summary**

**Stanza 1 (Lines 1-8)**

**Summary**

Adversity is the daughter of the supreme god Jove (or Jupiter). She has the power to subdue human heart and mind. She wields her authority in an unforgiving manner,

frightening the evil-minded persons and not sparing even the noblest persons when these persons happen to commit any wrong deeds. She wreaks a severe punishment upon the evildoers. She subjects the proud people to such acute pain that they are cured of their sin of pride. She inflicts such punishment upon cruel dictators and despots that they cry out with pain which they have to endure all alone.

**Critical Comments**

The poet addresses Adversity as the daughter of Jove and as a relentless power who can exercise full control over the feelings and thoughts of human beings. The power of Adversity to punish and chastise the wrong-doers has most

effectively and emphatically been described in this stanza. Gray uses very powerful words to convey to us the idea that, when human beings find themselves in adverse circumstances, they experience many agonizing feelings of repentance over the misdeeds which they have committed. In other words, Adversity awakens the conscience of a human being who had never cared to listen to the voice of his conscience in his days of prosperity. "Iron scourge", "torturing hour", and "adamantine chain" are examples of emphatic, forceful, and rhetorical expression. There is nothing obscure or far-fetched about his vocabulary; and every word is in the right place, even though some readers make out from these expression that these words and phrases are somewhat magniloquent and bombastic.



### Stanza 4 (Lines 25-32)

**Summary**

Adversity is attended to by wise persons clothed in simple garments and absorbed in their philosophical thoughts which are a source of joy to them. Adversity is also attended by melancholy persons whose eyes are devoid of lustre, and who keep looking down at the ground because of their state of joylessness. Other attendants of Adversity are charitable persons, just-minded persons, and sympathetic persons who are moved to tears by the sight of sorrow and misery.

**Critical Comments**

In this stanza another class of human beings are described, and their traits specified. Wise persons, melancholy persons, charitable persons, just persons, and sympathetic persons, who are presented to us here, offer a strong contrast to the kind of human beings depicted in the preceding stanza. These persons keep company with Adversity. In other words, these persons show their true characteristics in times of adversity. Here also the attributes of the various persons have been specified in words and phrases which are most appropriate and most effective though some readers may insist that the language used here, as well as in the rest of the poem, is a specimen of the eighteenth-century poetic diction. As for us, we find the choice of words and their arrangement to be most satisfactory.

## 1.1.4 GRAY'S HANDLING OF THE PINDARIC ODE

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**Discuss Gray's handling of the Pindaric Ode.**

**Or**

**Write an essay on Gray as a writer of odes.**

**Or**

**What opinion have you formed of the matter, manner, and technique of Gray's odes?**

**Or**

**Elucidate and illustrate the remark that in *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard*, Gray aimed at the qualities of Pindar's odes.**

**His Earliest Odes**

The earliest of Gray's odes are the two which deal with the spring and his old school (Eton) respectively. *The Ode on Spring* is a sustained piece of delicate description mingled with moralizing and wit. *The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* does not, as one might suppose, celebrate the greatness of Gray's old school or express the nostalgia generally expected from an alumnus. Instead, as he watches the boys at play, he anticipates the misfortunes and tragedies they are certain to meet in later life. A boy's happiness and innocence are, says the poet, built on the slight foundations of ignorance and are of brief duration. Both these poems are more or less in the form of Horatian odes, in regular, lyric stanzas. These early odes of Gray have been regarded as "elegant compounds of platitudes, inert conventions, and poetic diction".

**Misconception about Pindaric Odes**

*The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* are, however, the poems by which Gray is to be judged as a writer of odes, He called them both "Pindaric" odes, and "Pindaric" they are. The effective introduction of the Pindaric ode into English literature has usually been attributed to Cowley. But Cowley was not aware of the

metrical and structural principles of Pindar's poetry, The irregular stanzaic forms of Cowley's imitations led to a misconception of Pindar as a genius not restrained by normal rules. Congreve made a strong protest against this misconception about Pindar.



**Congreve's Clarification**

As Congreve explained, a Pindaric ode follows a strict regularity both with regard to the measure and number of stanzas and verse, and the coherence of thoughts. A Pindaric ode normally consists of three stanzas called the strophe, the anti-strophe, and the epode. The poet has to fix the metre and stanzaic form of the strophe (which varies from ode to ode). This pattern has then to be duplicated precisely in the anti-strophe. In the epode the poet devises another, usually contrasting, stanzaic form. The ode may comprise several sets of three stanzas, but stanzaic forms established in the first tripartite set have to be replicated exactly thereafter. Pindar himself varied this basic form which is, however, strictly followed by Gray.

**Pattern and Technique in Gray's Odes**

In *The Progress of Poesy*, as also in *The Bard*, Gray uses a metrical scheme that brings together the greatest fluidity and the greatest strictness. In imitation of Pindar he constructs these poems of nine stanzas, divided into groups of three. In each group the first two stanzas are identical, while the third uses a new pattern. Thus Gray uses two stanza-forms, one six times, the other three times. And he confronts the problem of fitting his varied subject matter and moods into this strict pattern, while observing the general development of his poem's theme and argument. This is made more complex by the nature of the stanzas used, for it is necessary to use lines of differing lengths and to hold the stanza together by a complex rhyming scheme which allows the rhymes to be noted by the ear (that is, a rhyme-word must not wait too long for its echo). When we compare the opening lines of each strophe and anti-strophe, we realize Gray to be a great skilful artist.

**The Abrupt Transitions**

In writing Pindaric odes, Gray used a form popular with poets since the time of Dryden. In a structure less complex than Gray uses, it was to be popular

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with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. Pindar, born in the 6th century B.C. wrote his odes to be performed with music and dancing, as part of communal festivals; his epodes are the moments of rest for the dancers. The 18th century ode has no such function in communal life; it is a highly artificial form which can do no more than imitate some of Pindar's verbal characteristics—not only his structure, but his richness of style and his abrupt transition from one subject to another. Pindar's transitions are abrupt as his odes were primarily written to celebrate such events as the winning of a chariot race in the Olympic games.

**Gray's Scholarship**

Gray, then observed the principles of Pindar's verse in the imitations (*The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard*) more faithfully than any of the earlier English poets. Besides, he tried to capture the manner of Pindar's odes by imitating the highly allusive and concise narrative technique and the swift transitions from one topic to another which characterize them. Gray's repeated emphasis on the scholarly character of his Pindaric poems points to his wish to detach himself from the debased, irregular form which had, in any case, lost much of its popularity by the mid-century.

**Other Characteristics: *The Progress of Poesy***

*The Progress of Poesy* is highly wrought and deliberately "grand". It is marked by a sustained rhetorical excitement. The ideas in it were already commonplace, but the attempt at grandeur was Gray's own. The mood and tone differ with each stanza; there is deliberate rising and falling; the language sometimes mounts to rapturous heights that tremble on the verge of the ludicrous and is occasionally content with rather pedestrian periphrasis. Probably it is rather a remarkable poetic exercise than a great poem.

**The Bard**

*The Bard* is even more highly rhetorical in style than *The Progress of Poesy*. Most of the poem symbolizes the bitter prophecy addressed by a Welsh bard to Edward I when Edward's conquering army entered Wales, and Gray attempts to sustain the lofty note of heroic denunciation. The poem certainly has rhetorical brilliance, but Gray has not been able to avoid a hint of strained histrionics.

According to Dr. Johnson: “These odes are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments; they strike rather than please; the images are magnified by affectation; the language is laboured into harshness”. However, Dr. Johnson admits that the odes are not without their beauties.

**The Beauty of the Odes**

The beauties of these odes include such pictorial effects as are to be found in the lines describing young lovers dancing to "brisk notes", and those which describe the sun rising and dissolving the terrors of night in *The Progress of Poesy*. The picture of the lonely Bard standing on a rock, with his "haggard eyes", his "loose beard" and "hoary hair streaming, like a meteor to the troubled air" is incredibly vivid and moving. The lyrical quality of certain lines is above reproach:

*Dear lost companions of tuneful art,*

*Dear, as the light that visits these sad eyes,*

*Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart*

**Its Salient Features**

Gray's odes are distinguished by (i) personal feeling (except *The Bard*) (ii) a dignity of theme; (iii) an elevation of style approaching sublimity or grandeur (iv) a strict adherence to the Pindaric technique. Among the faults are laboriousness, a lack of spontaneity, and a use of rhetorical and often "forced" language.

## 1.1.5 PRECURSOR OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

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**Gray is regarded as a precursor of the Romantic Movement in poetry. Examine some of his more important poems to show the validity of this view.**

**Or**

**Bring out the romantic elements in Gray's poetry with special reference to *The Progress of Poesy*, *The Bard*, and the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.***

### Gray, a Pioneer of Romanticism

Gray's poetry divides itself naturally into periods in which it is possible to trace the progress of his liberation from the classic rules which had so long governed English literature. His early poems—*Hymn to Adversity, Ode on the Spring,* and *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*—reveal two suggestive features; first, the appearance of melancholy and, second, the study of Nature as a suitable background for the play of human emotions. The second period shows the same tendencies more strongly developed. The *Elegy*, *The Progress of Poesy*, and *The Bard* belong to this period. In the third period, Gray reveals a novel field of romantic interest in two Norse poems, *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin*. In fact, his last poems show him as a true pioneer of romanticism. As one eminent critic writes: "Gray's work has much of the precision and polish of the classical school; but he shares also the re-awakened interest in Nature, in common man, and in medieval culture, and his work is generally romantic both in style and in spirit."

### Romantic Characteristics of "*The Progress of Poesy*"

The Pindaric ode dealing with the "progress" of poetry has several characteristics, which link it with the Romantic Movement that produced its finest poetical fruits in the first thirty years or so of the 19th century. Firstly, the treatment of the subject shows some degree of imagination and emotion not to be found in general in the classical poets of the 18th century. The very opening stanza

has that feature. Here, despite Dr. Johnson's criticism, we have evidence of a fanciful visualizing of natural scenes. Helicon's harmonious springs; a thousand rills; the laughing flowers; the rich stream of music; the vales; the steep; the rocks; the nodding groves—all these conjure up a pleasing scene, suggestive of the abundance and fertility of Nature. The picture of the young lovers dancing around Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, is pretty sensuous. The following picture, despite its personifications, has a romantic quality:

*Over her warm cheek, and rising bosom, move*

*The bloom of young Desire, and purple light of Love*

Certainly, the whole poem develops by means of a succession of pictures which have an imaginative quality. The pictorial description creates images which carry their own meaning. Great is the image of the influence of poetry over the remotest and most unrefined nations. The "climes beyond the solar road", the "ice-built mountains", and "Chili's boundless forest" have the romantic appeal of far-off and unreachable regions. The linking of the spirit of poetry with the spirit of freedom is also romantic in a way, even though this concept was quite familiar in the 18th century. Nor can we ignore a picture such as the following:

*Where each old poetic Mountain*

*Inspiration breathed around:*

*Every shade and hallowed Fountain*

*Murmured deep a solemn sound.*

Undoubtedly there is a deep real feeling in these lines, almost a fervour which is romantic in source. Then there are the tributes which Gray pays to the various poets: Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden. Even where conventional diction is used, the writer's enthusiasm shines throughout. The tribute to Dryden's "bright-eyed Fancy" particularly shows that. Next comes the reference to the poet's own temperament and character. No doubt this subjective portrayal of self is a romantic trait. Gray even talks of his attempts at lyrical poetry. He shows his modesty by not claiming Pindar's magnificence. But he does claim to have seen early in his life poetic visions of the finest kind:

*Yet oft before his infant eyes would run*

*Such forms, as glitter in the Muse's ray*

*With orient hues, unborrowed of the Sun.*

The romantic note is most prominent in the last ten lines or so of the poem. As it is a Pindaric ode, a stanzaic variety had to be adopted, and Gray shows a remarkable control of the form he chose. He has not used the heroic couplet in any of his best-known poems. This poem is even more richly rhymed and more elaborate in construction.

**Romantic Qualities of "*The Bard*"**

While certain 18th century features of style are more marked in *The Bard* than in *The Progress of Poesy* and the *Elegy*. *The Bard* is not wanting in romantic characteristics. An eminent critic writes: "*The Bard* is distinctly more romantic, in both subject and treatment, than *The Progress of Poesy*," and he further says: "This poem, with its imaginative rekindling of an ancient and perished people, shows that reversion to the Middle Ages for inspiration which soon became the leading feature of romantic art." Another critic goes still further and observes: "It (*The Bard*) breaks absolutely with the classical school and proclaims a literary declaration of independence." In subject matter, this ode is "the out-pouring of a 13th-century Welsh bard in a situation of wildness and terror." The words "out-pouring", "wildness", and "terror" are all suggestive of a romantic atmosphere, which the poem without question has. The very setting of the poem—the mountains of Snowdon where they meet the river Conway—is romantic. *The Bard* in the poem undergoes a variety of emotional experiences. His attitude at the outset is one of anguished defiance. Then follows a sad lament for his dead comrades. When he sees the ghosts of the dead men, he feels overjoyed. When they depart, there a cry of sorrow escapes his heart. He greets the visions that now ensure with a sense of triumph. And his speech closes with words of proud denunciation. The following lines possess lyrical quality:

*Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,*

*Dear, as the light that visits these sad eyes,*

*Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart*

*Ye died amidst your country's cries.*

Moreover, *The Bard* who speaks in the poem exhibits a spiritual power which tyranny cannot annihilate, and is superior in the end till death. This heroic quality is truly romantic.



**Romantic Qualities of the "Elegy"**

Gray's *Elegy* is the best flower of that 'literature of melancholy' which Milton's *Il Penseroso*, acting upon the awakening romantic sense of the second quarter of the 18th century, brought forth in remarkable profusion. A large part of the charm of the Elegy comes from the poet's personal, sensitive approach to his subject. He lingers in the churchyard, making a note of the signs of approaching nightfall until the atmosphere of twilight musing is established, following which his reflections upon life and death gain a note of gloom and personal seriousness. The whole poem is pervaded by an atmosphere of melancholy. The irrevocable nature of death, the extinction of his personal gifts and abilities which never found a occasion to display themselves, the poet's anticipation of his own death, are all full of pathos. The elegiac and reflective tone is sustained throughout a variety of turns in the thought. It is in the tradition of graveyard contemplation but here the handling of the setting and the development of the mediation is done with high art. The subjective note is to be witnessed in the very first stanza:

*The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,*

*And leaves the world to darkness and to me.*

From then on the poem becomes impersonal, and the personal element re-appears towards the ends. In its recognition of the dignity of simple lives that lived closely to the soil, and in its sympathy with their fate, the Elegy looks forward to the humanitarian enthusiasm which marked the later phases of romantic poetry. The sights and sounds described in the opening stanzas create a rural atmosphere and suggest that interest in Nature, which in a highly developed form became one of the most striking features of romanticism.

**Conclusion**

Gray's poems are an early indication of discontent with the Augustan (or neo-classical) orthodoxy. They are an early attempt to establish a freer and wider use of poetic language (despite Wordsworth's criticism of it). They offer in a sense is the starting-point for the Wordsworthian revolution.

# 1.2 WILLIAM COLLINS

William Collins was born at Chichester and educated at Winchester College and at Magdalen College, Oxford. His Persian Eclogues (1742) were published anonymously when he was only seventeen. Coming to London from Oxford he tried to establish himself as an author. He published Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects (1746) with his friend Joseph Warton when he was in London. The volume could not receive much response, and when his father died in 1744, Collins was left in debt and without a job. He got some help from Dr Johnson who arranged an advance for him to write a translation of Aristotle's Poetics. However, when an uncle died leaving him £2000, Collins abandoned the project and paid his debts. After this he travelled for a while, but fits of depression became more serious and debilitating. He broke down completely on a journey in France in 1750, and died insane at the age of 38 in his sister's house in Chichester.

Thomas Gray gave favourable comments on Collins's work, and as the century progressed, he gained in reputation. Some of his finest odes are 'Ode to Evening' and 'Dirge in Cymbeline'. His last known poem is Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands , written in 1749. His sister destroyed his manuscripts after his death.

## 1.2.1 PRECURSOR OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

### Collins as the Precursor of the Romantic Movement

William Collins is regarded as one of the most important and prominent pre-Romantics. The first stirrings of the different stands of pre-Romanticism were seen in the poetry of Thomson, Dyer, Shenstone, Blair, Young, Gray and Collins. But Gray and Collins represented virtually all the strands of this new trend in

poetry which was finally to consummate in the Romanticism. Both Collins and Gray were comparatively minor poets of the second rank, who could not wholly free themselves from classicism, yet their contribution to the Romantic Movement cannot be underestimated. A great many second rate poets are second-rate just for this reason that they have not the sensitivity and consciousness to perceive that they feel differently from the traditional classicists and therefore must either evolve a new style of writing for themselves or use words differently from those of the Augustans. They led the pre-Romantic reaction against classicism in a rather unenthusiastic manner. Had this reaction produced a Wordsworth instead of a Collins or a Gray, the Age of Johnson would have ended and the second Romantic period begun a quarter of a century earlier than they did.



Romantic poetry is conspicuous by sorrow, pessimism and melancholy. The pre-Romantics struck a new note of melancholy, which was lovingly nourished upon a nostalgic regret for the past and advocated a return to the beliefs of older days, old legends and old-fashioned superstitions. This melancholic trend derived its poetic inspiration from Milton's Il Penseroso that exerted a great influence on this particular strand of the romantic reaction. Collins obviously adopted this melancholy mood that, actually, stemmed from a natural sensibility. In the words of Cazamian, "The note of Collins's inspiration is elegiac; tenderness breathes in his lines (Ode to Pity) and the uncertainty of what lies beyond, the thrill of death, connects him with the night and graveyard school."

**His Love of Liberty**

Liberty is the watchword of Romanticism. William Collins was a diehard advocate of liberty and freedom. He had an inborn hatred of all kind of oppression. His Ode to Liberty expresses his faith in liberty and freedom. In this connection, the views of Swinburne are noteworthy: "Collins was the first English poet, after Milton's voice for the dwellers upon earth fell silent, to blow again the clarion of republican faith and freedom; to reannounce with the passion of a lyric and heroic rapture the divine right and the godlike duty of tyrannicide."

**Conclusion**

Therefore, it is evident that Collins went a long way in heralding the great Romantic Movement. His poetry, chiefly the Odes, contains all that made the poetry of the great romantics like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and

Byron. The subject and spirit of his poetry is essentially romantic, though in his manner and style, he could not completely free himself from the conventional artificiality of the eighteenth century diction. His Persian Eclogues followed the heroic couplet and his style was characteristically classical in its adherence to personification and abstractions of the Augustan school but this artificiality of diction grew less in his later poetry where "the rhythms are adapted to the sentiment with a very sure intuition, which presages the freedom of the future."

Thus the Romantic Collins fell on an age of classicism. But his contribution as a true precursor of the Romantic Movement cannot be belittled. Legouis and Cazamian rightly observed that Collins's poetry "abounds in all the seeds of the coming age; it is wholly animated by emotions which are preparing the rejuvenation of literature."

## 1.2.2 THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLINS'S POETRY

### The General Characteristics of Collins's Poetry

Certainly Collins was the most exquisite and the greatest lyric poet of the century. He is considered as an early harbinger of English Romanticism. We note in his slender output of verse the combination of the classical style with a delicate and intimate poetic vision peculiar to romanticism. Being only a minor poet, Collin's poetry reflected the characteristic spirit of the two ages—the classical and the romantic—but his poetry had certain outstanding elements which set him altogether apart from his contemporaries. The following characteristics are to be found in his poetry.

Although a precursor of the Romantic Movement, Collins's poetry is not free from the literary tendencies of the age. The classical traits are too much prominent in his early poetry. In his earlier works, he was the product and exponent of classicism. When he first embarked on his *Eclogues* he felt vague stirrings of naturalism and romanticism but, being only a poet of the second rank, he was clearly not conscious of the fact that the change of sensibility also

demanded a change of idiom. Therefore in spite of his romantic leanings, he could not free himself from the shackles of classicism. Saintsbury observes in this connection: "Almost everything that is good in Collins belongs to the man; almost everything that is not good belongs to the time."

Collins wrote little and his scanty work lay mostly in odes, which entitle him to our remembrance and assure him a high place among some of the supreme lyricists of the eighteenth century and in modern English poetry as well. In his age odes were in fashion among poets. The ode writers followed the classical traditions in two chief forms, viz., the Pindaric, for the lofty themes and the Horatian for more familiar themes. Before Collins published *Odes* in 1747, Gray had already written two odes, viz., *Ode on the Spring* and *Ode an a Distant Prospect of the Eton College* in 1742 for his contemporaries. But it was in the Pindaric form of the classical odes that Gray tried to put his most original qualities of poetry not at all worrying about popular applause, viz., *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*, Collins attempted several kinds of odes and also evolved a new type of his own called 'descriptive and allegorical'. In four of his odes, viz., *To Fear*, *To Mercy*, *On the Poetical Character* and *To Liberty*, he followed the Pindaric form. *The Passions*, on *Ode for Music*, is the only ode of Collins in which he did not follow the rigid verse form of the classical odes.

For the Augustans 'Nature' specifically meant the nature of Man and not the external Nature as Wordsworth and Coleridge used it. It was to the infinite credit to Thomson that he heralded the dawn of naturalism in English poetry by the publication of his *Seasons*. The transitional poets thus included in Nature all things nonhuman except man and man-made things, e.g. hills, springs, rivers, earth, sky, wind, woods, heavenly bodies, etc. 'Return to Nature' in this context means the revival in poetry of subjects connected with external Nature in a natural manner.

William Collins was a pioneer of Nature poetry in his time. In his Odes, he brought back the lyric spirit besides an elegiac note, a genuine love of Nature in its 'introversive' aspect as against Thomson's 'extroversive' and realistic natural descriptions, a delicate feeling for beauty, mystery and in his personal, not bookish sympathy with ghost story, folk-lore and fairy tale, Welsh superstitions and legends.

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But his *Ode to Evening* is the best example of his Nature poetry. This exquisite ode reveals the poet's deeper yearning for Nature. Cazamian observes: "The note of Collins's inspiration is elegiac: tenderness breathes in his lines, and the uncertainty of what lies beyond, the thrill of death, connect him with the night and graveyard school." The general tone of melancholy, arising out of vague feeling for Nature is characteristic of much eighteenth century poetry, Collins could not remain unaffected and an unmistakable atmosphere prevails in his poetry. Collins's melancholy springs from spontaneous sensibility. The influence of Milton's *Il Penseroso* is clearly seen in all his Odes, particularly in his *Ode to Evening*, *Ode to Pity*, *The Passions*, *The Ode for Music*, *Ode on Thomson* and Dirge in *Cymbeline*. Collin's melancholy was not an artificial pretence but genuine feelings, being nourished upon a sincere regret for the past and a return to the beliefs of older days which is characteristic of Romanticism.

Collins's poetry is personal or subjective. It is lyrical in character in that the poet goes down into himself and seeks his inspiration in his own experiences, thoughts and feelings. It is the poetry of self-delineation and ingenious self-expression. It is the expression of a mood, the embodiment of a worthy feeling which impresses us by the convincing sincerity and honesty of its utterance. Its language and the imagery used are characterised not only by a subtle sense of beauty, mystery and vividness, but also by a harmony and a unity of impression created by a single subject matter. Such a lyric is Collins's *Ode to Evening* which has for its purpose, the expression of a single mood or feeling, somewhat akin to the lyric of religious emotion, as when the poet bursts into an exclamation of joy as the deity, the 'nymph reserved' is descending to the earth:

*Whose numbers, stealing through the darkening vale*

*May not unseemly with its stillness suit*

*They genial loved return!*

The *Ode to Evening* is considered as one of the most successful lyrics without rhyme in English literature and the most exquisite lyric of the century. In fact Collins possessed greater lyrical gift than his contemporaries. In this connection Swinburne remarks: “As an elegiac poet, Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station as lyric poet he is simply unworthy to sit at the feet of Collins.”

Collins, the poet was a great lover of the wild, fantastic and the supernatural. His imagination took strange flights not known to the classicists. Dr. Johnson aptly observes, "Collins was indeed delighted with those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature. He loved fairies, giants and monsters. He delighted to rove through the lands of enchantment to repose by the waterfalls of Elysian gardens."

Collins's themes were invariably romantic in that he loved to deal with the romance of the past. He was full of regret for the vanished glories of pagan art in his *Ode to the Passions*, in his Highland Ode, his love of the supernatural is obviously visible. In this poem he points to the so-called 'Celtic revival' in English literature.

Collins had the highest gift of simplicity, combined with a kind of austere dignity which are characteristic features of Greek poetry. It was so because he invariably followed the style and manner of 'true classicism' and not of 'pseudo classicism.' It is his hunger for simplicity that imparted to his poetry a grace, beauty and freshness of its own. His *Ode to Simplicity* characterises his longing for the elemental simplicities of life. According to him, simplicity is the greatest virtue in life:

*O sister meek of truth*

*To my admiring youth*

*They sober aid and native charms infuse!*

*The flowers that sweetest breathe,*

*Though beauty culled the wreath;*

*Still ask thy hand to range their ordered hues.*

The heroic couplet was the usual vehicle of satirical poetry in the age of Dryden and Pope. In their hands it could carry the satirical barb which they could wield with consummate skill and force. But the discovery of 'Sensibility' by the pre-Romantics brought about a change. Thomson was the first to sense the need for a change in form, style and idiom. Collins, however, was at first very sure in his poetic style. His *Persian Eclogues* followed that heroic couplet and his style was characteristically classical in his adherence to personifications and

abstractions of the Augustan School. But this artificiality of diction grew less in his later poetry till it disappeared in his Ode to Evening altogether.

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## 1.2.3 ODE TO EVENING

*Ode to Evening*

If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales,
O nymph reserv'd, while now the bright-hair'd sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed:
Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat,
With short shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,
As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum:
Now teach me, maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd strain,
Whose numbers stealing thro' thy dark'ning vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow, I hail
Thy genial lov'd return!
For when thy folding-star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours, and elves
Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and, lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet,
Prepare thy shadowy car.
Then lead, calm vot'ress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
Or upland fallows grey
Reflect its last cool gleam.
But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds, and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.
While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve;
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy ling'ring light;
While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
Or Winter, yelling thro' the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;
So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And hymn thy fav'rite name!

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The poet desires to be inspired to offer the goddess of Evening some delicate song. He paints a picture of the setting sun when the air is hushed and only the short shrill shrieks of the weak-eyed bat or the dull drones of the beetle break the general silence. The poet requests Evening to teach him to sing a soft and tender song. His notes that will pass through the darkening valley, will fairly be in keeping with her calm and quiet atmosphere. The Evening prepares to depart a number of supernatural beings who have slept during the day, viz. the fragrant hours, nymphs, elves etc., to prepare the shadowy car of Evening. The poet will not like to miss the charm of evening. He would like to spend the evening in a quiet hut alongside the mountain, which has a view of the surrounding wild country, the swelling floods, etc. The poet, then, concludes the poem with an epilogue of three stanzas in which he makes his vow, on behalf of all holy and humble men of heart, through all the seasons and their changeful masque to keep the wonder, the grace, the modesty and kindness of Evening always before him.

The *Ode to Evening* is admittedly the best, the finest and the most exquisite lyric of the eighteenth century. It is Collins's best poem in that it reveals some of the best qualities of Collins as a poet. In every respect it is Romantic in mood, temper and subject matter. According to Cazamian, it is "The most delicately exquisite eighteenth century poem, where a pensive colouring, rich in subdued, restrained vibrations, spread over the landscape as over the meditative mind that contemplates it, fuses in so harmonious a manner the charm of twilight, the paling lights, the oncoming silence and gloom, all that the hour hold of happy and foreboding intent, into one suggestive of a mysterious eloquence."

Edmund Blunden observes thus: “As regards the general form of the Ode, the first five stanzas are a conjuration and a petition to the Evening with an exquisite modesty yet resolve of imagination on the poet. He prays that she may smile on his verse by all her own beauties. In the course of this, by choice of image and secret allusions, he hints how his great predecessors among English poets have wooed and won the spirit of his dream. In the next two stanzas he confesses his longing for Evening as the season when the poet seeks no higher achievement than to wander like elf or nymph in the early starlight and dew. The poet then passes to three stanzas remembering those scenes which most delight him in these pilgrimages: the ruin by the lake, the hut on the hill with its opening

on a whole countryside stealing into sleep; and the vision of the divine dreamer over all."



The *Ode to Evening* is an exquisite lyric of Nature. It contains fine descriptions of Nature. These descriptions are very fanciful and captivating.

Collins is "a perfect painter of still life, or starlit vision"—brawling springs, sylvan beauty of the woods, the bright-haired sun setting in his cloudy tent made of ether, still life broken only by the weak-eyed bat and the drones of the beetle. The twilight and starlight spreading a mysterious veil over the earth, the evening star followed by creatures of the woods welcoming the evening goddess, some ruined building along-side of a gloomy lake, the hut on the brow of a hill, the pelting rain, the swelling floods, the sleepy hamlets in the distance with spires of churches all growing increasingly dimmer with the gathering darkness of the night.

The *Ode to Evening* is a poem of pensive and melancholy mood. Collins had an inborn love of melancholy. The whole poem, therefore, is steeped in a pensive melancholy mood into the mind of the poet when he withdraws into a lonely heath or a hut on the brow of a nearby hill to reflect upon the silent charm of evening. This melancholic strain in his poetry is not just a literary fashion but also an actual expression of his feeling springing out of his personal life.

*Ode to Evening* was greatly instrumental in heralding the dawn of the Romantic Movement. It is a prophecy of the Nature poetry that was to emerge in the future, i.e. the poetry by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. It predicts the poetic temper of the great Romantics. It approaches the sentiment and language of Keats in some place and the lyrical fervour of Shelley in others, especially where he describes the evening sky. There is an elfin magic about it, which is almost Shelleyan. At the same time the exquisite description of Evening as a country girl, a fairy Queen, priestess, goddess or a ghost in the sky "anticipates Keats's mythological treatment of Autumn in his famous Ode of that name. The myth-making ability of Collins is clearly visible where we see the sun seated in his cloudy tent whose edges are made of ethereal threads.

Collins invests natural phenomena with a personality like Shelley and Keats. Like Wordsworth he also experiences the chastening and purifying influence of Nature. In all these he anticipates the great Romantics of the next

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century by fusing together the different phases of Romanticism already in evidence among his contemporary poets into consistent pattern and also by reviving and imitating the stalwarts of the Elizabethan age.

With regard to Collin's poetic art, style and poetic diction, the language is learned and however steeped in literary memories, there is a natural and spontaneous grace about it. Again, in poetic diction, although it is not altogether free from personifications and abstractions, e.g. Hours, Fancy, Friendship and Science, and although his choice of words is a little laboured, he succeeds in investing them with personalities in lending them qualities borrowed from reality, in showing in movement and action and in spiritualizing them by an inner youthfulness of spirit and a subtlety of feeling which is quite modern. His style had a superb gift of musical expression, a very fine sense of word values, a musical perception of their expressive force. All these gave his expressions an appropriateness all their own, a freshness, a force of suggestion and a kind of elfin magic about them. He wrote this poem under the loftiest inspiration. He had the supreme gift of simplicity. His poem is thus the result of sincere self-expression and of a passionate sensitivity for Nature. He had an infallible eye for landscape painting and there is a spontaneous grace in his utterance which is the true mark of great poetry.

The ode is structured on the fundamental idea that Music controls different passions. Music expresses the various passions of the human heart, e.g., fear, anger, despair, hope, revenge, pity, melancholy, cheerfulness, joy and mirth. The poem is a glowing and composite picture of these emotions. The central idea is that music can embrace all the phases of human experience of passions and feelings. The poet sketches the psychological characters of the various emotions and passions. Fear with its diffidence, timidity and nervousness; Anger with eyes red with fury; pale, sickly and colourless Despair: Hope wit beautiful gleaming looks; impatient, turbulent and destructive Revenge; sad and dejected pity; pale Melancholy and blooming cheerfulness, all these have been delineated through vivid and graphic word-pictures.

## 1.2.4 THE PASSIONS

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*The Passions*

When Music, heavenly maid, was young,
While yet in early Greece she sung,
The Passions oft, to hear her shell,
Thronged around her magic cell,
Exulting, trembling, raging, fainting,
Possest beyond the Muse's painting:
By turns they felt the glowing mind
Disturbed, delighted, raised, refined;
Till once, 'tis said, when all were fired,
Filled with fury, rapt, inspired,
From the supporting myrtles round
They snatched her instruments of sound,
And, as they oft had heard apart
Sweet lessons of her forceful art,
Each (for Madness ruled the hour)
Would prove his own expressive power.

First Fear his hand, its skill to try,
Amid the chords bewildered laid,
And back recoiled, he knew not why,
E'en at the sound himself had made.

Next Anger rushed, his eyes on fire,
In lightnings owned his secret stings:
In one rude clash he struck the lyre,
And swept with hurried hand the strings.

With woful measures wan Despair
Low sullen sounds his grief beguiled;
A solemn, strange, and mingled air,
'Twas sad by fits, by starts 'twas wild.

But thou, O Hope, with eyes so fair,
What was thy delighted measure?
Still it whispered promised pleasure,
And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail!
Still would her touch the strain prolong;
And from the rocks, the woods, the vale,
She called on Echo still, through all the song,
And, where her sweetest theme she chose,
A soft responsive voice was heard at every close;
And Hope enchanted smiled, and waved her golden hair.
And longer had she sung;—but, with a frown,
Revenge impatient rose:
He threw his blood-stained sword in thunder down;
And, with a withering look,
The war-denouncing trumpet took,
And blew a blast so loud and dread,
Were ne'er prophetic sounds so full of woe!
And ever and anon he beat
The doubling drum with furious heat;
And though sometimes each dreary pause between
Dejected Pity, at his side,
Her soul-subduing voice applied,
Yet still he kept his wild unaltered mien,
While each strained ball of sight seemed bursting from his head.

Thy numbers, Jealousy, to nought were fixed:
Sad proof of thy distressful state!
Of differing themes the veering song was mixed;
And now it courted Love, now raving called on Hate.
With eyes up-raised, as one inspired,
Pale Melancholy sat retired;
And from her wild sequestered seat,
In notes, by distance made more sweet,
Poured through the mellow horn her pensive soul;
And, dashing soft from rocks around,
Bubbling runnels joined the sound;
Through glades and glooms the mingled measure stole,
Or, o'er some haunted stream, with fond delay,
Round an holy calm diffusing,
Love of Peace, and lonely musing,
In hollow murmurs died away.
But Oh! how altered was its sprightlier tone
When Cheerfulness, a nymph of healthiest hue,
Her bow across her shoulder flung,
Her buskins gemmed with morning dew,
Blew an inspiring air that dale and thicket rung
The hunter's call, to Faun and Dryad known!
The oak-crowned Sisters, and their chaste-eyed Queen,
Satyrs and Sylvan Boys, were seen
Peeping from forth their alleys green:
Brown Exercise rejoiced to hear;
And Sport leapt up, and seized his beechen spear.
Last came Joy's ecstatic trial:
He, with viny crown advancing,
First to the lively pipe his hand addrest;

But soon he saw the brisk awakening viol,
Whose sweet entrancing voice he loved the best:
They would have thought who heard the strain
They saw, in Tempe's vale, her native maids
Amidst the festal-sounding shades
To some unwearied minstrel dancing,
While, as his flying fingers kissed the strings,
Love framed with Mirth a gay fantastic round:
Loose were her tresses seen, her zone unbound;
And he, amidst his frolic play,
As if he would the charming air repay,
Shook thousand odours from his dewy wings.

O Music, sphere-descended maid,
Friend of Pleasure, Wisdom's aid!
Why, goddess, why, to us denied,
Lay'st thou thy ancient lyre aside?
As, in that loved Athenian bower,
You learned an all-commanding power,
Thy mimic soul, O Nymph endeared,
Can well recall what then it heard;
Where is thy native simple heart,
Devote to Virtue, Fancy, Art?
Arise, as in that elder time,
Warm, energetic, chaste, sublime!
Thy wonders, in that godlike age,
Fill thy recording Sister's page—
'Tis said, and I believe the tale,
Thy humblest reed could more prevail,
Had more of strength, diviner rage,

Than all which charms this laggard age;
E'en all at once together found
Cecilia's mingled world of sound—
O! bid our vain endeavours cease:
Revive the just designs of Greece:
Return in all thy simple state!
Confirm the tales her sons relate!

## Critical Appreciation

*The Passions* of William Collins is modelled on Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*. It is the most irregular poem of Collins. Collins was a great admirer of the finest of fine arts, viz., Music. The strange fascinating power exercised by the forceful art of Music is the subject matter of this ode. It is structured on the idea that Music expresses the various Passions of the human heart. This is allegorically presented by the various passions snatching away the musical instruments so as to try their hands at music under the stress of emotional excitement. Thus the ode is a series of emotional pictures evolved by Music as each passion in turn expresses its own unique character through song.

The first to embark on this experiment is Fear. As Fear plays on the lyre, it is seized wit a feeling of dread and it recoils from the sound of its own creation. It is now the turn of Anger who rushes impetuously towards the lyre, with eyes flashing fire in anger and strikes the instrument rather rudely. Now comes pale Despair whose music is low and passively resentful. Hope, a goddess with fair eyes and golden hair, succeeds it. Her song is echoed from the wooded hills and valleys. And now comes Revenge with a fearful frown on its face. It throws down its blood-stained sword with a terrible noise and blows a loud blast on the trumpet. Pity sitting by its side, fails to assuage the fury of Revenge. Jealousy comes in fumbling at its work without being sure of it, now courting Love and the next moment calling upon Hate. Now it is the turn of Melancholy to play on her lyre an temptingly sweet song from a distance. She is followed by Cheerfulness, "a nymph of healthiest hue." She blows an inspiring air which rings through the woods and groves. Last of all, comes Joy who generates an enchanting song on her viol. Love and Mirth dance a fantastic round to the tune played by joy which

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is sure to make one feel as if one is present before the gay dance of young maidens of Tempe.

There is hardly any plan or any great design. Collins always lacked the constructive power of Gray. Here he followed the pattern of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*. Though somewhat hesitant in style it has a lyrical flavour and fire, fitful perhaps but still indisputably divine, which places him above Dryden. The poem has a musical quality of a high order. There are subtle variations in its rhythm according to the changing emotion of each singer. The expressions are almost always onomatopoeic, i.e., the sounds of the words employed echo the sense. Indeed, it is an ode for Music, and written with that intention, it ought to be read with the knowledge of that intention constantly before us, because that aim rules its measures, its changes of melody, the placing and choice of words. Even without music's interpretation the sounds of the phrases and run of the metre are made the echo of the sense, and Collins changes his melodies with as much ease and skill as Shelley.

There are some admirable world-pictures in the ode. The picture of Hope, for example, is one of the finest things in English poetry. Even Dr. Johnson, a severe critic of the transitional poets, has praise for it: "The picture of Hope is beautiful beyond imitation. By the united powers of imagery and harmony, that delightful thing is exhibited with all the charms and graces that pleasure and fancy have appropriated to her." Similarly, the picture of cheerfulness as huntress is equally graphic. Cheerfulness is represented as a huntress with hunting-bow thrown across her shoulder and boots sparkling with dew-drops of early morning before sunrise. Besides these pictures, the description of the landscape is not only a catalogue of natural objects sentimentalized and harmonized with the mood and atmosphere.

Every passion is made to reveal itself in its own manner. The fiercer passions --Fear, Anger, Despair, and Jealousy-- are recited each in a rapid quatrain. Revenge, which interrupts Hope and is attended by Pity, is given a longer stanza. But the happiest figures, Hope and Melancholy, Cheerfulness and Joy, attended by Love and Mirth, as well as Sport and Exercise, are portrayed more distinctly, beautifully and at greater length. Like Milton and Gray, Collins also believes Melancholy to be the happiest of Passions, and the most poetic, with her love of peace and lonely musing. The style is uncertain, irregular, with lines

and stanzas of varying lengths. It is somewhat chilled by classicism like personifications, abstractions, and allegories and its atmosphere is classical but the noteworthy thing about it—something new in Augustan writing—is that there is perfect harmony as between words and phrases, and the emotions evoked by them. The landscape is sentimentalized and thoroughly harmonized with the mood.



Elton rightly observes, "Each passion chooses its own measure with sure instinct. The fiercer Fear, Anger, Despair and Jealousy have each a rapid quatrain: Revenge, who interrupts Hope but who is attended by Pity has a longer stanza. But the happier figures, Hope and Melancholy, Cheerfulness and Joy, with Love and Mirth in attendance, and Sport and Exercise besides, are portrayed at more length, are more distinctly and beautifully seen, and inspire the more beautiful words and tones."

## 1.2.5 SOME IMPORTANT EXPLANATIONS

**Lines**: *For when thy folding-star……religious gleams.*

**Explanation**: These lines have been taken from William Collins's *Ode to Evening*. The poet says that if the poet is prevented from going to such ruined places by spring-winds and heavy rains he would like to spend the evening in a quiet hut along the mountain, which has a view of the surrounding wild country, the swelling floods, small cottages and the dimly-seen spires of churches tolling the evening bell. From this vantage point of the hut he would like to see the dark veil of the evening slowly descending on and spreading over the entire landscape by means of her dewy fingers.

**Lines:** *First Fear……had made.*

**Explanation**: These lines have been extracted from Collins's poem, *The Passions*, an Ode for Music. Collins describes various passions through personifications. He says that when Music, the heavenly maid, was young in ancient Greece, the Passions would often gather round her magic cell to hear her sweet songs. The effect of the song was so great that the passions lost all control over themselves.

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They rejoiced, trembled, raged and fainted, fell to ecstasy and pensiveness, each depending on its own nature. In such excited state they seized the instruments of music from the branches of myrtle and would try their hands on them.

**Lines.** *And from the rocks……golden hair.*

**Explanation**: These lines have been extracted from Collins's poem, *The Passions*, an Ode for Music. Collins describes the various passions through personifications. All the passions gathered round Music in her cell to hear her sweet songs. They were so excited to hear her sweet songs that one day they snatched away her musical instruments and tried their hand on them. First, Fear tried her hand but shrank back in fear after having touched the strings. Next Anger with eyes flashing fire, laid its violent hands on the lure. Then Despair produced a melancholy strain to beguile his sorrow.

**Lines**. *But O how……beachen Spear.*

**Explanation**: These lines have been extracted from Collins's poem, *The Passions*, an Ode for Music. While describing various passions through personifications, Collins presents these passions according to their characteristic traits. He gives the picture of Fear trying to shrink back, Anger with fiery eyes, Despair producing melancholy strains, Hope with bright and gleaming, Revenge with frowning appearance and Jealousy with no fixed subject or theme. Pale Melancholy is presented as sitting retired in her wild sequestered seat, the notes of the songs of Melancholy spread an atmosphere of holy calm and peace over the scene.

## 1.3 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Give critical appreciation of "Hymn to Adversity".
2. Give critical appreciation of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard".
3. Elucidate and illustrate the remark that in *The Progress of Poesy* and

*The Bard*, Gray aimed at the qualities of Pindar's odes.

4. Discuss the general characteristics of Collin's poetry.

5. Give critical appreciation of *Ode to Evening*.

6. Give critical appreciation of *The Passions* or *An Ode for Music*.

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## 1.4 LET US SUM UP

Unit I introduces you to Thomas Gray and Collins. Now you can easily discuss their life and works in general. You are capable of summarizing and critically evaluating Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and 'Hymn to Adversity'. You are competent enough to speak on Collins as the precursor of Romantic Movement. Further you can discuss Collins's 'Ode to Evening' and 'The Passions'.

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# UNIT-II ALEXANDER POPE

## Structure



## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

***In Unit II the objective is to introduce you to Alexander Pope, his life and works, and the social background in which he worked. For a fair appraisal of his abiding popularity we have selected his classic*** **The Rape of the Lock.** ***You will be able to:***

- Discuss on Pope and his work.
- Give a summary of the work.
- Evaluate the characteristics of the work.

# 2.1 ALEXANDER POPE



**Introduction**

Alexander Pope was born on May 21, 1688 in London in a Roman Catholic Family. His father was a prosperous tradesman. Alexander was a sickly and weak child. Sickly in body and lonely in spirit, he found his only delight in books. In those days Roman Catholicism was a great handicap and the child was, therefore, denied the privilege of education at a first-rate school. With a studious bent of mind, he more than made up for his deficient schooling by reading at home. He read books "like a boy gathering flowers in the fields just as they fell in his way."

His religion also made it extremely difficult for him to enter any of the professions, while a business life was out of the question for one who was not only weak in health but also really deformed. His own preference for literature, and the fact that his father was financially independent, and had retired to a small estate on the borders of Windsor Forest made it possible for the boy to go by his own liking. It is said that a brief interview with Dryden at the age of twelve largely decided his career. He displayed remarkable capability in verse-writing, many thousands of lines having been written before he was sixteen. He records the fact of his poetical career having commenced very early in the following lines:

*As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,*

*I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.*

Sir William Trumbull, a neighbour and a retired secretary of state, encouraged him. A translation of Statius, was produced when he was about fourteen. It was followed two or three years later by the Pastorals, not published until 1709. Two small poets and critics of the previous generation, whose acquaintance Pope made about this time, did something to turn the bent of his mind. Especially Walsh advised him to make it his aim to be correct. According to Walsh, the poet's freedom had in England degenerated into licence, and a remedy had to be sought in "correctness" and in "order". Pope accepted this view, and expressed it at large in the Essay On Criticism, a didactic poem on the canons of literary taste and style, which made him famous. This was followed in 1712 by

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The Rape of the Lock, a brilliant satire on the fashionable life of his time. The artificial tone of the age and the light-hearted aspect of women are nowhere more exquisitely depicted than in this epic of trifling. The publication of poem indeed brought him great fame, with a circle of literary friends including Gray, Addison and Swift. He became a member of the Scribblers Literary Club, formed under the presidentship of Swift. Voltaire called him "the best poet of England and, at present, of all the world." Thus by the time Pope was twenty-four, he had came to be regarded as the leading poet of his age.

In the meantime Pope's friendship with Addison grew, and when, early in 1713, Addison was about to produce his tragedy of Cato, Pope wrote an eloquent prologue to it. But Pope was quarrelsome by nature. He had already discarded a friendship with Wycherley and antagonized Dennis. Soon he got offended with Addison and was further annoyed with him when Addison advised him against introducing the machinery of sylphs into the revised version of The Rape of the Lock. Addison later became one of the targets of Pope's cruel satire.

Among Pope's friends was an ancient Roman Catholic family. There were two daughters, Teresa Blount and Martha Blount. Pope owed many of his acquaintances to them, and, though he quarrelled with Teresa, Martha remained his friend throughout her life. Pope's friendship with Lady Mary Wortley Montague, a leader of society and a woman of letters, ended in a quarrel, and later made her the object of his malicious satire.

Now the task of translating Homer into rhyming pentameters became the main occupation of Pope's life. The first part of the Iliad appeared in 1715 and the last part of the Odyssey in 1725. The translations were received very favourably, though the real spirit of Homer was lacking in them. Pope received some ten thousand pounds for this work, and the money thus earned enabled him in 1718 to establish himself comfortably with his mother in a villa on the banks of the Thames at Twickenham.

In appearance Pope was singularly unimpressive. He was physically weak and mentally miserable. He had inherited headaches from his mother and a crooked figure from his father. By the middle of his life, he had physically grown so weak that he could not dress without help. But by the sheer force of his own ambition, he jumped to the foremost place in English literature.

During the period in which he was occupied with Homer, he published two powerful poems: the Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady, and the Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard; and he was also engaged n preparing an edition on Shakespeare. This last work came in for adverse criticism from Lewis Theobald, an indifferent man of letters, but one possessed a sounder knowledge of Shakespeare than Pope. This so annoyed Pope that he made Theobald the hero of his great satirical poem, The Dunciad (1728), in which he avenged himself on all his critics. The scheme of The Dunciad, namely the castigation of all the literary pretenders of the day, had long been in the poet's mind. Fourteen years later a fourth book was added, Colley Cibber being substituted for Theobald as the hero. About one hundred contemporary writers are the targets of satire in The Dunciad.

The closing days of Pope's life was occupied with philosophical and critical poems, of which the most notable is the Essay On Man (1733). This exposition of the philosophy of Bolingbroke contains passages of great eloquence that are perhaps more quoted than anything outside Shakespeare. The influence of Bolingbroke, with whom he had become friends, is also to be traced in Imitations of Horace and Moral Essays.

At Twickenham, Pope spent a good part of each day with Martha Blount who remained faithful to him to the end of his life. To Twickenham, Pope's friends used to come for a chat. Here Swift, Bolingbroke, Congreve and Gray would exchange wit and wisdom. Pope had a huge store of interesting literary talks, and he had the reputation of telling anecdotes with great expertise. But he did not have a capacity for hearty laughter. A hearty laugh would indeed sound surprising from the sensitive, temperamental, and intriguing little man. His chronic ill-health made him complain of his life as a "long disease".

Pope died in 1774 and buried at Twickenham. He deserved to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but his religion denied him the honour which was surely his due.

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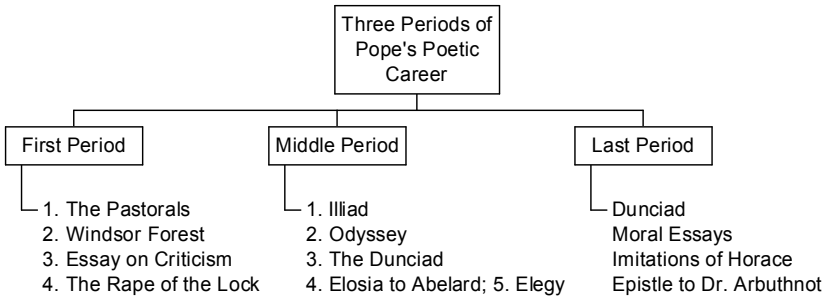


**Social Background**

The social background of the poem includes: (1) The rise of coffee houses (2) The vices of the age—drinking and gambling (3) Barbarity of age (4) Low status of woman (5) An epitome of female vanity and frivolity (6) The corruption and moral depravity of the age (7) Classicism of the age.

**Publication of Poem**

Pope received Miss Fermor's permission to publish the poem in a London Miscellany in 1712. It got a new shape in 1714 with Sylphs and Gnomes, and an additional account of a game of cards.

**Occasion of the Poem**

The poem was written with the purpose of bringing about a reconciliation between two families. In 1711, one Lord Petre cut a lock of hair from the head of Arabella. The Lady took great offence which resulted in bitter feelings between the two families. John Caryll wanted to bring about a reunion between the two families. He asked Pope to turn the whole affair into friendly ridicule.

**Outline Story of the Poem**

(i) Belinda's dream (ii) The warning of Ariel (iii) The love letter (iv) Belinda's toilet (v) Belinda sails on the Thames (vi) Her charming lock was taken by Lord Petre (vii) Lord Petre's Prayers (viii) Ariel arranges for her safety (ix) Ariel's warning to the Sylphs (x) The Sylphs take up their duties (xi) The Hampton court (xii) The game of ombre (xiii) The Rape of the Lock (xiv) Belinda's grief and Baron's joy (xv) The descent of Umbriel (xvi) The cave of Spleen (xvii) Umbriel's prayer to the goddess to change Belinda's nature (xviii) The Bag of vexations (xix) The due sympathy of Thalestris (xx) Sir Plume pleads with the lord to return the lock (xxi) The sermon of Clarissa (xxii) The battle

between Belinda and Lord Petre (xxiii) Belinda's attack on the Baron (xxiv) The Lock vanishes and becomes immortal.



**The Model of the Poem**

The poem is modelled after two foreign satires (1) Boileau's Le Lutrin satire on the French clergy who raised a big quarrel over the location of a lantern, and (2) La Sechia Rapita a famous Italian satire on the petty causes of the endless Italian wars.

**A Unique Poem**

The poem is the finest example of witty mock epic. It is a judicious blend of the serious and non-serious. The Sylphs give to the poem a tone of lightness and delicacy. Its burlesque mockery is serious. It is an expression of the artificial life of the age with its card playing, parties, toilets, lapdogs, tea-drinking, snuff-taking and idle vanity. It is a satire on society and a witty parody of the heroic style in poetry. There are fine flashes of Belinda's toilet, the game of cards, the cutting of the lock and Gnome's visit to the cave of Spleen. In it we find a beautiful blending of the mock epic and social satire. Here wit is infused with fancy. According to Dr. Johnson "In this mock epic new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new."

**Defects in *The Rape of the Lock***

(i) Limited range—The poem is limited to the city life of ladies and gentlemen of fashionable upper class of London (ii) Lack of lyricism—The poem lacks poetic rapture, lyric intensity, highest music and melody (iii) Harshness of tone—It is marked with certain harshness, stiffness and want of sympathy (iv) Lack of Idealism.

**Specimen of Filigree Work**

Hazlitt says, "The Rape of the Lock is the most exquisite specimen of filigree work ever invented. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly." It is a masterpiece of satire. The Sylphs constitute the filigree work. Their appearance, nature, tasks are described in a poetic language. Ariel's account of the tasks of the Sylphs is fanciful. The myth of the Sylphs is an example of filigree work. Filigree is ornamental work of fine gold, silver or

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copper wire. The Sylphs are responsible for the decorative and ornamental character of the poem. Belinda herself moves in a filigree world. The description of her toilet itself is a good filigree work. There are the airy elves scene by moonlight's shadows. Also the virgins are visited by angel powers with golden crowns and wreath of heavenly flowers.

Edith Sitwell aptly writes: "The Rape of the Lock is a miracle of summer air, airy and glittering as the net of the summer light and early dew over the strawberry lead a poem so airy that it might have been woven by the long fingers of Sylphs."

**The Moral of The Rape of the Lock**

Some critics think that The Rape of the Lock is immoral and devoid of wit and judgement. John Dennis has to say: "The poem deviates from the rules of epic, deals in trifles without morals. Pope fails to follow the conventional morality in epic as found in Boileau's Le Lutrin."

Pope follows the conventions of contemporary mock epic. Warburton says, "Pope introduced Clarissa's speech to open more clearly the moral of the poem." The Rape of the Lock teaches Pope's dedication to the poem and show's moral implications of a satire on high Society.

**Sexual Implications**

Stanley Edgar Hyman says, "The poem is a vast comic, symbolic defloration. The hair is a sex symbol, and lock is a pun on Freud's lock. The clipping of the lock by the Baron is a sex act." The loss of lock corresponds to the loss of virginity. Cleanth Brooks says, "The card game is another symbol of the war of sexes."

**Style and Technique**

*The Rape of the Lock* is written in a metre called heroic couplet. Pope depicts the antithetic aspects of the truly epic world and achieves poetic effects. The stylistic devices include balance and parallelism, use of romantic hyperbole and imagery. Also, Pope ironically treats domestic playthings and ornaments in a lady's house.

**The Rape of the Lock**

**Summary of the Poem**

**Theme of the Poem.** The opening lines of the poem declare that affairs of love may lead to serious resentments and insignificant events may cause great conflicts. The poet tells that Caryll suggested this poem and that Belinda inspired it.

**Belinda's Dream.** Belinda sleeps till late in the morning. Her guardian Sylph in the form of a fair youth tried to prolong her sleep. Ariel addressed her as the fairest of mortals. Majority of spirits are called Sylphs, but the cunning ones are called gnomes.

**Ariel's Warning.** Ariel warned Belinda that some danger would happen to her before sunset. He asks her to be careful in the advances of a lover.

**Belinda's Anxiety.** Belinda opens her eyes, sees a love-letter and is charmed by it. She keeps herself busy with her toilet. Her maid, Betty and the Sylphs help her in her decoration. She sails on the Thames. Ariel arranges for her safety with the help of spirits. Belinda reaches the Hampton Court. She desired to play card game known as Ombre.

**The Rape of the Lock.** Coffee was served to the lord and the ladies. Lord Petre wished to get the lock of Belinda. A lady Clarissa gives the lord a scissor to serve the purpose. The Sylphs try their best to protect Belinda. But she loved a human being, and the spirits were helpless. Lord Petre succeeds in cutting the lock and feels happy.

**The Cave of Spleen.** A clever gnome whose name was Umbriel caused Belinda's grief. He goes to the cave of spleen. The goddess Spleen had two maidservants—Ill-natured and Affectation. The gnome prays to the goddess to change Belinda's nature. She gives a bag full of sighs, sobs, passions and tears. The gnome finds a lady, Thalestris, trying to console her. He pours the bag over their heads.

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**Sir Plume's Pleadings.** Belinda asks her lover Sir Plume to demand the lock from Lord Petre. But the Baron rejects the request and does not return the lock. Umbriel pours a bag full of grief on the head of Belinda. She wishes to destroy the other lock herself.

**The Mock Battle.** Clarissa advises Belinda against grieving over the loss of a mere hair. Thalestris gives a call for a fight. Some sided with Belinda and the rest with Lord Petre. There was a fight between the two rival groups. Umbriel and gnomes were happy at them. Belinda fights with the Baron in a single combat. She throws a pinch of snuff into his nostrils. Tears flow down his eyes and he sneezes. She attacks the Baron with a bodkin. She demands the lock, but it is lost. It is said to have gone to the moon. It shot through the sky like a meteor, and was transformed into a star.

## 2.1.2 POPE AS A CORRECT POET

**Examine the remark of Dr. Johnson: "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?"**

**Or**

**Dr. Samuel Johnson has remarked, "Pope is read with perpetual delight." What features of The Rape of the Lock produce this delight?**

**Or**

**"The question whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled." Discuss.**

**1 Or**

**Pope was a correct poet. Discuss.**

**Introduction**

Pope holds an astounding place in the history of English poetry. Some even regard him as one of the master poets of England. But a few critics deny him

even the title of a poet. The faults of his character have come in the way of the appreciation of his poetry. Dr. Johnson said, “If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?” Joseph Watton says, "In that species of poetry wherein Pope excelled, he is superior to all mankind.” John Ruskin says, "Pope is the most perfect representative of the true English mind.” Mr. Lowell says, “In his own province he still stands unapproachable alone.”



**Theme of Pope's Poetry**

Wordsworth and Coleridge did not hold him in high esteem. Matthew Arnold says, "Pope is the classic of our prose." The poetry of Pope suffers from a number of defects. He is incapable of singing. He has no ear for the subtle melodies of verse. He fails to show spirit-stirring thoughts. He cannot be called a creative poet, because he fails to show imaginative flights. He is in no sense a lyric poet like the romantics. He does not show the intensity, spontaneity, music and melody in his verse. He gives importance to reason over imagination. He displays scientific method in his poetry. He shows efficiency in ethical philosophy and moral satire. His satirical poetry lacks universal appeal and common interest. Much of his poetry is full of allusion and reference to contemporary events. He was devoid of an eye to see the beauty of nature and also lacks an ear to listen to the harmonies of nature. Much of his poetry displays the fashionable society of London. He shows the artificiality, vulgarity and crudeness of London life. He analyses the fashionable men and women of his times.

Leslie aptly remarks, “The discontinuity of his style and the strict rules which he adopted tend to disintegrate his poems. They are a series of brilliant passages, often of brilliant couplets, stuck together, and as the inferior connecting matter decays the interstices open and allow the whole to fall into ruin.”

Pope lacks an ear for rhyme. There is seen frequent repetition of the same rhymes at close intervals. He does not respond to the music and melody. His conception about the uniformity of sense and sound are crude:

*Here thou great Anna! Whom three realms obey*

*Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tea*

The rhyme in this couplet is faulty due to the change in pronunciation.

**A Poet of Prose and Reason**

Pope was the poet of prose and reason. His poetry is rational and intellectual consistent with the taste of the times. His couplets become monotonous to a casual reader. He has skilfully given immense variety and rapidity of movement to his couplets by varying the depth of the caesura. Sometimes the pause is slight and at other times it is quite profound. Moreover, Pope has given variety and movement to his couplets by the adept manipulation of liquid consonants and alliteration. He has truly shown great skill in his style. In the *The Rape of the Lock* Pope says:

*Some to the sun their insect wings unfold,*

*Waft on the breeze or sink in clouds of gold*

*Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,*

*Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light.*

Miss Sitwell says, "It is texture and not the structure of his couplets that makes Pope a great poet. The variations in speed results from the fine texture of couplets."

**Pope as a Satirist**

The style of Pope is epigrammatic. His fine aphorisms are popular like proverbs.

(i) Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

(ii) To err is human, to forgive divine.

Edmund aptly observes, "Probably no poet with the exception of Shakespeare has enriched our own language so much with quotable and readily remembered sayings."

The major part of Pope's poetry is satirical. John Dennis says: "His careful workmanship often makes his satirical touches more attractive than Dryden's. There is no more consummate piece of satire than the twenty lines that contain the poet's masterpiece—the character of Atticus. His satire often achieves universality. Pope's sensibility to the claims of his art is exquisite, the adaptation

of his style to his subject shows the hand of a master, and if these are not the highest of a poet, they are gifts to which none but a poet can lay claim."



## 2.1.3 CONTEMPORARY LIFE MIRRORED IN THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

**How is contemporary life mirrored in The Rape of the Lock?**

**Discuss The Rape of the Lock as a satirical picture of aristocratic society.**

**Or**

**"The artificial tone of the age, frivolous aspect of the femininity is nowhere more exquisitely pictured than in The Rape of the Lock. Elucidate.**

**Or**

**Consider Pope, the poet, as the critic of his age.**

**Introduction**

Pope was the true child of his age. His poetry fully reflects the social and moral, literary and sexual tendencies of the 18$^{th}$ century. The virtues and vices, the fashions and tastes of the age are fully described in his poetry. His 'Essay on Man' stands as an ethical code. He faithfully represents the vanities and follies of the upper class in his works. Leslie Stephen rightly observes: "No writer reflects so clearly and completely the spirits of his own better than Pope."

**The Vices of the Age**

Pope was influenced by the political, religious and social conditions of his age. The clubs and coffee houses had become the centres of fashionable public life. People of all tastes gather round the coffee houses to demonstrate their wit.

John Dennis writes: "Books were seldom judged on their merits, the praise or blame being generally well awarded according to the political principles of their authors."

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In the age of Pope, coffee houses were the popular haunts of the fashionable writers. Drinking and gambling was most common in the city of London. Every section of the society was fouled with the evil of drunkenness. Gambling was a passion with all classes of society. Even ladies gambled and they liked the card games. In *The Rape of the Lock* Belinda played the card game known as Ombre and challenged two of her companions to the game of Ombre.

*Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites*

*Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,*

*At ombre single to decide their doom;*

*And swell her breast with conquests yet to come.*

**Immorality of the Age**

The morals of men and women were very nasty. Beautiful girls were often abducted and married by force. All sorts of French fopperies, cosmetics, rogues and articles of dress were in common use. Women devoted a lot of their time in toilet. The *Rape of the Lock* is an epitome of female vanity and frivolity.

**True Depiction of Contemporary Society**

In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope becomes the spokesman of the age. The artificial tone of the age, the frivolous aspects of femininity are well shown in this poem. It depicts the pleasure-seeking life of fashionable beauty. It describes the toilet chamber and card table, the scent patches and powder. It exposes the vanity, jealousy, treachery and intrigue of the aristocracy. The idleness, late waking and liking for domestic pets of ladies like Belinda are shown. In *The Rape of the Lock*, we see,

*Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,*

*While peers and dukes, and all their sweeping train,*

*And garters, stars and coronets appear,*

*And in sounds, your grace salutes their ear.*

The different vanities of the ladies are shown in this poem. They waited for the excited looks of the gallants and were keen to attend the balls and entertainments arranged by them. They were fickle-minded and inconstant in their love affairs:

*With varying vanities, from every part,*

*They shift the moving toy-shop of their heart.*

The manners of these women were artificial and affected. They used to pretend sickness so that young gallants inquired after their health. They took great interest in love letters. Belinda sees the love letter when she wakes up late in the morning. They used to keep pets like dogs and parrots. Belinda had her Shock and her Poll. Lowell writes, "It was a mirror in a drawing room, but it gave back a faithful image of society, powdered and rouged to be sure and intent on trifles."

**Satire on Fashions**

Pope treats satirically "the toilet" in *The Rape of the Lock*. It was the most interesting hobby of Belinda. Addison in the *Spectator* writes, "The toilet is their great scene of business and the right adjustment of their hair the principal employment of their loves." Belinda represents contemporary fashions, vanities and follies of the 18$^{th}$ century London. She is always surround by admirers, fops and gallants.

*Favours to none, to all she smiles extends.*

*Oft she rejects, but never once offends.*

Pope describes the hollowness of 18th century chivalry. Lord Petre represents Otis tendency. *The Rape of the Lock* is the epitome of 18th century social life. Pope's 'Epistles' serve to reflect the manners of the 18$^{th}$ century English life.

Leslie Stephen says: "No writer reflects so clearly and completely the spirit of his own day as Pope does in *The Rape of the Lock*."

An American critic, Wilson Bailey, writes: "In *The Rape of the Lock* pope has caught and fixed forever the atmosphere of the age. No great English poet is at once so great and so empty, so artistic and yet so devoid of the ideal on which all high art rests."

## 2.1.4 POPE IS PERMANENTLY A SATIRIST

**Pope is permanently a satirist. Examine the statement.**

**Or**

**"Pope's satirical adaptation of the epic mode itself posses epic qualities." Discuss.**

**Or**

**Discuss The Rape of the Lock as a satirical picture of aristocratic society?**

**Introduction**

Pope was the child of his age. His faults were the faults of his age. His age was the age of prose and reason. He had always the tastes of his mind before him. He wrote for the wits, fops and gallants of his age. The people of his age were incapable of appreciating any poetic rapture or any outburst of passion. J.R. Lowell says, "Pope was the chief founder of an artificial poetry which in his hands was living and powerful, because he fused it to express artificial modes of thinking and an artificial state of society."

**Pope as a Representative Poet**

Pope is representative of the social and literary tastes of the early 18$^{th}$ century England. His poetry realistically represents the merits and demerits of the age. All the existing traits among the people are visible in poetry. He gives prominence to accuracy and aptness, reason and wit, elegance and judgement in his writings. The society at that time demanded correctness, wit, and goodness. It showed external brilliance and glitter. He had no profound thoughts at all. His muse was the drawing room Muse. In his 'Essay on Man' he says: "I describe the contemporary ethical code." His satires throw light on the decline of literary standards and corruption in high society. In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope says:

*O thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate.*

*Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.*

*Sudden these honours shall be snatch'd away*

*And curs'd for ever this victorious day.*

Leslie Stephen rightly observes: "He was a man of genius, who brought to task, not of the highest order, a keenness of sensibility, a conscientious desire to do his very best, which enabled him to be as indisputably the first of his own peculiar line, as our greatest men have been in for more lofty undertakings." No writer reflects so clearly and fully the spirit of his own day. Pope has realistically represented the fashion, the frivolities, the vanities and the follies of the upper class society.

**Pope as a Satirist**

Pope had an innate talent for satire. His physical constitution, his catholic mind, his suspicious and irritable temperament contributed a great deal in making his works satirical. He was conscious of his power and capacity as a satirist. He focussed his satires against several classes of people. His satire on the corruption in high society was impersonal. His personal satires were marked by malice and hatred. His aim was to amend vice by correction. These impersonal satires were reformative in character. Pope wanted to correct the evils of the age by satire. He says in the 'Epistle to Dr. Fortesque':

*Yes while I live, no rich or noble knave*

*Shall walk the world, in credit to his grave*

*To virtue only and her friends a friend*

*The world beside may murmur, or commend*

Saintsbury writes: "Yet it is in his later essay, his epistles, his satires, his 'Dunciad' that Pope's genius shows at its very best. His philosophy may be always shallow and some mere nonsense; his satire may lack the sweep of Dryden, but he looked on society with an uncoloured eye."

'The Dunciad' is considered the most notable satire of Pope. It was against those who criticized his works. He lashes at education, at the trivialities and follies of learning in dignified way.

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Hugh Walker observes thus: "In spite of the relief in passage of general utility such as the ridicule of the folly of learning, the absurdities of the stage, the Dunciad is not a poem to be read with pleasure and profit."

**As Social Satire**

Pope satirises the fashionable female sex and lashes at feminine frivolity. To him all women are frivolous beings and their real interest is the love making. In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope satires the fashions, frivolities and gaieties of women. It is not really a satire directed against Arabella, but against the weakness that she shares with the world. It is through the character of Arabella, Pope satirised the whole of the female sex. It is a judicious blending of mock-heroic and delicate fancy. John Dennis says: "It is as a satirist that Pope with one exception excels, English poets, and his careful workmanship often makes his satirical touches more attractive than Dryden's."

Warton writes: "I hope it will not be thought an exaggerated panegyric to say that '*Rape*' is the best satire that it contains the truest and liveliest picture of modem life, and that subject is of a more elegant nature, as well as more artfully conducted than that of any other heroic-comic poem." In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope says:

*On the rich quilt sinks with becoming woe,*

*Wrapt in a gown, for sickness and for show*

*The fair ones fell such maladies as these*

*When each new nightdress gives a new disease.*

**Conclusion**

Pope used his satire against the fair sex. He believes that every woman is at heart a rake. The moral essays and epistles contain his finest workmanship as a satirist. His skill in dissecting the faults of his enemies is amazing.

## 2.1.5 SOME IMPORTANT EXPLANATIONS

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**Lines 67-70.** Know farther yet; Whoever fair and chaste Rejects Mankind, is by some *Sylph* embrac'd: For Spirits, freed from mortal Laws, with ease Assume what Sexes and what Shapes they please.

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

Ariel asks Belinda to learn something more. If a beautiful and righteous lady rejected all offers of love from a man, she gains the protection of some sylph. This protecting sylph assumes the male sex and takes that pure lady in his embrace. Even though all the sylphs were originally women, yet after death when the spirits of those women become sylphs, they are no longer governed by the laws to which human beings are subject. These sylphs can assume the kind of shape and sex they desire. Accordingly, a sylph, assuming the male sex, holds a beautiful and pure lady in his embrace with the object of protecting her against earthly lovers.

**Lines 171-176.** Love in these Labyrinths his Slaves detains, And mighty Hearts are held in slender Chains. With hairy Sprindges we the Birds betray, Slight Lines of Hair surprize the Finny Prey, Fair Tresses Man's Imperial Race insnare, And Beauty draws us with a single Hair.

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

A man may fall in love with a woman because of her beautiful curly hair. In such a case, a man becomes a prisoner of the charm of his beloved. He gets entangled in the labyrinthine or mazy mass of her hair. Even strong-minded men are sometimes caught in such fragile chains. In other words, the very hair of a woman may so attract a man as to make him her slave, just as we deceive birds with snares made of horse-hair and thus catch them, and just as we catch fish by means of a horse-hair line, so a man gets ensnared or enslaved by the beauty of a woman's hair. Man is far superior to birds and to fish, but he is caught by the same weapon with which he catches them. The beautiful locks of a woman are

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sometimes irresistible to a man. A single lock of her hair is enough to entangle a man.

**Lines 391-394.** Oh thoughtless Mortals! ever blind to Fate, Too soon dejected, and too soon elate! Sudden these Honours shall be snatch'd away, And curs'd for ever this Victorious Day.

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

This is a piece of moralising. Pope says that human beings are thoughtless and usually unaware of what fate has in store for them. They become depressed too quickly, and intoxicated with joy as well. They do not realise that the cause of their depression or the cause of their happiness is likely to go very soon. The honour won by Belinda will, for instance, soon be snatched away from her and this day of victory at the game of ombre will be converted into a day of disgrace for her when she is deprived of her favourite lock of hair.

**Lines 463-468.** Steel cou'd the Labour of the Gods destroy, And strike to Dust th' Imperial Tow'rs of *Troy*. Steel cou'd the Works of mortal Pride confound, And hew Triumphal Arches to the Ground. What Wonder then, fair Nymph! thy Hairs shou'd feel The conqu'ring Force of unresisted Steel?

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

These lines describe the power of steel. The city of troy was built by the power of gods. But even this city was captured and ruined by the power of steel weapons. The power of steel weapons was able to reduce the great towers of that city to dust. Steel weapons were able to pulled down all those structures and edifices of which mortal men had felt proud. The power of steel could bring down to the ground victory arches erected to celebrate military triumphs. If steel is so powerful, the beautiful Belinda should not feel surprised that a pair of steel scissors could cut off a lock of her hair. Steel is all-powerful. Nothing can resist

this power. No wonder, then, that Belinda's lock of hair fell a victim to the conquering power of steel.

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**Lines 445-450.** Then flash'd the living Lightnings from her Eyes, And Screams of Horror rend th' affrighted Skies. Not louder Shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast, When Husbands or when Lap-dogs breath their last, Or when rich *China* Vessels, fal'n from high, In glittring Dust and painted Fragments lie!

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

When the Baron had cut off a lock of Belinda's hair, she became enraged. Her eyes flashed lightning. In other words, she seemed wild and fierce with anger, she uttered screams of fear and distress which seemed to frighten even the deities in heaven and which aroused their sympathy. The screams that Belinda uttered were louder than those which are uttered by women who have lost their husbands or who have lost their lap-dogs, or whose expensive China-pots fall from a height and lie scattered on the ground in shining particles or broken painted pieces.

**Lines 701-706.** A *Beau* and *Witling* perish'd in the Throng, One dy'd in *Metaphor*, and one in *Song*. 5.60 *O cruel Nymph! a living Death I bear*, Cry'd *Dapperwit*, and sunk beside his Chair. A mournful Glance Sir *Fopling* upwards cast, *Those Eyes are made so killing*---was his last:

**Explanation:** These lines have been taken from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

A gallant young man by the name of Sir Fopling and a poor-witted fellow by the name of Dapperwit were two of the casualties in the fighting, their killer being Thalestris. Dapperwit, struck by the lightning in the eyes of Thalestris, described his condition by the use of a figure of speech, saying, "O cruel lady! Your indifference and scorn towards me make me so miserable that, even though I am alive, I feel like a dead man." Having uttered these words, Dapperwit collapsed by the side of the chair in which he had been sitting. The other fellow, Sir Fopling, threw an unhappy look at Thalestris and said, "Your cruel eyes have a fatal effect

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upon the beholders." Having said so, Sir Fopling could say no more. This Dapperwit died while using the phrase "a living death" which is a figure of speech called "oxymoron", and Sir Fopling died while singing a line borrowed from a well-known song (from the Opera of Camilla).

## 2.2 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Give the synopsis of *The Rape of the Lock.*
2. Dr. Samuel Johnson has remarked, "Pope is read with perpetual delight." What features of *The Rape of the Lock* produce this delight?
3. How is contemporary life mirrored in *The Rape of the Lock*?
4. Discuss *The Rape of the Lock* as a satirical picture of aristocratic society.
5. Consider Pope, the poet, as the critic of his age.
6. Pope is permanently a satirist. Examine the statement.

## 2.3 LET US SUM UP

After having completed Unit II you have become fully familiarized with Alexander Pope, his life and works, and the social background in which he wrote. You are now capable of giving a fair appraisal of his work *The Rape of the Lock.*

# UNIT-III ADDISON & STEELE



## Structure



## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit III the objective is to acquaint you with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and also to discuss their craftsmanship as prose writers. We will further bring into discussion some of their more popular essays for their critical study.

You will be able to:

- Discuss their life and works.
- Summarize their essays.
- Evaluate criticality their works.

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# 3.1 ADDISON & STEELE

**Joseph Addison**

Joseph Addison was born in Wiltshire in 1672. His father was a clergyman, and he preserved his father's piousness and devoutness throughout his life. He received his early education at Lichfield and then at Charter House School. After finishing his early education, he entered Queen's College Oxford in 1687. In 1693, he took his M.A. degree, with his account of the greatest English poets.

He earned distinctions in character and also scholarship and became famous as writer of refined verses. His Latin poem, 'The Peace of Ryswick' (1697) brought him into the notice of the king. He was granted a pension of three hundred pounds a year. It was intended to enable him to undertake travel abroad. He studied French at Blois and then made a journey to Italy. He wrote a letter to Lord Halifax from there. He visited Switzerland, Austria, France, Germany and Holland. He met Boileau and the philosopher Melebranche. In 1702, his pension was stopped due to the downfall of Montague, his patron. After the death of his father, he reached his native country in 1707.

**Marriage and Death**

Lord treasurer Godolphin favoured Addison and he wrote the 'Campaign' celebrating the courageous deeds of his new patron. He was made the Commissioner, and then the Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1709. In 1716, he married the Countess of Warwick and went to live at her home, the famous Holland House.

His marriage was a failure. He spent most of his time in clubs and coffee houses. He picked up unhappy quarrels with Pope, Swift and Steele. He suffered from shortness of breath and dropsy. He died in 1719 and was buried in the Westminster abbey. His friend Tickell, wrote an elegy on him with well-known lines, 'He taught us how to live; and, oh; too high. The Prince of knowledge taught us how to die.

**Literary Career of Addison**

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It is Addison to whom goes the credit of creating and perfecting the periodical essay. In his essay ‘Qualification for Office’, Addison wrote that men of learning prove competent administrators and discharge their duties generally with greater honesty than men of the world. He wrote in verse, ‘Account of the Greatest English Poets’, J.H. Lobban says, "the feeble couplets contain much that is of the nature of an awful example of critics".

He also wrote from Italy ‘Letter to Lord Halifax’—it was the most elegant of his poetical productions. He wrote an account of his travels. In 1704, he produced, ‘The Campaign’ celebrating the heroic deeds of Marlborough of England. He helped Steele in his drama ‘The Tender Husband’. He himself brought out the opera 'Rosamand'.

Dr. Samuel Johnson writes: "The whole drama is airy and elegant in its process and pleasing in its conclusion". In May 26 of 1709. Addison contributed to 'The Tattler’, which appeared only thrice a week. But he also contributed to the spectator, which appeared daily except Sundays. In 1713 he published high-minded classical tragedy 'Cato' which won for him great reputation. His essays in the Coverley Papers were significant.

E. Albert writes: “If Addison had pinned the Coverley Papers together with a stronger plot, if, instead of only referring to the widow who had stolen the knight's affections, he had introduced a definite love theme if he had introduced some important female characters, we should have had the first regular novel in our tongue.” Addison wrote only 236 essays for the' Spectator'. He also helped Steele with the ‘Guardian’.

## Richard Steele

Richard Steele was born in Dublin, the capital of Ireland in 1672. His father was the Secretary to the Duke of Ormond. At an early age of thirteen, he was admitted to the Charterhouse School. After five years he left the school and joined Merton College, Oxford. He left the university without earning a degree. He entered the army as a volunteer. He took keen interest in politics and became the member of Parliament. He wrote a few articles for the wings. He was soon expelled from the House of Commons. Then he became a Tory.

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Steele married twice. His first wife died and left him an estate in the West Indies. He married another girl 'Prue'. But his extravagance made his married life miserable. He died on first September of 1729.

**Career of Steele**

Steele wrote a poem on the funeral of Mary in 1695. William III favourably noticed his prose work *The Christian Hero*. He wrote a comedy called *The Funeral* in 1701 and it was well received on the stage. He wrote two more comedies *The Lying Lover* and *The Tender Husband* written respectively in 1703 and 1705. His most successful comedy was *The Conscious Lover* in 1722.

He was appointed to the office of Gazetteer in 1707. He was associated with many periodicals like 'The Guardian', 'The English Man', 'The Reader', and 'The Theatre'. But he got great fame as editor of 'Tattler' and the 'Spectator'. He also wrote many pamphlets on a variety of subjects. His pamphlet on the 'Crisis' was taken seriously and he was expelled from the House. He wrote an apology for himself and his writings.

He started 'Tattler' in 1709 for fear of bankruptcy. His purpose was to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguise of cunning, vanity and affectation and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse and our behaviour. Each issue of the 'Tattler' contained several essays. He criticised prominent social and political personalities. He ridiculed many social evils life affectation in dress and manner.

He closed 'The Tattler' in 1711 and started 'The Spectator'. The motive forces behind 'The Coverley Papers' was Steele himself and Addison developed, perfected and carried it out.

**Personality of Addison**

Addison's character both as a man and a writer was fascinating. Many renowned scholars held him in high esteem. Thackeray writes, "A life prosperous and beautiful; a calm death; an immense fame and affection afterwards for his, spotless name". Lord Macaulay says, "But after full enquiry and impartial reflection we have long convinced that he deserved as much love and esteem as can he justly claimed by any of our infirm and erring race. Some blemishes may be detected in his character; to use the phrase of old anatomists, sound in the

noble parts, free from all taint of perfidy, of cowardice, of cruelty, of ingratitude; of envy.'



Addison has been accused of insincerity to friends, timidity, flattery and an insensitive calculating mind. He was fond of drink. Pope charged him with treachery, malignity and jealousy towards his friends. But he faced no frustration in life. He passed an easy life. He was optimistic and a concerned man with all his ambitions fulfilled. He was lucky to earn the favour and patronage of Halifox and Godolphin. He was given high offices in the administration and proved to be successful at that.

Addison was very clever as he could win the hearts of the people with help of his written and spoken words. He made friends and disciples by the sheer witchery of his tongue. He was not a good orator; he once tried to address the house and failed as a member of Parliament. He was so much confused by the applause that he could not complete even the first sentence of his speech. But he was good at private conversation. His talks appeared so impressive and delightful that even the greatest wits admired him.

Flattery was a weakness with him. He loved himself to be surrounded by a small circle of admirers. Pope attacks bitterly at the domineering nature of Addison in his 'Epistle to Arbuthnot'.

*A man too fond to rule alone,*

*Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne.*

But Addison had a pacific nature. He took legal proceedings to recover from Steele the unpaid debt of 100. Addison advised Pope against introducing the supernatural machinery in his *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope accused Addison of jealousy and cunning. Macaulay in his ‘Essay on Addison’ dismisses Pope's allegations.

**Addison as a Conciliator**

David Daiches remarks: "Addison was a mediator between town and country, between landed gentry and prosperous citizen and between cavalier and puritan".

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Addison tried to maintain the apolitical nature of 'The Spectator'. He made Mr. Spectator declare, “I never espoused any party with violence and am resolved to observe a strict neutrality between the Whigs and the Tories, unless I shall be forced to declare myself by the hostilities of either side".

He tried to keep himself away from active politics. He exposed the absurdity of the party system. He remained a Whig throughout his life. He wanted to preserve the liberties of parliament. He accepted the irrationality of the party system. He admired violence as the most forceful instrument to convince the opponents. He satirised party spirit in the 'Spectator' papers.

He made attempts to promote communal understanding between the ruralities and the urbanities of his age. He favoured new ideas, but showed sympathy for Sir Roger, the exponent of the old order of things. He was a conciliator in the political and communal fields as well as in the field of religion. He was a strict Anglican. He wanted to reconcile religion with good breeding. He tried to harmonise the code of pleasure with that of religion and virtue. He pointed out in 'The Aim of the Spectator' that he would endeavour to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality.

Dr. Johnson writes, "He has dissipated the prejudice that had long connected gaiety with vice and easiness of manner with laxity of principles. He has restored virtue to its dignity and taught innocence not be ashamed".

Thus Addison acted as a conciliator in (1) the political field, between the Whigs and the Tories. (2) In the religious field between the numerous warring sects of Christianity and between religion and politeness. (3) In the communal field, between different communities and between the people of town and the country. (4) In the ideological field between puritans and cavaliers, between wit and virtue.

Macaulay observes**,** "So effectively did he report on vice the mockery which had recently been directed against virtue that since his time the open violation of decency has always been considered amongst us the sure mark of fool". It is hard to overemphasize Joseph Addison’s influence.

**Addison as a Painter of Society**

Addison in his periodical papers depicts realistically the cultural and social

picture of his age. A full record of the social and cultural conditions of the age of Queen Anne may be gathered from the Spectator papers. Both the country and the town scenes are drawn truthfully.



A. R. Humphrey observes**,** "Even more than 'The Tattler' is 'The Spectator' famous for the variety and vividness of its social Panorama. The scope of London's life and something of the country's is mirrored". The 'Spectator' is a lively representation of the ways of living of the early 18th century Englishman as well as their ways of thinking. He has also departed from reality in some essays for the sake of his corrective aim. He presented the vices of contemporary society in a rather accentuated form so as to make them look hideous or ridiculous. His aim behind satire was to effect improvement in men and manners. But he avoided its seamy side. He contented himself to present lesser flaws and vices. In a sense he was a social reformer.

He has certain limitations. His frequent exaggeration for the purpose of propaganda and his deviation of unseemly facets of the Augustan social scene are the prominent ones. He was an unbiased observer of society. Addison's portrayal of society was best illustrated in the Spectator Club. All the members of this club are very alive and jolly. Each one of them is a representative of a profession. Each stands for a particular way of living and a particular set of values. Mr Spectator was the type of a new culture, which grew out of Puritanism. It is through Sir Andrew and Sir Roger that Addison draws up a picture of Augustan country life and town life. He shows a class between feudalism and urban manners.

Addison paints the vices in morals and manners of the people of London in a rather exaggerated form in order to make them appear ridiculous. The description of the absurd and fantastic French fopperies, fashions in hoods and the immodesty of Amazons is very interesting. The coffee houses were popular intellectual and social resorts of London. Addison was among the regular coffee house fans.

Leslie Stephen makes an apt remark that "Each coffee house had its habitual circle. There were coffee houses frequented by merchants and stock jobbers. Whigs and Tories like St. James' Coffee House". Addison portrays the coffee house wits and politicians humorously.

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Addison followed his age. He was in better consonance with the spirit than any of his contemporaries. His writings with didactic tone were powerful. He himself says, "I must confess, were I left to myself, I would rather aim at instructing than diverting". Leslie Stephen says, "One obvious characteristic of this generation is the didacticism which is apt to worry us."

In many of Spectator papers, the tone is didactic or instructive. He writes as an authority in almost every field of human learning. He was a universal adviser. He was a censor of morals and manners. He took pains to improve and educate his readers. As a matter of fact he assumes the position of a moral teacher. His tendency to lay down rules and to moralise is very fantastic. He seeks sermons in stones and books in running brooks. He is of the belief that nothing is worthwhile if it does not produce a moral. In 'The Trunk Maker' he says, "I do not care for terminating my thoughts in barren speculations, or in reports pure matter of fact without drawing something from them for the advantage of my countrymen". He was the first social and moral philosopher in English Prose.

Addison was a happy moralist in his judicious blend of Puritan and Renaissance spirit. He equated religion with virtue and virtue with religion. Many of his essays were taken as sermons. His essay 'On Contentment' gives a note of placid optimism. His religious philosophy is based on the foundations of cheerfulness, contentment and discretion.

He rigorously stayed away from all controversial issues of his day. He was in favour of tolerance and tried to combine social and religious criticism. He was fully aware to the social and political outlook of the age. But he did not try to fathom the depths of human actions and remove the heart of mysteries.

Addison was not that much kind towards women. He did not make a show of respect for the fair sex. His satire on female follies and frivolities is cold. His ideal woman must be simple, intelligent and modest. He says, "For my part, I am shocked with everything which looks immodest in the fair sex." To him "Female virtues are of a domestic turn".

Courthope says, "Addison saw clearly how important a part the female sex was destined to play in the formation of English taste and manners." He wanted

to raise the status of women.

**Addison's Art of Characterisation**

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Addison held a mirror to the morals and manners of his age. He served as a novelist in the 'Spectator'.

Macaulay says, "We have not the least doubt that if Addison had written a novel on an extensive plan, it would have been superior to any that we possess. As it is, he is entitled to be considered not only as the greatest of the English essayists but as the forerunner of the great English novelists".

Addison has created lively characters in the 'Spectator Papers'. The Coverley Papers have some elements of a novel Proper. Addison achieved success in creating viable and life-like characters. He could impart lifelikeness to his character. He imported particular qualities to a character. His description makes even a colourless character vivid and alive. Sometimes he dwells on the physical traits of a character. He has full command in importing a sense of mystery into the character. He often names his characters after the pluralities they possess. Captain Sentry is a soldier. Andrew Freeport wants that ports should be kept free of duty. He lets his characters reveal themselves dramatically. Thus Addison renders them through descriptive and dramatic ways.

**Addison's Humour and Satire**

Addison was a humourist in the literary sense. His humour is genial, warm, mildly satiric and urbane. He provokes smiles in his descriptions. He believes that wit and good sense have relationship with true humour. Virginia Woolf says, "He checks his smile before it has broadened into laughter".

His humour is associated with good sense and makes the readers smile. He had the talent of humour and enjoyed it thoroughly. His humour was not meant for entertainment alone, but instruction. It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. His humour aims at reformation, instruction and edification. It is not always satiric. He put his smile to right use.

Macaulay observes, "But what shall we say of Addison's humour of his sense of the ludicrous; of his power of awakening that sense in others and of drawing mirth from incidents which occur every day, and of little peculiarities of

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temper and manner, such as he found in every man. He served the cause of morality through wit and ridicule. He realised the use of ridicule as a corrective measure". His humour with a corrective aim becomes satire. His sense of wit was tempered with good nature and good breeding.

**Addison as an Essayist**

Addison and Steele wrote periodical essays for the first time. On April 12th of 1709 Steele published the first number of 'The Tattler'. Addison wrote regularly for the periodical. His essays were 42 in number. Then he wrote 274 essays for 'The Spectator'. Addison also associated himself with the 'Guardian' in 1713 and contributed fifty-one essays to it.

Addison has four hundred essays to his credit. They are a true representation of the people of the Age. They deal with fashions, headdresses, and practical jokes. He also wrote on serious themes like immorality, jealousy, prayer, death and drunkenness. In a few essays he used allegory as a vehicle to carry his ideas before the readers, as in "The Vision of Mirza' and 'Public Credit'.

W. J. Long says, "The most enduring of Addison's works are his famous essays, collected from the 'Tattler' and the 'Spectator'. He advocated moderation and tolerance in them. He condemned all the little vanities and vices of his times. His essays are the true pictures of social life of England."

His characters are very fascinating. If he had introduced some female characters, he would have given out a regular novel in English.

**Addison's Prose Style**

Addison's prose style was very fascinating. It is marked by neatness, lucidity and precision of expression. He has created and perfected English prose through his ability. He took to writing as an essayist, moralist, philosopher and critic. He had moral and instructive aim in his essays.

Compton Rickett says, "If we compare Addison's prose with the prose of Milton or Hooker or Bacon we shall realise the delightful plasticity", the delightful nuances of mood and fancy for which Addison finds expression".

Addison's prose is polished, elegant, well-chiselled and simple i.e. refined and polished. It is nearer the language of conversation. It is free from the

heaviness of formalism and the levity and licence of common speech. He shunned all brashness and severity of diction. He maintained a balance between high-flown rhetoric and trivialities of flippant colloquy. His choice of words is fine. His diction is very ornamental. His style lacks modulation and is monotonous. It contains the qualities of effortlessness and lucidity. He introduced subtle kind of balance and contrast in his prose.



**Steele as an Essayist**

Steele invented periodical essay in 1709. He combined all the scattered elements of essay to fit the needs of the time. He fused Bacon's epigrams, epistolary of Bruton, personal note of Cowley and discursive musings of Temple. He aimed at entertaining the visitors at the centres of social life like coffee houses.

He started many periodicals and journals. His purpose in starting the 'Tattler' was the fear of bankruptcy. His aim, as he himself wrote, is to, expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguise of cunning, vanity and affectation, and to recommend to general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour. The 'Tattler' displayed his inventive genius. All admired its wide-ranging appeal and ease. Each essay began from a particular coffee house. Steele tried to instruct or amuse people of every taste and he made his essays as simple and interesting as possible. He gave foreign, political and theatrical news. He condemned the frivolity and immorality of the time. He criticised some social and political personalities of the time. This paper was closed after 2nd January 1711.

**Steele's Prose Style**

Steele wanted to write the 'Tattler' in a colloquial vein. He imparted the ease and freedom of open conversation to his style. His prose contained the grace and flow of the spoken phrase. It is urbane, simple but dignified. They have epigrams and figures of speech. It is not verbose, slack and pedantic. His easy style, the unconstrained sentences, fresh and colloquial vocabulary were fascinating. His prose contains a warmth, confidence and sincerity, naturalness and spontaneity.

Dobson says: "Four words which the heart finds when the head is seeking, for phrases glowing with the white heat of generous emotion; for sentences which throb and tingle with manly pity or courageous indignation, we must go to the

essay of Steele".

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**Steele as a Humorist and Satirist**

Steele's satire was generally directed against women who are silly and frivolous in nature. In a few essays he used strong language to satirise duelling. In an essay he shows contrast between impudence and absurdity. He lashes at fashions in dress end loquacity of women. He tried to infuse into the readers good sense and morality. He had a very genial and lively sense of humour with a friendly quality.

Austin Dobson says, "As a genial and kind commentator upon the men and women about him, as a human and indulgent interpreter of their frailties: as a generous and ungrudging sympathiser with their feeblest better impulse--he belongs to the great race of English humorists".

**Comparison with Addison**

Addison was reserved and serious: but Steele was passionate and impulsive. He was more original and inventive than Addison. Addison was superior to Steele, in the art of essay writing. As Hugh Walker says "Addison was more finished writer: more correct, more scholarly and more subtly humorous".

Steele was a careless writer. He was a better moralist than Addison. He was an autobiographical and frank writer. His self-revelation was unconscious. Steele had a talent of romanticism while Addison was classical. His humour was broader and less restrained than Addison. He lacked penetration and ironical talents and insight of Addison.

## 3.1.1 SUMMARY OF THE ESSAYS

*Summary of the Essays*

**(1) The Spectator's Account of Himself**

**Summary.** Mr. Spectator was born to a small hereditary estate. His mother hoped that the child would become a judge. From the very childhood he was a

very reserved boy. At the university, he was silent, sober and eccentric. He was a hard-working student. He read many books in the classical and modern languages. As a result he was well versed both in the ancient and modern languages.



After the death of his father, Mr. Spectator resolved to undertake educational tours in foreign countries. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. He wanted to see the wonders of Egypt. He even went to Cairo to exactly measure for himself the size of the Pyramid.

He settled in the busy city of London. He mixed with all sorts of people and listened to their conversation. He also visited all the places of public resort. He would go to well-known coffee houses of London. He was often seen at the exchange or at the chief theatres of the city. He tried to maintain a neutral attitude in the affairs of Whigs and Tories. He was a silent spectator of the affairs of the world. He never disclosed anything about his name, age and lodging. He also kept his dress and complexion a secret. He was a shy and reserved man.

**Critical Comments.** The essay throws light on the guiding spirit of the Spectator who calls himself 'Spectator'. It is a living portrait of Addison. His modesty, his knowledge, his reticence and his calm observation and his shyness have been described in this essay. It depicts the peculiar style of Addison, which has the charm of personal conversation and the correctness of formal writing as well. His urbanity and humour are also highlighted. This essay is autobiographical in tone. The very first sentence of the paper is a good example of Addison's irony. There is an ironic hit on Mr. Greaves. There is also an apparent attack on the superstitions.

**(2) Of the Club:**

**Summary.** Steele gives an account of the six members of the Spectator club.

**Sir Roger de Coverley.** He was a baronet of a very ancient descent of Worcestershire. He is an odd, whimsical and eccentric fellow. He is man of good sense and good nature. He is a Bachelor and in his youth a ‘perverse widow’ rejected him. He had been careless in disposition after a disappointment in love. He is generous, aged, cheerful, gay and hospitable. He was kind and sympathetic

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towards his tenants and servants. He is a justice of peace. He loves mankind and is loved by all. He has a good knowledge of the Courts.

**The Law Student.** He is a member of the inner temple. His father wished him to become a lawyer and sent him legal problems to solve. But he hired a lawyer to solve them and return them to his father. He was interested in literature and drama. He joined legal profession just to please his father. He is a good observer and critic of manners. He goes to the theatre regularly. He is a critic of ancient literature.

**The Merchant.** Sir Andrew Freeport is a merchant of London. He is a wealthy man and has trade relations with many foreign countries. He advocates free enterprise, as he wants the seas and ports to remain open and free. He believes in the commercial value of empires. He is a prudent man with good maxims. He became a rich man through diligence.

**Captain Sentry.** He is a military man. He took part in many sieges and battles. He resigned from his post because his modesty came in the way of his promotion. But he does not blame his superiors for that. He is courageous and wise.

**Will Honeycomb.** He is a healthy gallant. He is a lady-killer and entertains ladies by narrating anecdotes or adventures of love. He is an authority on fashions. He knows the history of fashions, modes of dress and conduct. Even in advanced years he is youthful and shows good spirits.

**The Clergyman.** He is a prudent, learned and pious clergy. He could not get promotion in his service due to his avoidance of worry and strain. His followers admire his honesty and integrity. Due to his unsound health, he does not come to the Club regularly.

**Critical Comments.** This essay displays Steele's skill in characterisation. The character of Sir Roger is vivid and life-like. Addison has given 'Tell-Tale' names to his characters. Sir Andrew, Freeport and Captain Sentry—all the characters have been drawn from different professions and they reflect contemporary society.

The essay has a tinge of shy humour. There is irony in the description of 'The Game Act'. Pure humour arises in the description of the law student. This

essay shows lucidity and simplicity in the prose style of Steele.



### 3. Sir Roger at Home

**Summary.** Sir Roger invited the Spectator to spend some time with him at his country estate. He allowed Mr. Spectator to live there like his own home. He instructed the villagers not to stare at him.

All the servants were aged, sober and dignified. He seldom changed them. All the servants loved and respected him. They were not treated like servants. Sir Roger treated with kindness an old dog and a useless horse. He showed keen interest in the welfare of his servants. His butler was a grey-haired man and cared much to the comfort of the guests.

Sir Roger's clergy had a good personality, a clear voice and a good temper. He also delivered sermons in an effective and impressive way. He had advised him to deliver sermons prepared by others. He should deliver the sermons with great acumen and efficacy.

**Critical Comments.** This paper shows the character of Sir Roger. He has praised the qualities like his eccentricity and common sense. The sketch is vivid and realistic. The character of Sir Roger's Chaplain has also been effectively drawn. It shows his humour which is typical to Addison. His style is marked by clarity, antithesis and balance.

### 4. Character of Will Wimble

**Summary.** Mr. Spectator walked with Sir Roger in front of his residence. A countryman brought to him a huge fish for the knight sent by Will Wimble alongwith a letter. Mr. Will Wimble expressed his desire to stay with him for a week to catch fish in the river near his estate. He would bring for Sir Roger half a dozen lashes for his whip.

Mr. Will Wimble was the younger son of a rich baronet. His elder brother had occupied the estate of his father. He was a good hunter with a pack of dogs. He knew many handicrafts. He could make May-fly and fishing rods. He was, noble, cheerful and helpful. He kept the roots of flowering plants, or puppies.

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Will Wimble arrived carrying two or three hazel twigs in his hand, a set of shuttle cocks. At the dinner table Mr. Wimble told about his hunting adventures. Mr. Spectator felt compassion for Mr. Will Wimble. He wasted his talents on trifles. His case was typical of many aristocratic families.

**Critical Comments.** Addison criticises the law of primogeniture and suggests a remedy to better the lot of younger sons. His art of characterisation and blend of humour and pathos are seen here.

### 5. Sir Roger's Ancestors

**Summary.** Once Mr. Spectator saw the picture gallery of Sir Roger at his country residence. Sir Roger gave an account of the various ancestors whose portraits hung in the gallery. He told the difference between old and modern fashions. One of the ancestors was a warrior. He seized his enemy from his horse and rode with him round the lists. He won his ladylove. He could also play on the bass viol. The maid of honour hung next to her husband.

There were pictures of his three sisters. Two sisters died unmarried. The third one got a portion of their estate. But she was stolen by a neighbour who poisoned three watch dogs. It brought great disgrace to the family.

Another was a soft gentleman who had great poetic abilities, but no sense of justice. He borrowed money from others and ruined them. He invented the art of love- making by squeezing the hand of the lady. He left the estate with a debt of ten thousand pound, which was paid by a relative. Next was Sir Humphrey, who was true to his words. He did not accept Government service and was rich.

**Critical Comments.** This paper shows he character of Sir Roger. He was proud of his ancestors. He was abrupt and incoherent as it lacks the unity and coherence. His jolly humour and felicity of expression depicts Steele's style.

### 6. On Ghosts and Apparitions

**Summary.** There was a ruined church at a small distance from Sir Roger's house. Towards it was a secluded path covered with old elm trees on which many

rooks and crows lived. This secluded spot was supposed to be haunted by ghosts. Sir Roger's butler warned the guest against going there after dark. One of the footmen saw there a black horse without a head. Birds of ill omen inhabited the trees.



The author himself saw a cow grazing there. When Sir Roger began to live in the present house, it was supposed to be haunted. He got the clergyman to sleep in all the rooms. The clergy declared that there was no ghost at all in the house. The fear of the servants was thus dissipated.

Addison quoted from John Locke that the fear of ghosts and spirits arises from early education. He refers to the view of ancient Roman Philosopher Lucretius.

**Critical Comments.** Addison regards ghosts and spirits as merely mental phenomenon. He quotes the views of John Locke and Lucretius. His purpose is the correction and reformation of taste and the popularisation of his philosophy. The graphic description is full of imaginary terrors. He looks upon the faith in ghosts and apparitions with derision.

**7. Sir Roger at Home**

**Summary.** Addison shows the behaviour of Sir Roger in the church. In the village of Sir Roger people were the regular church-goers. They used to come to the church on Sunday in good dress and cheerful mood. This produces refining effect on their characters and manners. They get relieved of the selfishness and the concerns of the week's work.

Sir Roger was a devoted churchman. He got the church decorated all over with several quotations from the Bible. He gave a fine pulpit cloth and fenced off the altar at his own expense. He presented a hassock and a prayer book to his tenants. He had also engaged a singing master to teach them to chant the hymns properly. He awarded prizes to the village boys to encourage them to show their talents in the church.

Sir Roger does not allow anybody to sleep in the church, except himself. He cannot see anyone making a noise and shouts to warn him. In this way he

himself would make a lot of noise. He lengthens the prayer and repeats 'Amen' three or four times.

**Critical Comments.** Addison has shown that Sir Roger is a mixture of good sense and eccentricity, oddity and prudence. Addison's humour and irony are at full play. A sort of didactic not is seen here.

### 8. His Account of Disappointment in Love

**Summary.** Steele tells us about Sir Roger's falling in love with a perverse widow. At the age of twenty-three, he fell in love with her, but the lady rejected him.

Mr. Spectator walked with Sir Roger at a distance of his house. Sir Roger had carved her name on the bark of trees. He recalled to his mind her faithlessness. He was a young handsome gallant at that time. He was obliged to serve as the Sheriff. The beautiful widow was a defendant in a case concerning her dower.

He went to her residence to make the marriage proposal, but the learned and philosophical talk of the lady made Sir Roger nervous. He talked to her in the presence of a confident friend who supported the widow and made fun of Sir Roger. Thus Sir Roger returned disappointed from her house. She was a desperate scholar.

**Critical Comments.** In this essay Steele describes the change in mood of Mr.Spectator's friend Sir Roger after his disappointment in love. The character of the widow has been vividly drawn. She was learned and talented. Steele's skill of blending humour and pathos is also shown in this essay.

### 9. On the Shame and Fear of Poverty

**Summary**. Steele praises the virtue of economy. It is as conducive to prosperity as good manners are necessary to the charm and grace of social life. Economy in expenditure and ability to spend generously are connected with a comfortable fortune. To spend generously beyond means may cause grief. False show of wealth makes a man miserable and ridiculous.

Mr. Spectator came across a gentleman at Roger's residence. He would take wine in a rather voracious manner. He was in financial difficulties. His estate was under heavy debt, and he paid a heavy interest on it. He was afraid of the shame of poverty and spent much on false show.



Some are afraid of probable poverty in future. They save money and behave like poor. Steele mentions two hypothetical neighbours Laertes and Irus. Irus is moved by the fear of poverty and Laertes by the shame of poverty. The writer follows poet Cowley.

**Critical Comments.** This essay is a satire on the landlords and misers. One must impose a ceiling on his income. He laid stress upon the virtue of economy. The essay depicts Steele's felicity of expression. He has used vivid and apt similes and metaphors.

**10. Labour and Exercise**

**Summary.** Addison says that physical labour is of two kinds. First is compulsory labour, which a man submits for the sake of his livelihood. Second is voluntary labour, which is meant for pleasure. Country life provides both types of labour, and tthat is why country folk are healthier.

Addison gives details of the nature and structure of human body, which is a system of tubes and glands. Exercise is necessary to keep them fit. It helps the glands to secrete juice and fluids. It maintains the vigour of the body and the freshness of mind. It clears the intelligence, frees the mind from anxieties and purifies soul.

Human body possesses great the flexibility. It can be easily expanded, contracted or twisted; Exercise is necessary to keep body and soul together. The poor work hard for their living, but the rich people must do some physical exercise. Sir Roger is fond of hunting and riding. Addison takes the exercise in the mornings.

**Critical Comments.** This shows Addison's knowledge of human body. It has an element of universality. The character of Sir Roger is further revealed. The essay is full of humour typical of Addison. A personal note is also to be seen here.

## 3.1.2 ENGLISH STYLE—FAMILIAR AND ELEGANT

*"Whoever wishes to attain an English style familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his nights and days to the volumes of Addison." Justify.*

**Introduction**

Addison had unveiled the cultural and social picture of his age. He acted as a conciliator in the political field between the Whigs and the Tories in the religious field, and in the ideological field. Almost all literary men have acknowledged his contribution in the development of the periodical essay.

Richard Blackmore remarks, "The world has been, obliged to an author of distinguished merit now living for having been the inventor of a manner of writing no less entertaining than any which had been established by the practice of the most celebrated ancients".

**Addison's Moral Purpose**

Addison set the periodical essay on a firm footing and made it a dominant genre for a hundred years to come. He brought a synthesis between two adverse viewpoints of life. He wished to equate pleasure with virtue and virtue with religion. His role in improving and refining the contemporary literary taste is great and remarkable. He practiced neatness, lucidity and revision of expression through his writings. Courthope makes an apt remark**:**

> *Addison may be said to have almost created and wholly perfected English prose as an instrument for the expression of social thought. He took features of his style from almost all his predecessors: he assumes the characters of essayist, moralist, philosopher and critic. But he blends them altogether in his new capacity of Journalist. He has accepted the public as his judges; and he writes as if some critical*

*representative of the public were at his elbow putting to the test of reason every sentiment and every expression.*



**His Prose and Language**

Addison welded the English prose for the expression of social thought. He kept a highly moral and instructive aim for his essays. His tone often becomes authoritarian. The plasticity, mood and fancy of his expression is obvious. He took informal conversation, as a means of social intercourse. But his prose is still too polished, too elegant, too chiselled, to be the language of actual talk. He tried to convey the conversational ability to his prose. His prose is nearer the language of conversation. He is the founder of modern English, essay and prose. He invented a middle style between the formal writing and the free speech of everyday. Every page of his essay is luminous in the splendour of his thought. He avoided all ruggedness and severity in the use of diction. Sometimes he becomes verbose in his transitions and connections. His sentences are short and easy to understand. He kept a delicate balance between high-flown rhetoric and flippant colloquy.

**Addison's Unique Style**

Addison employs a very peculiar language. His choice of words shows his bent of mind. His language is free from Latin derivatives. He often makes use of homely expressions when they suit his purpose. His diction is naturally well wrought. He is a master of native phrase and expressions. He has the capacity to suit his manner to his matter. The thought and style of fictitious letters in the Spectator shows his ability of expression that goes well with all tastes. Such letters concerning fans, the cries of London, about garden and grinning match are all interesting.

Addison's style lacks modulation. He has the talent to vary his style as per his matter and his mood. It may be doleful, pungent and reflective. He can modulate his style in keeping with the necessity and mood of the moment. The balanced sweep and poetic flavour of his style is apparent when he deals with the highly serious and reflective themes.

J.H. Fowler says, "Clearness was a virtue which Addison esteemed highly, and in which his own writing excels. It is this quality that makes Addison so

perfect a model for the writing of essays. But the essay does not imply carelessness, there is evidence that it was achieved by considerable pains."

**Flexibility and Clarity**

The ease and clarity are the cardinal qualities of Addison's style. The lucidity and effortlessness of expression were the result of cultivation and discipline in him. He was fastidious and painstaking in his writings. With all his flexibility and ease there is no slipshod mannerism in his writing. He took much care to perfect his prose.

Edmund Gosse says**,** "Addison was excessively fastidious in his choice of words, laboriously polishing and balancing his phrases until they presented the finest literary art at his disposal, until the rhythm was perfect, the sentence light and bright as possible, and the air of good breeding at which he always aimed successfully caught".

Addison was very fastidious in composition so much so that he would often stop the press to alter a preposition or conjunction. He paid great attention to the balance, rhythm and lucidity of his sentences. He shunned loading his prose with excessive ornamentation. He tried to give his prose that flavour and ease which were most fascinating. There is the subtle kind of balance and contrast in his prose. He also recognizes the sound of words in English and distinguished them with the sounds of the continental languages. His essays never blaze in unexpected splendour. His prose is without glowing words or decorated sentences.

**Precursor of the Novel**

The Coverley Papers is rich in the novel elements. Addison was the precursor of the English novel. His successful characterization is evident in these papers. He has succeeded in presenting Sir Roger's romance in a form that may be easily given the shape of a novel. There is description. The dialogues are appealing and stimulating. The scene in the stage couch looks like a chapter in a novel. He could not elaborate the love theme or importunity.

E. Albert writes, "If Addison had pinned the Coverley Papers together with a stronger plot; if, instead of only referring to the widow who had stolen the knight's affections, he had introduced a definite love theme: if he had introduced some important female characters, we should have had the first regular novel in

our tongue. This essay serious brings us writhing measurable distance of the genuine 18th century novel".

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Addison's study of manners makes him the earliest of the novelists of manners. His psychological approach guided the modern novel. His urbane humour and delicate irony impart the touch of a novel.

## 3.1.3 ADDISON'S HUMOUR

**What do you know about Addison's humour?**

**Or**

**Write a note on Addison's humour?**

**Introduction**

Addison was one the greatest humorous writer in English literature. His aim was to strip off vice, its ugliness and uphold virtue. His genial humour is the source of charm of his essays. It is mild and gentle.

E. Albert says, "Addison seized upon the idea of the club, gave it life, interest and adventure, cast over it the charm of his essays, of his pleasant humour, and finished up by making the knight die with affecting deliberation and decorum".

**Addison's Humour**

An eminent critic writes, "Humour is the kindly, amused contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the expression thereof in literature. It is the contrast between what actually is, and what ought to be. It is marked by tolerance and the amusement."

Many critics have recognized Addison's greatness as a humourist. He laughed at the frivolities, vanities, affectations and self-deceptions of the age to which he belonged. He took a serious view of the feminine obsession for fashion. He smiled at the vague of the fan and the snuffbox. He treated humorously the

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vanity of the loquacity of the fair sex and the pedantry of the learned people. He derided the false traditions prevalent in the bankrupt families of England. He disliked the contemporary tastes in drama and literature.

Saintsbury says, "Addison exposed the vulgarity and negligence of his age by the practice of elegant and refined writing".

**Great Sense of Wit and Humour**

Addison's humour imparted enduring charm and popularity to the papers published in the spectator. His humour was genial, tolerant and amiable. It was urbane and pleasing and never became bitter or profane. He used wit, humour, and irony as an instrument in exposing the abuses of times. Grace, nobility moral, purity and decency marked his humour.

Lord Macaulay opines, "What shall we say of Addison's humour, of his sense of the ludicrous, of his power of awakening that sense in others, and of drawing mirth from little peculiarities of manner, such as may be found in every man? We feel the charm, we give ourselves up to it, but we strive in vain to analyse it."

Addison had the knack for making men ridiculous. He has been regarded as a great humourist in the English language. He had the ability to move the readers to smile. His humour was mild, refined and dignified. Grace, nobleness and moral purity are the hallmark of his humour. He has blackened no man's character. His humorous style is inimitable.

But Addison lacks pure humour. His purpose of humour was reformative and corrective. He laughed at the follies of the age simply to correct and improve them. He never cared to amuse his readers.

**Social Reform and Morality**

Addison was interested in social reform and moral instruction. He was a satirist. He tried to ridicule some folly, weakness or vice of the people of his age. He said, "I would not willingly laugh but in order to instruct"

He wanted to harmonise wit and decency. He showed in Coverley Papers that humour could be most compassionate, tender, good natured and genial. He was successful in holding the whims and caprices of Sir Roger de Coverley up to

gentle ridicule. He writes, "I shall endeavour to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality. I was the first to break loose from that great body of writers who employed their wit and their parts in propagating vice and irreligion."



Addison's humour is easy and interesting. He chooses the chief follies and foibles, a distinct departure from decency and decorum as the target of ridicule. He had not left a single taunt that can be labelled unkind. T.B. Macaulay says, "The mirth of Addison is consistent with tender compassion for all that is frail and with profound reverence for all that is sublime. His humanity is without a parallel in literary history." Thus Addison was a humorist with a purpose. He made the people laugh off their folly and frivolity.

**Irony: A Forceful Tool**

Addison used irony as a forceful weapon to ridicule human folly. He wanted to correct and improve the social weakness or vice through his satire. Mostly he satirized feminine vanity, triviality and their craze for fashion. He exposed the affectations and self-deception of his age with a view to correcting and reforming them. He wished to improve the manners and morals of his age. He lashed at the vanities of the fair sex and vice of his age with a genial ridicule and gentle humour in his essays.

Addison produced satiric effect by employing similes, metaphors, fitting anecdotes and illustrations. Irony was the essence of his humour and satire. It was taken as an indirect means of exposure and ridicule. He used irony as an instrument of satire. The shortcomings if Sir Roger have been treated ironically. Addison praises him and at the same time ridicules him. He says, "As Sir Roger is the landlord to the whole congregation. He kept them in very good order, and will suffer nobody to sleep in beside himself. Sometimes he stands up when everybody else is upon their knees, to count the congregation, or see if any of his tenants are missing."

**Social Satire**

Addison's irony is mostly pungent and comic. He writes, "There are many women who can talk wholly hours together upon nothing. I have known a women branch out into a long extempore dissertation upon the edging of a petticoat and chide her servant for breaking a china cup in all the figures of rhetoric."

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Addison satirizes upon fashions in feminine dress and trivialities. He becomes pungent when speaking about the garrulous nature of women. The structure of society was his chief concern. The character of Will Wimble is a satire on the folly of a great family. He also satirizes the treatment of Private chaplains who dine at the table of the Squire of Lord.

Courthope says, "Irony is the very essence of Addison's humour and satire". Addison could hold the whims and caprices of the character up to gentle ridicule. His humour is marked by great abundant variety and fertility of invention. Some of his essays blend humour and pathos."

## 3.1.4 CRITIC OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

**Write a note on Addison as a critic of contemporary society.**

**Or**

**Discuss the importance of Addison as a critic of the life and manners of his age, illustrating your view from the Spectator essays.**

Although Addison, in writing for the famous periodical started by Steele, called himself a mere Spectator of the affairs, yet his real object was to play the role of a critic of the life and manners of his times. He set out as a mild censor of the morals of the age, and most of his compositions deal with topical subjects such as fashions, head-dresses, practical jokes, indecency in conversation, gambling, drinking, swearing, cruelty and duelling. He attacked the trivialities of life, and the follies and foibles of dress, of manners, or of thought. His aim was to point out vices, which in his own words "are too trivial for the chastisement of the law, and too fantastical for the cognisance of the pulpit." He was therefore, a confirmed social reformer, but he had no desire to denounce or castigate the fools and the nasty people. His manner was to laugh them out of their vices and follies. Addison writes that "the great and only end of these speculations is to banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great Britain". He demonstrates the ugliness and deformity of vice by stripping the mask off it. He used satire, ridicule

and irony as weapons. He sought to "enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality." He was not the fiery moralist, nor the quaint moralist, nor the stern or pompous one, but the "happy moralist." Accordingly he employed humour and wit for expressing his disapproval and his censure of preventing absurdities and follies in English social life and manners. He aimed at amusing his readers with such writing as tended to the raring out of ignorance, passion, and prejudice. The effort of Addison, in the words of Steele, was "to expose the false arts, to pull off the disguises, cunning, vanity, and affectation," and to recommend a general simplicity in dress, in conversation, and in behaviour. Addison stated his fundamentally moral intention when he declared his purpose of bringing philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in office houses. It is in view of this that Addison has been called "a person in a tie-wing", and an "Archbishop of Good Taste." "Amiable, and urbane, laughing with no scorn—rather as one who understands and sympathizes with gentle pressure he puts his figures on their foibles, and cajoles as much as argues from out of their propensities."

The essays of Addison have been regarded as a realistic depiction of the times viewed with a distant and dispassionate observation. They are "the best pictures we possess of the new social life of England, with its many new interests." Prompted by the more original genius of his friend Steele, Addison seized upon the new social life of the clubs and made it the subject of endless pleasant essays upon types of men and manners. According to Dr. Johnson, Addison must be allowed "the first of the first rank" as a describer of life and manners. Addison is guilty of neither distortion nor aggravation. He copies life with so much fidelity that he cannot be said to have invented anything. His humour, too, is happily diffused in these essays written to depict and reform social manners. Hudson rightly points out that Addison set himself as a moralist to break down two opposed influences that of the profligate Restoration of loose living and loose thinking on the one hand, and that of Puritan fanaticism and bigotry on the other. But Addison did not indulge in sweeping condemnations and unqualified invectives: he wrote good humouredly, and made ample allowances for the ordinary failings of humanity. He consistently advocated the claims of decency and sound sense. He did much to set the conscience of the time right on the essential questions of the social and domestic conduct and it is for this very reason he occupies a high place in the history of English manners during the first half of

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the eighteenth century. Of the world of the eighteenth century, with its crudeness, its coarseness and its grotesqueness, Addison was severely critical. He was, in this respect, a missionary. He sought to put into effect certain ideas of civilization. Cazamian calls Addison "an informed observer" and "a judicious critic of manners and characters."

Referring to the essays of Addison and Steele, Cazamian writes, "The collection as a whole forms the most charming, the most varied, and the least sermonizing of commentaries upon social life as it should be." The art of living together, the duties of family life, the rules of true gallantry, the status and part of women in society, the laws governing the toilet, amusements and reading such are the subjects touched upon by Addison. He is the universal adviser who passes from the most serious subjects to the slightest, and conducts a crusade against duelling in the midst of jokes aimed at extravagant headdresses.

The most important fact about Addison as a painter or critic of contemporary life therefore is that he makes all vice, all extreme affectations, and hundred and one forms of selfishness and self-love, equally ridiculous. In his essays 'Pedants' and 'On Egotism', he ridicules a narrowness of mind, a preoccupation with one's own pursuits, and self-conceit. In 'Grinning Match', he satirizes the triviality of people who found interest in an ass race or in 'a controversy off aces'. In 'The Truckmaker', he pokes fun at the theatre audiences of the time for their lack of taste and of judgment. In 'The Cries of London' he laughs at the chaos of calls, shouts and noses produced by sellers of miscellaneous wares in the street of the capital. In 'Coffee House Politicians' and 'Coffee-House Opinion', he exposes the emptiness and ignorance of the gossips of the time, who talked glibly and in an affected manner about public events. Contemporary women are ridiculed for their coquetry in 'Fans', for their excessive love of fashion in 'French Fopperies', for their fantastical accomplishments in 'Women's Head-Dresses' and the 'Philosophy of Hoods' and their glibness and triviality of conversation in 'Female Orators'. He exposes too, the absurdities and inconsistencies of Sir Roger de Coverley who represents the landed aristocracy of the time. He takes a dig at Will Wimble for his idling ways of life and thus hits the younger sons of the English nobility. He ridicules Will Honeycomb who represents the unprincipled and unscrupulous gallants of the time. Thus he criticizes the manners and foibles of the English society of the 18th century, but

he does not employ the bludgeon of Swift. As a critic of the current task in the field of the drama, he employs the same method of ridiculing what he disapproved of. In 'Stage Realism' he describes ironically the absurdities that were presented on the stage and deplores the lack of common sense responsible for those absurdities. In 'Stage Murder' he denounces the absurd devices used on the English stage for producing horror and pity. In 'Nicolini and the Lions' he criticizes the Italian opera of the time for its "forced thoughts, cold conceits, and unnatural expressions". He strongly disapproves of the "florid form of words" and "tedious circumlocutions" of certain writers. In the periodical Essays he attacks certain critics who fail to appreciate merit in literary writing. He again takes a jab at this class of critics in another essay, 'False Criticism'. His aim, in which he certainly succeeded to some extent, in these essays was to correct and improve the literacy taste of the people of his time.



## 3.2 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Discuss Addison as a painter of society.
2. Give an estimate of Addison's prose style.
3. Give a summary of *The Spectator's Account of Himself*.
4. Give a summary of *Sir Roger at Home.*
5. Give a summary of *His Account of Disappointment in Love.*
6. Write a note on Addison as a critic of contemporary society.
7. Discuss the importance of Addison as a critic of the life and manners of his age, illustrating your view from the Spectator essays.

## 3.3 LET US SUM UP

Unit III acquaints you with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and also their craftsmanship as prose writers. You have further become enlightened about their more popular essays for their critical study.

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# UNIT-IV HENRY FIELDING

## Structure



## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit IV the objective is to familiarize you with Henry Fielding and his classic *Joseph Andrews*. We will discuss with you about his life and works with special reference to *Joseph Andrews*. You will be able to:

- Discuss his life and works.
- Give an outline of the work.
- Offer a critique on his work.

# 4.1 HENRY FIELDING



Henry Fielding was born at Sharpham near Glastonbury in Somerset in 1707, and was educated at Eton College. His younger sister, Sarah, was also destined to be a successful writer. After a romantic episode with a young woman that ended in his getting into trouble with the law, he went to London where his literary career began. In 1728, he travelled to Leiden to study. On his return, he began writing for the theatre, some of his work being very critical of the contemporary government under Sir Robert Walpole. The Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 is alleged to be a direct result of his activities. The particular play that triggered the Licensing Act was *The Vision of the Golden Rump*, but Fielding's satires had set the tone. When the Licensing Act passed, political satire on the stage was in no way possible, and playwrights whose works were staged were viewed as suspect. Fielding therefore retired from the theatre and resumed his career in law, becoming a Justice of the Peace in 1748 for Middlesex and Westminster.

But Fielding did not stop writing political satire and satires of current arts and letters. His *Tragedy of Tragedies* of Tom Thumb was, for example, quite successful as a printed play. He also contributed a number of works to journals of the day. He wrote for Tory periodicals, usually under the name of "Captain Hercules Vinegar". As Justice of the Peace he issued a warrant for the arrest of Colley Cibber for "murder of the English language".

Fielding's first major success was *Shamela*, an anonymous parody of Samuel Richardson's melodramatic novel, *Pamela*. It is a satire that follows the model of the famous Tory satirists of the previous generation (Jonathan Swift and John Gay, in particular). He followed this up with *Joseph Andrews* (1742), an original work supposedly dealing with Pamela's brother, Joseph. Although the work was begun as a parody, this work developed into an accomplished novel in its own right and is considered to mark Fielding's debut as a serious novelist. In 1743, he published a novel in the *Miscellanies* volume III (which was the first volume of the Miscellanies). This was *The History of the Life of the Late Mr Jonathan Wild the Great.* This novel is sometimes thought of as his first because

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he almost certainly began composing it before he wrote "Shamela" and "Joseph Andrews". It is a satire of Walpole that draws a parallel between Walpole and Jonathan Wild, the infamous gang leader and highwayman. He implicitly compares the Whig party in Parliament with a gang of thieves being run by Walpole, whose constant desire to be a "Great Man" (a common epithet for Walpole) should finally result only in the antithesis of greatness: being hanged. His anonymously-published *The Female Husband* of 1746 is a fictionalized account of a notorious case in which a female transvestite was tried for duping another woman into marriage. Though a minor item in Fielding's total *oeuvre*, the subject is consistent with his ongoing preoccupation with fraud, sham, and masks. His greatest work was *Tom Jones* (1749), a meticulously constructed picaresque novel telling the convoluted and hilarious tale of how a foundling came into a fortune.

His first wife Charlotte died in 1744. Three years later Fielding married her former maid, Mary, disregarding public opinion. Despite this, he became London's Chief Magistrate and his literary career went from strength to strength. Joined by his younger half-brother John, he helped found what some have called London's first police force, the Bow Street Runners in 1750. In 1751 he presided over notorious criminal James Field, finding him guilty in a robbery and sentencing him to hang. However, his health had deteriorated to such an extent that he went abroad in 1753 in search of a cure. He died in Lisbon in 1754 and was buried at the English Church.

Important Works

- *Love in Several Masques* - play, 1728
- *The Temple Beau* - play, 1730
- *The Author's Farce* - play, 1730
- *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or, The Life and Death of Tom Thumb* - play, 1731
- *Grub-Street Opera* - play, 1731
- *The Modern Husband* - play, 1732
- *Pasquin* - play, 1736

- *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* - play, 1737
- *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* - novel, 1741
- *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr. Abraham Abrams* - novel, 1742
- *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great* - novel, 1743
- *The Female Husband*, 1746
- *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* - novel, 1749
- *A Journey from This World to the Next* - 1749
- *Amelia* - novel, 1751
- *The Covent Garden Journal* - 1752
- *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* - travel narrative, 1755
- *Tom Thumb* .

## 4.1.1 JOSEPH ANDREWS

**JOSEPH ANDREWS**

Joseph Andrews, brother of Pamela, was a hardworking, sincere, stout and handsome, manly man. Taking inspiration from his sister he wanted to preserve his chastity. He began to work as a domestic servant in the house of Mr. Booby. He used to scare the birds away. But instead of getting frightened the birds would rather get allured with his sweet, melodious voice. The same thing happened when he was removed from the field to the dog-kennel. There also he failed very badly. The sweetness of his voice disqualified him for this position. The dogs preferred his melodious chiding to all the alluring notes of the huntsman. But when he was shifted to the stable he was successful as a rider. The best gamesters, before they laid their money, always enquired which horse Joseph was to ride. They betted by the rider than by the horse himself. Joseph was later removed from the stable to attend on his lady, to carry out her orders, stand behind her chair, wait at her table

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and carry her prayer book to the church. He would distinguish himself by singing psalms in a melodious manner. Mr. Abraham Adams was pleased and impressed by his melodious voice and his knowledge.

Joseph became the footman of Lady Booby. When Sir Thomas Booby died, Lady Booby extended her favours to Joseph and became enamoured of his handsome looks. She praised him as the handsomest footman in the kingdom. She would walk out with him into Hyde Park, and when tired, which happened almost every minute, would lean on his arms, and talk to him with great familiarity. Whenever she stepped out of her coach, she would take him by the hand, and occasionally, for fear of stumbling, press it very hard. She would walk with him in Hyde Park arm-in-arm, which gave an opportunity to ladies like Tittle and Tattle to spread scandals about them.

Once she tried to seduce Joseph and thus assail the chastity of Joseph. She indirectly invited him to lie with her, on her, in her bed to cool and calm down her burning sexual passions, but they were lost upon Joseph. And she became frustrated. Mrs. Slipslop was equally enamoured of him and wanted to satisfy her passions by his virile and handsome body. Joseph preserved his virtue against the amorous snares of both the ladies. Lady Booby at last dismissed Joseph from service because she was disappointed and humiliated, and her pride was hurt.

Instead of going to his parents or his sister Pamela, Joseph travelled towards Booby Hall, a country estate of Lady Booby, because his beloved Fanny Goodwill lived there. On the way he was robbed of all his belongings, was beaten, and left naked almost dead, in a ditch. As he lay there, a coach passed by. Most of the passengers were unwilling to help him. But when a lawyer told that all of them might be held legally responsible if they left him to die there, then only the passengers agreed to take him in the coach, but they refused to provide him with their coats. Only a poor parson gave him his only coat to cover his naked body.

Joseph was taken to an inn. Betty, the chambermaid of the inn, attended him, served him and nursed him. She lit fire to warm him, summoned a surgeon and then informed her master about it. The mistress of the inn was angry at the arrival of the newcomer, as he had no money. The surgeon attended him and told that the patient would not survive. The mistress, Mrs. Tow-wouse sensed trouble and wanted the patient to leave her inn. But the master treated him kindly. He

even asked Miss Betty to provide the patient with one of his shirts but Mrs. Tow-wouse refused to give the shirt. As the surgeon told that Joseph would die, a parson, Barnabas, was sent to him to pray for him. The parson came in a drunken state, forced Joseph to forgive his assailant, mumbled a few words, and returned to drink more wine.

Then Parson Adams happened to arrive at the inn. He helped Joseph financially, and in every other way. When Mrs. Tow-wouse learnt from Miss Betty that Joseph was highly connected, she changed her attitude and began to behave kindly with Joseph. Adam, borrowed some money from Mr. Tow-wouse on the security of his sermons, but Mr. Tow-wouse refused to lend any money. Barnabas had a very low opinion of the sermons but he introduced him to a bookseller who offered to take his sermons to London for sale. Then Adams remembers that he had forgotten his sermons at home. Miss Betty was enamoured of Joseph and tempted him to enjoy with her in bed. She even compelled him to seduce her but Joseph foiled all her attempts and threw her out of his room.

Mrs. Tow-wouse raised an alarm because she had seen Betty satisfying her sexual passions with her husband. Miss Betty was a very passionate girl. She had sexual relations with an ensign of foot, John the Hostler and Tom Whipwell, the stage coachman. Her passions were already aroused when Joseph had declined her offer to seduce her, and when Mr. Tow-wouse persuaded and cajoled her to yield to his passions, she readily agreed.

When Mrs. Tow-wouse wanted to attack her, Adams intervened and saved her. Now as Adams had left his sermons behind, he travelled back home with Joseph. Numerous times he fell into monetary difficulties. Mrs. Slipslop, who was also travelling to Booby Hall, helped him on the way. Parson Adams was separated from Joseph. He heard the voice of a girl. He ran to rescue her from the ruffian who wanted to molest her. There came some other fellows for bird baiting. The ruffian charged Adams and the girl of robbing him. The fellows sided the ruffian. The girl was no other than Fanny, Joseph's beloved. They brought Adams and Fanny before a court. The justice had sentenced them to jail but they were saved by the intervention of a Squire who knew Lady Booby and Adams. Released, they travelled and were joined by Joseph. Joseph requested Adams to bind them into marriage, but Adams advised him to wait till the banns were announced in the country church. They reached a farm where they were warmly

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received and entertained by Mr. Wilson, Joseph's real father. Later the local squire entertained them. But the squire had an amorous and sexual eye on Fanny. When the travellers disappeared, he sent a Captain, a poet, the player and three servants to abduct Fanny. There was a fierce fight. Ultimately, they tied Joseph and Adams to bed posts and took away Fanny. On the way, however, they met Peter Pounce, the steward of Lady Booby. Peter Pounce recognised Fanny, and rescued her. In due course the travellers reached Booby Hall.

Lady Booby also reached there, almost chasing Joseph. She had not yet been able to conquer her passion for Joseph. She wanted to keep him for herself, to satisfy her passions. She was even prepared to marry him at the peril of her dignity, and position in the society. She laid bare her whole heart to Mrs. Slipslop. She was extremely angry when Adams announced the banns for the marriage of Joseph and Fanny. She summoned Adams, ordered him to stop announcing the banns and threatened him to remove him from his position in the parish, but Adams remained fearless, and refused to obey her unjust orders. She then used all her resources to stop the marriage. She asked the lawyer Scout to detain Joseph and Fanny in prison. On the complaint of James Scout, Fanny and Joseph were arrested and Justice Frolic imprisoned them on the petty charge of cutting a twig of a tree.

Meanwhile Joseph's sister Pamela and her husband Squire Booby arrived. Booby Squire intervened in the matter and both the lovers were set free. But Lady Booby poisoned the ears of Squire Booby that Joseph, her brother-in-law should not marry, with the purpose of maintaining their position, a servant girl Fanny. Squire Booby was convinced and declared that Joseph would not marry Fanny, Pamela also asked Joseph not to marry Fanny. Nevertheless Joseph remained unmoved. When be reached Fanny, she was struggling to save her honour from a vagrant. Joseph thrashed him, assured Fanny not to leave her alone, and both of them went to Adams. Lady Booby was now fully frustrated. She made a last attempt to stop the marriage. She persuaded a ruffian Bean Didapper to abduct and rape Fanny. The attempt, however, failed because Bean, by mistake, reached the room of Mrs. Slipslop and lay with her.

There were other difficulties in the marriage, which surmounted. The Pedlar informed Fanny about her parents, by which information she was the sister of Joseph and Pamela. He told that Fanny was stolen from the house of the

Andrews by the gypsies. Gaffar and Gammer Andrews arrived. Mr. Gaffar tells that he had no daughter. But Mrs. Andrews told that she had a daughter born when her husband was away, and who had been stolen. The Pedlar asked Mrs. Andrews if the son, who was exchanged for daughter, had a strawberry mark on his chest. She responded in the affirmative. When Wilson heard this he was over-joyed, because he had a son lost with a similar mark.



Everything was now explained. Joseph and Fanny were not brother and sister. They were married with great joy. Squire Booby generously gave Fanny a fortune of two thousand pounds, which Joseph used in purchasing a little estate in the parish of his father. He bestowed upon Adams a living of one hundred thirty pounds a year, and appointed him the Pedlar, a tax assessor.

A few days later Lady Booby returned to London where, a young Captain of dragoons, together with eternal parties at cards, soon obliterated the memory of Joseph.

## 4.1.2 CHARACTER-SKETCH OF PARSON ABRAHAM ADAMS

### Character-sketch of Parson Abraham Adams

Parson Abraham Adams, in spite of his shortcomings, is a virtuous person, and upholds the Christian values. In his honesty, poverty, charity, sacrifice and sense of duty he may be compared to Chaucer's Parson in *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. He possesses almost all the virtues of that Parson. Though he has been compared to Don Quixote, he is, unlike him, a man of commonsense. He combines the poetry of unworldliness with the prose of common life. He is preoccupied, unworldly, noble, child-like, innocent, sincere and benevolent. Walter Allen specifies some of these qualities in Parson in the following words:

> *The title page of Joseph Andrews describes the novel as written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes, author of Don Quixote. Parson Adams is Fielding's Quixote. He is not made, like the great Spaniard. He is, however, very absent-minded. When Joseph first meets him on the road*

*he is on his way to London in order to find a publisher for his sermons; but he has forgotten to bring them with him and returns with Joseph to get them. And then—and for Fielding this is the sign of his nobility of character—he is an innocent: he is so completely sincere in his beliefs and actions that he cannot imagine in sincerity in others; he takes everyone he meets at his face value. He is the least worldly of men, and so, in his utter honesty and benevolence, he is the agent by whom Fielding exposes the wickedness, the hypocrisy, and the meanness of the world.*

**His Physical Features**

Fielding has purposely made him look shabby, perhaps to heighten his comic disposition. Parson Adams has a grotesque face. His fist is no less than the knuckle of an ox. Though he has a muscular body, his cheeks are wrinkled. Although he is fifty, he is bulky and stout, and keeps his Herculean fist ready for any ruffian.

**A Scholar**

As he gained education at Cambridge University, he is a scholar, and breathes the classical air. Fielding praises him as a scholar in the following lines:

*Mr. Abraham Adams as an excellent scholar. He was a perfect master of the Greek and Latin languages; to which he added a great share of knowledge in the Oriental tongues, and could read and translate French, Italian and Spanish. He had applied many years to the most severe study, and had treasured up a fund of learning rarely to meet with in a University.*

Although a scholar he is proud of displaying his learning. He claims to have more knowledge of life than anyone else. He often corrects the pronunciation of others and points out rules of grammar.

**His Nobility**

The shabby exterior of Adams hides one of the noblest hearts in literature. He is generous and benevolent, and always remains prepared to help others, especially Joseph and Fanny. When Lady Booby manoeuvred to get Joseph and Fanny arrested to prevent their marriage, he comes striding to help them to get them released.

He offers all the little money he has to the distressed Joseph: "He protested he would not leave Joseph in his present condition: finally, he told him, 'He had nine shillings and three pence half penny in his pocket, which he was welcome to use as he pleased."



Naturally Fanny and Joseph praise him very highly. Joseph writes to Pamela, “Parson, who is the best Man in the World.” His nobleness of character is expressed through the following virtues he possesses.

**Idealism**

Though poor, he is honest, and honest in financial matters. Far from corrupting, poverty ennobles him. He is straight, upright, and impractical. He is a man of good sense, good parts and good nature. He is utterly ignorant of the ways of the world. He is an infant just entered into the world could possibly be. As he never has any intention to deceive, so he never suspects such a design in others. He is incapable of seeing through even the most evident rascals. He is very credulous and freely allows himself to be deceived with disarming ease.

**Charity**

In his conversation with Peter Pounce, Adams defines charity in the following words: "My definition of charity is a generous disposition to relieve the distressed". And this is what he does, especially for Joseph and Fanny. He helps Joseph at every step. He saves the chastity of Fanny from violation, and burns his Aeschylus in his concern to relieve Fanny. He claims that if he has ten pounds about him, he "would bestow it all to rescue any Christian from distress”. He is brave in doing good to others. He is just fearless and undaunted. None, even Lady Booby fails to persuade or compel him to do anything which is unreasonable or unjust. She remains unflinching in doing his duty, in observing charity. He publishes the banns for Joseph and Fanny, and binds their hands in holy matrimony despite threats from Lady Booby.

**Christianity**

His essential nobility lay in upholding the Christian virtues. Just as Chaucer's Parson serves as a foil to the worldliness, meanness and hypocrisy of the Monk, the Summoner, the Pardoner and other such characters. Fielding's Parson exposes the pretensions, hypocrisy, vanity, egotism and such other un-

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Christian vices. As Walter Allen fittingly observes: "He (Parson Adams) is the least worldly of men; and so, in his utter honesty and benevolence, he is the agent by whom Fielding exposes the wickedness, the hypocrisy; the meanness of the world".

**A Humorous Character**

Adams has been conceived as a humorous character. Humour in Adams partly stems from his forgetfulness and absent-mindedness. Here are a few examples:

(a) When Joseph first meets him on the road he is on his way to London in order to find a publisher for his sermons; but he has forgotten to bring them with him and returns with Joseph to get them.

(b) He forgets all about his horse, forgets to pay for it.

(c) He forgets his coat at Trulliber's house.

(d) He puts on all his clothes but forgets to wear his breeches.

(e) He forgets to take his hat when he leaps out of the Pounce's coach into the highway.

(f) He comes to a large water body and wades through it to reach the other side. But after crossing the water, he looks over the hedge and perceives that "he would have found a foot-path capable of conducting him without wetting his shoes."

**Conclusion**

Adams has numerous flaws in his character. Though a parson he drinks, fights, and contradicts himself. He cautions Joseph against immoderate grief when Joseph's Fanny is abducted, but he himself grieves immoderately when his own son is said to have been drowned. Fielding plays off Adams' vices against his virtues. In a way Adams is the greatest character of Fielding. He is both ridiculous and lovable at the same time. He is caught up in humorous situations. But he produces different emotions in us. We laugh at him, but at the same time we also laugh with him. Mark Spilka regards him as a touchstone of measuring others:

Adams will be the foremost touchstone, since his religious position and his personal traits—innocence, simplicity, bravery, compassion, haste, pedantry, forgetfulness—will always pithch will deliver, and nothing of those he will receive.



## 4.1.3 CHARACTER-SKETCH OF JOSEPH ANDREWS

**Character-sketch of Joseph Andrews**

Mystery shrouds the parentage of Joseph Andrews. Fielding writes in Chapter 2 of Book I: "Mr. Joseph Andrews, the hero of our ensuing history, was esteemed to be the only son of Gaffar and Gammer Andrews, and brother to the illustrious Pamela, whose virtue is at present so famous."

Like the Biblical Joseph, he exemplifies patience and chastity. Like the Biblical Joseph, he is goodly person and well-favoured. He has been kidnapped by gipsies, and has been in employment in a great house. He has rejected the sexual advances of his late master's wife, and has suffered owing to her resultant wrath. He is finally revealed in his true identity, is reconciled with his family, and weeps while embracing his father from whom he has been so long separated.

**His Person**

When the novel opens, Joseph is twenty-one. His limbs are put together with elegance and strength. His legs and thighs are formed in the most exact proportion. His shoulders are broad and brawny. His arms hang so easily that he has all the symptoms of strength without the least awkwardness. His hair is of a nut-brown colour, and is displayed in wanton ringlets down his back. His forehead is high, his eyes, full of sweetness, are dark. His nose is a little inclined to the Roman. His teeth are white and even. His lips are full, red, and soft. His beard is rough, and his cheeks glow with blood. His countenance possesses the tenderness of a soft heart. He is middle-statured, handsome and smart. When he wears a fine dress, he looks like a gentleman. Though he is a poor footman, he is popular and loved by the parishers.

**His Early Life**

He comes to serve in the Booby establishment. He is employed to keep birds but his voice is so melodious that the birds, instead of being terrified, get attracted towards him. He is then transferred to the dog-kennel. His sweet voice again disqualifies him. The dogs prefer his chiding to the alluring notes of the huntsman. He is then transferred to the stable. There he performs superbly. He rides several races for Sir Thomas Booby with success. The best gamesters, before they lay their money, always enquire which horse little Joseph is to ride. The bets are rather proportioned by the rider than by the horse himself. Lady Booby is so much impressed by him that she employs him as her footboy.

**A Pure Gentleman**

Like his sister, Pamela, from whom he seeks inspiration, he is a model of male chastity. He protects himself from the sexual onslaughts of Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop, and Miss Betty. His function is, undoubtedly, to parody Pamela, because, while Pamela has an axe to grind, and protects her chastity from Mr. B in order to snare him, Joseph does it disinterestedly, from his pure heart. The defence of male chastity on the part of Joseph against the lascivious advances of Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop, and later of Miss Betty causes immense laughter in the readers.

Joseph is a perfect gentleman. Had there been another person he would have gladly enjoyed the bliss of sexual consummation with Lady Booby and Miss Betty, but he takes no advantage of the situations.

**His Love for Fanny**

Joseph keeps himself untainted for his Fanny whom he loves from the innermost recesses of his heart. He declares that he loves his Fanny more than ever man loved a woman. He tells Barnabas that he regrets parting from his beloved whom he loves as tenderly as he does his heart. He lies fondly contemplating on Fanny whose thoughts open his eyes in the morning. He is prepared to protect her at the cost of his life: “He immediately let her in, and embracing her with the most passionate tenderness, bid her fear nothing, for he would die in her defence.” He loves her so much that he cannot bear her separation. When Squire’s men abduct Fanny, he grieves over her loss with

groans. His sorrow is proof enough of his deep love for her.

He is constant towards Fanny. When Squire Booby persuades him to desert Fanny and marry a girl of high status, he replies: “I am resolved on no account to quit my dear Fanny.”

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**Rebellious**

He cannot yield to injustice and rebels openly against it. He is the champion of the poor and the oppressed. When Lady Booby tells him that his virtue should not resist her inclination when a woman has demeaned herself to throw aside the rules of decency, in order to honour him with the highest favour in her power, he replies: "Or why, because I am a man or because I am poor, my virtue must be subservient to her pleasures." As Adams is the agent by whom Fielding exposes the meanness of the people, Joseph is the agent by whom he exposes the oppression of the rich on the poor. He rebels even at the advice of Adams in the hour of his distress. He interrupts the speech of Adams and says that it is easier to give advice than to take it.

**Brave**

Joseph is brave. He displays his bravery for the first time in defending himself against the robbers. If one of the dacoits had not attacked him from behind, he would have won the battle. He again shows his bravery in protecting Fanny from Squire’s men. He again shows his bravery in protecting Fanny against a servant of Beau Didapper.

And though Joseph is brave like Adams, unlike him he is intelligent. While Adams is an idealist and credulous, and can easily be deceived, Joseph is a realist and can see through the manners of men. If Adams is unworldly, Joseph is worldly. Joseph is a practical realist who can judge a man by his behaviour, speech and actions.

**Conclusion**

A factual assessment of a person comes from his superiors and enemies rather than by his juniors and friends. It is a matter of significance that his praise comes from the two ladies whose amorous advances he has foiled and caused their fury. Lady Booby praises Joseph as "a charming fellow" and then asks Mrs.

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Slipslop what she thinks of Joseph. Mrs. Slipslop replies that "he is the handsomest, most properest man." Lady Booby enters into a long encomium on the beauty and virtue of Joseph, and sees in him “tenderness”. On earlier occasions she has praised him as "the handsomest and gentlest footman in the kingdom."

## 4.1.4 FIELDING’S ART OF CHARACTERISATION

### Fielding’s Art of Characterisation

**(With Special Reference to *Joseph Andrews*)**

Fielding is superb in the delineation of his characters. Walter Allen aptly writes: “Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us had been permitted to depict to his utmost power a Man”.

**His Galaxy of Characters**

He has created such a galaxy of characters that he can be compared in this respect to none but Charles Dickens. There is in the novels of Fielding something indisputably new in fiction, for never before had the readers been offered such a harvest of characters. The characters, boldly and brilliantly observed, are drawn from all classes of society. There are effeminate fops, cheating lawyers, brutal squires, acquisitive innkeepers, corrupt waiting maids and the easy-going judges. Fielding presents them with a rare skill, and contrives situations to expose their follies and foibles.

Like Chaucer’s, his novels contain God’s plenty. The galaxy of his characters is richly alive. In the creative productiveness of his characters he can be compared to none else but Dickens and Shakespeare.

**Variety of his Characters**

Fielding has drawn his characters, except royalty from all classes and walks of life. He chooses Sir Thomas Booby, Lady Booby and Squire Booby, from the higher class. He draws Mrs. Slipslop, Peter Pounce, Pedlar, Miss Betty

and Bean Didapper from the lower walks of life. Though he draws all his characters excellently well, yet he has drawn the low characters with greater intensity, especially in *Joseph Andrews*. He raises the stature of such poor nameless persons as a servant and a Pedlar who, lend money to the needy Adams, and Parson, who offers his only coat to the naked Joseph Andrews. Indisputably, he has wider sympathy for the poor folk, who are essentially more impulsive.



**Both Types and Individuals**

Fielding wrote: "I describe not men, but manners; not an individual but a species." This illustrates that the characters of Fielding are types that represent the society of the age. The characters of Fielding are typical English men and women of the Eighteenth Century England. Walter Scott remarks: "The persons of the story live in England, travel in England, quarrel and fight in England." However the characters of Fielding are types as well as individual, for Fielding describes the species in terms of the individuals.

**His Objectivity**

One of the salient features of these characters is that they are observed objectively and impartially. Some of the characters have been, unquestionably taken from real life. Sophia Western in *Tom Jones*, for example, is the picture of Fielding's first wife. But he has almost transformed her beyond recognition by his imagination. He takes a detached view of his characters. His characters are real human beings. He was a dramatist, and, like a great dramatist, he has delineated his characters dispassionately and objectively.

**Realistic Characterisation**

His dispassionate and impartial outlook helps him to deliver a realistic depiction to the characters. Richard Church aptly observes: "It is the spirit of all-pervading charity, expressing itself in. a genial but vigorous compassion, which enabled Fielding to bring to the novel, for the first time, a completely dispassionate observing mind."

The importance of Fielding as the delineator of real characters is historically immense, because, though real characters had been portrayed in poetry by Chaucer, they were never portrayed in fiction before Fielding.

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**Dramatic Characters**

Fielding was a dramatist prior to becoming a novelist. Obviously he carried drama to the novel. We have in his novels all the elements of drama, melodrama, action, dialogue, farce and conflict, both external and internal. His characters speak like the dramatis personae. The characters act and speak, and reveal themselves in the fewest possible words. In this respect Diana Neill observes thus: "His construction betrayed dramatist's hand, and effects were obtained by situations and climaxes which gave scope for dialogue, no interest in psychological realism, and all the characters are most healthily extroverted".

**Characters: Graphic and Picturesque**

His characters are graphic, picturesque and vivacious. In this respect he may be compared to Chaucer, who can visualise and immortalise his characters with one masterstroke as he does in the case of Shipman. Chaucer could do it as he is essentially a dramatist, especially, as he did in *The Pardoner's Tale*. Fielding is also a dramatist in novel and he can also visualise his characters. He visualises, for example, Parson, Trulliber makes his dramatic appearance only for a short while but he leaves a lasting impression on us. Even his minor characters are invested with such qualities.

**Comic Characters**

The characters of Fielding are essentially comic. Most of them suffer from affectation. We are allowed to laugh at the hypocrisy of Lady Booby and the snobbery of Mrs. Slipslop. Both Mrs. Slipslop and Miss Betty are ludicrously comic when they pounce upon Joseph, as if to completely devour him up, sexually.

The following extract is evidence enough of how Fielding invests his characters with the comic spirit. Mr. Tow-wouse, not willing to lend money to Adams, runs away in the following manner: "He then cried out, coming, Sir! though nobody called; and ran away downstairs without any fear of breaking his neck". The characters of Fielding are essentially comic.

**Individualized Characters**

Though the characters of Fielding are types, yet they are individualized.

They are individual in the sense that, though representative, they are distinguished from each other. No two characters are identical, or even alike. They differ from each other even in their similarities. Parson Adams, Joseph and Squire Booby are idealists. But they are idealists in their own individual ways. Adams is foolishly pious and Joseph is romantically constant. Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby and Miss Betty are dominated by one master trait, i.e. the sexual passion for Joseph. Yet all are different from one another. Mrs. Slipslop is rude and snobbish, whereas Lady Booby is hypocrite and vindictive and Miss Betty, passionately impulsive.

**Conclusion**

Thus the characters of Fielding are dramatic, graphic, vivacious and life-like. They are real because they come from life. They are drawn from the personal experience of the author. They are not round because they are not three-dimensional. And yet they are flat like the Micawbers because they, like Mrs. Tow-wouse, change and, like Mr. Trulliber, surprise us. John Butt is also of the view that the characters of Fielding change. He observes: "In Amelia, as in *Tom Jones*, Fielding infers that at the end of the book the hero is in some respects an altered man."

But the characters in a comedy do not essentially change because they are allowed to expose others but not their own themselves. Thus although one or two characters like Mrs. Tow-wouse or Parson Trulliber may change or surprise us, the characters essentially remain static in a comic pattern.

We can sum up with G.H. Mair, who examines the inherent qualities in Fielding's characterization in the following words:

In the matter of his novels, he excels by reason of a Shakespearean sense of character and by the richness and rightness of his faculty of humour. He had a quick eye for contemporary types, and an amazing power of building out of them men and women whose individuality is full and rounded. You do not feel as you do with Richardson that his fabric is spun silkworm-wise out of himself; on the contrary you know it to be the fruit of a gentle and observant nature and a stock of fundamental human sympathy. His gallery of portraits, Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, Parson Trulliber, Sophia and her father and all the rest are each of them minute studies of separate people; they love and move according to their proper natures; they are conceived not from without but from within.

## 4.1.5 JOSEPH ANDREWS: A PICARESQUE NOVEL

### *Joseph Andrews*: A Picaresque Novel

**The Meaning of Picaresque**

Picaresque novel treats of the adventures of rogues and vagabonds. The word "picaresque" is derived from the Spanish word *picaro*, which means a rogue. The *picaro* (the rogue hero) is a clever and amusing adventurer of low social class who makes his way by tricks and roguery rather than by honourable labour. When he does work, he begins with petty, menial tasks such as performed by household servants and valets. His immoral rascality sometimes verges on actual criminality.

The rogue in the first person, as autobiography, usually tells the story. Episodic in nature, the plot consists of a series of thrilling incidents only slightly connected and strung together without organic relationship. Usually it is a novel of the road and the hero wanders from one place to another as well as from one job to another. The adventures and wanderings in diverse social settings lets the rogue-hero meet people of all social classes—bankers, politicians, the clergy, doctors, lawyers, actors and the like. He is thus provided with the opportunity of satirizing the corruption and hypocrisy of a whole society and epoch. The picaresque novel is in consequence a study of manners. The picaresque novel is important, as it is a very powerful vehicle to give a realistic picture of a whole age.

***Joseph Andrews*: a Novel of Adventure**

After Joseph, the footman of Lady Booby, is dismissed from service for not gratifying her sexual passion, he proceeds to Lady Booby's country estate, where his beloved Fanny lives. From here onwards the journey starts. Joseph comes across many adventures, and when he meets Parson Adams in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Tow-wouse, and later Fanny, the journey becomes more interesting and adventurous. The greatest adventure befalls Joseph when he is robbed of all his belongings, even of his clothes, and lies naked and wounded in the ditch. He is taken to an inn where a maidservant looks after him, serves and nurses him, but

who indiscreetly and amorously throws herself upon him. There in the inn he meets Adams, and the two proceed together onwards. When they face financial difficulties, Mrs. Slipslop, meets them on her way to Lady Booby's countryseat, and helps them. In some way Joseph is separated from Adams. Adams saves a woman, who is in danger of being raped by a ruffian. The girl happens to be Fanny, the beloved of Joseph. The vagabonds take Adams and Fanny to a court. They are about to be sentenced when luckily a squire relieves them from certain imprisonment. Soon afterwards they join Joseph and the three proceed together. They receive a warm welcome by Mr. Wilson, and later harassed by the Squire of the parish. The Squire's army of gangsters abduct Fanny. Fanny is in danger of being raped by the Squire when fortunately Lady Booby's steward, Peter Pounce, who himself has an amorous eye on her, happens to be there, and saves her. Then they reach a parish where they meet a gentleman, who welcomes them and offers them to stay in his house, and then disappears, leaving the travellers in an odd, difficult situation, because they have nothing in their pockets to pay the estimate of the bill. The innkeeper then helps them and they are allowed to proceed towards their destination. When they reach the countryseat of Lady Booby, the adventurous journey comes to a close. But still there is drama coming up. Thus we see that in form *Joseph Andrews* is a series of adventures in high and low life. In keeping with the tradition of picaresque novels it is divided into books.

**Picture of an Age**

Fielding has represented in *Joseph Andrews* a cross-section of society. We may borrow Dryden's remark on Chaucer:

Here is God's plenty. Fielding has given here a picture of social, economic, religious and ecclesiastical conditions of the age. With its squires, parsons, clergymen, judges, surgeons, rich ladies, waiting-maids, footmen, scoundrels, thieves, inn-keepers, Hyde Parks, coaches, roads and bushes, Joseph Andrews is a veritable compendium of Eighteenth Century England.

The product is the appearance in fiction of real human beings, in light and shadow, in weakness and strength, acting and thinking and feeling as you and I and all other flesh and blood mortals behave during our lifelong conflict with the spirit that inhabits us. We are sinners, we are saints, and usually we are a neutral emulsion of the two. An eminent critic makes the remark: “Here, finally, is

realism at its truest and most significant; not the cold-blooded realism of Defoe, nor that multiplication of it which was to overload so much of the fiction of the nineteenth century."

**Satire on Corruption**

*Joseph Andrews*, like a picaresque novel, satirises the corruption of society. It satirises the prevailing corrupt social, economic and religious condition of the age. Fielding satirises the effeminate fops, cheating lawyers, whimsical magistrates brutal squires, acquisitive innkeepers, amorous waiting women, lascivious rich ladies and worldly parsons. The satire is directed against the foibles of the magistrates, the contradictions of the parsons, the arrogance of the rich and the meanness of all kinds of people.

**Episodic in Form**

The form of the novel is episodic. The different episodes are linked not by any internal relationship but by thematic sequence. The events are loosely bound together. Moreover, there are digressions in the novel, which may be linked with the novel thematically but not artistically. Hudson too discovers the novel containing episodic material.

**The Hero**

As it is the case with a *picaro*, the hero, Joseph belongs to a low class. He is just a footman in the service of Lady Booby. If we regard Adams as another hero, he too is a poor person, having six children to feed on his meagre income. Lady Booby treats him as though he were one of her domestic servants.

**Summing-up**

Thus we see that *Joseph Andrews* possesses almost all the characteristics of a picaresque novel. Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian also come across most of the characteristics of the picaresque novel in *Joseph Andrews*. They write:

> *Something of the impulse that produces Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones is derived from Don Quixote, that source of humour and irony without bitterness which the English genius has never ceased to lay under contribution. French novels, the Roman Comique of Scarron, the Roman Bourgeois of Furetiere, the Marianne and the Paysan Parvenu of*

*Marivaux, may have stimulated or guided the creative intuition, without our being able to estimate precisely their action. But the effect of the picaresque tradition is certainly to be felt in Fielding, as in his contemporary Smollet. The philosophical unity with which he wants to stamp his work is not so strong as the spirit of diversity and adventure. Joseph Andrews is very loosely put together…the quality of realism in these novels assures them a precious documentary value. Town manners, the pleasures and amusements of the capital, country society organized round the squire, and where the vicar occupies, for a time, a singularly less dignified place; stage coaches, inns, and the incidents of the road, the underworld of vice and crime, have here left traces sufficiently accurate in themselves to be of use to the historian.*

**Conclusion: *Joseph Andrews* more than Picaresque**

*Joseph Andrews* is more than a parody, and more than a picaresque novel also. Mark Spilka protests that the critics ignore the importance of the night adventures at Booby Hall, which are among the most unforgettable scenes in *Joseph Andrews*. He adds that they pluck the adventures out of context and thus belittle the significance of many adventures in the novel. He quotes J. B. Priestley as such a critic:

*Such Chapters of accidents are very familiar to students of the picaresque, and all that need to be said of this one is that there is some slight relation to character in it…but that it is not enough to make the episode anything more than a piece of comic business of a very familiar type. Smollett could bustle through such rough-and-tumble business just as well, if not better…*

He further comments:

*Priestley is right as far as he goes, but he forgets that Joseph Andrews is more novel than picaresque tale and that the novel requires special handling. In the picaresque tale, there is little or no dramatic connection between one episode and the next, and the critic can lift things out of context to his heart's content. But with the more fully developed novel form he must show how an episode lifted from a tradition has been fitted into the scheme of a given book. Certainly this is the proper approach to the escapades at Booby Hall, the last major comic scene in Joseph Andrews*

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*scenes which involve all the major characters in the book and both aspects of the central theme, the lust-chastity theme.*

## 4.1.6 THE THEMES OF JOSEPH ANDREWS

### The Themes of *Joseph Andrews*

*Joseph Andrews* does not have one theme but it is an amalgamation of a number of themes. There are various themes like native impulse of goodness, richness, poverty, love, chastity, sex, lust, religion, and the contrast between the being and seeming, as exhibited in it. The heart of all these themes is concentrated in little, unremembered acts of love and kindness. Fielding appears to be saying: "Be good and kind to your fellow-beings, for grace and charity are the marks of human beings". For him, a benevolent non-Christian is better than a heartlessly cruel Christian, as Christianity lies not in religion but in utter honesty of soul, in being kind and compassionate towards others.

**The Impulsive Goodness**

Fielding lays stress on intrinsic impulse, goodness of heart and the individual conformity to his better self, and uses a novelist's privilege in judging his characters by their intentions. An impulsive generosity of heart, a simple forthrightness, a sincere sense of goodness are the virtues which Adams, Joseph and Fanny possess. They are the touchstones by which the sinners and evildoers are measured. With their innocence, simplicity, courage and concern they lay bare the treachery and meanness of Barnabas and Trulliber. In all his novels Fielding has laid stress on the fact that it is goodness of heart that is valued in life. Richard Church observes in this respect:

> *Utter honesty of soul; that is the quality which sums up the genius of Fielding. And it is a power so rare, and so strong that once demonstrated, it can never be forgotten or evaded. It is the basis of all religious moral activity, as it is of all theories of art and aesthetic fashions. It outlives them all.*

There are two significant points to be noted in Fielding's philosophy of goodness.

(1) He emphasises that a particular religion does not necessarily make a person good. A person may be Christian by religion and yet inhuman; a person may be good even though he may belong to a religion other than Christianity.



(2) For Fielding a person may be sexually loose and yet may be a good person. He prefers the erring but pious persons to the righteous but cruel ones. His novels exhibit the antithesis between the generous headless errors of warm-hearted humanity and the calculating prudence and rigid propriety of persons, formally righteous but without the least tincture of generous feelings. And, undoubtedly, he prefers the former sort of persons to the latter ones. He praises Betty who though sexually immoderate, is kind and generous, and denounces Barnabas who is worldly and selfish. He admires the generosity of the postilion even though he has stolen a hen roost and condemns the meanness of the righteous Trulliber.

**Love and Sex: Lust versus Chastity**

Another important theme in the novels of Fielding is love versus sex or lust versus chastity. There are many variations of this theme. Mark Spilka regards "the lust-chastity theme" as the central theme. Lust is expressed through the characters of Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop and Miss Betty. But while Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop are hypocrites and vain, Miss Betty is generous, simple and humble. Two characters are both chaste and generous, and they are Joseph and Fanny. Joseph seems to be humorous when Lady Booby wonders at male chastity but we view it in a different way when we know that he preserves his chastity for Fanny who, he thinks, will preserve her chastity for him. Joseph is never tempted by the lust appeals of Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop and Miss Betty. He guards himself zealously against these ladies and does not surrender to their feminine lust and charm. On the other hand, Fanny saves her chastity by the timely help of providence. She is always in danger of being raped. She is about to be raped by a ruffian when Adams appears and saves her. Later she is abducted and is close to being raped by the Squire when luckily Peter Pounce, who himself has an amorous eye on her, luckily appears and saves her. A third time she is about to be raped by the servant of Bean Didapper (Bean Didapper himself craves to ravish her) when Joseph turns up, thrashes the servant, and saves her, promising never to part from her. Thus we witness the interplay of lust and chastity all through the novel.

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**Seeming and Being**

Seeming versus being is yet another theme in *Joseph Andrews*. Some of the characters in the novel are better than they seem to be and some are worse or just the reverse of what they appear to be. Lady Booby makes a show of being virtuous but she is just the reverse of it. She is herself desirous of exploiting Joseph sexually hut condemns such looseness in others. She attempts to seduce Joseph yet poses to be sincere to her dead husband. She becomes ludicrous, and we laugh at her because we know that she not only admitted Joseph in her room in all her nakedness, but also persuaded and tempted him to ravish her.

Trulliber is yet another hypocrite. He is a parson, a religious person but unlike an ecclesiastical person he is marked by greed and meanness. Then there is Parson Barnabas, another hypocrite ignoring the Christian gospels and sticking to avarice, never doing anything unless he gets any monetary advantage.

But there are persons better than they seem to be. They are Parson Adams, Joseph Andrews and Fanny Goodwill. They are better than they look, because, although they are noble and generous and act nobly and generously, they do not make a show of their virtuous qualities. Then there are poor noble souls like a servant, the pedlar, the postilion, and even Miss Betty who surprise us with their kindness and generosity, who are certainly better than what they seem to be. Thus seeming vs. being theme runs throughout the novel.

**Richness and Poverty**

Richness versus poverty forms yet another important theme of *Joseph Andrews*. There are in the novel rich and poor persons. The rich and high persons are fashionable; the poor and low persons have no fashions at all. The rich persons like Lady Booby and Trulliber give themselves airs and are hypocritical, mean and arrogant, the only exception being Squire Booby, who is intelligent and generous. Even the upper class servants of these wealthy individuals give themselves airs, and do not allow the poor persons to sit with them in the coaches. Thus Miss Grave does not allow Joseph, the footman to ride in the same coach with herself. She later speaks rudely that “she would not demean herself to ride with a footman”. Mrs. Slipslop picks a quarrel with Miss Grave-airs, thinking that she was the daughter of a poor gentleman but when she knew that she had an alliance with the upper servants of a great family, she repents for having picked

the quarrel with her. Mrs. Slipslop was herself an upper class servant and was so much affected in her superiority that she refused to recognise Fanny with whom she had worked in the Booby House.



In contrast, the poor are honest and generous. While the affluent persons are callously indifferent to Parson in his misfortune, it is the poor who lend him money generously. When Parson Barnabas and Mr. Tow-wouse refuse to lend him money, it is a servant belonging to the coach and six from whom he borrows money. When the rich persons in the coach refuse to give their coats to the naked, wounded Joseph, it is the poor postilion who gives him his only coat, swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by the passengers) that he would rather ride in his shirt in his life, than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition. When the hostess of an inn detains the travellers for not paying the reckoning, it is the poor Pedlar who generously offers to Adams all he has.

It is the poor, who conform to Fielding's belief in charity, kindness, grace and benevolence. The affluent persons are selfish, unfeeling, avaricious and greedy. Naturally Fielding likes the poor and despises the rich, has a preference for the low to the high.

## 4.1.7 HENRY FIELDING IS THE FATHER OF ENGLISH NOVEL

**Do you believe that Henry Fielding is the father of English Novel? Support your answer with your views.**

**Or**

**Do you agree with the view of Sir Walter Scott that 'Fielding is the father of the English novel'?**

**Or**

**In what ways did Fielding contribute to the English novel?**

Sir Walter Scott rightly called Henry Fielding the father of the English novel though there are critics who differ from Scott and argue that this title should go to

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Chaucer, Bunyan, Defoe and Richardson. G. K. Chesterton makes a witty remark: "If Chaucer is the father of English poetry, he is the grandfather of English novel." Now Chaucer is really a novelist in verse. Some of his tales like *The Pardoner's Tale* possess most of the constituents of novel. But we are talking of prose fiction, and in this respect Chaucer has no claim. W. J. Dawson confers the title of fatherhood on Daniel Defoe. But Defoe cannot draw an individual character. Moreover, he has no sense of plot-construction. John Bunyan can also claim the title because he wrote the immortal masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress*. But The Pilgrim's Progress is more of an allegory than fiction, more a moral fable than a novel. The main contender, however, is Richardson who wrote his masterpiece, *Pamela*. But *Pamela* suffers from a number of limitations. Richardson cannot draw a real character; his characters are models of virtue. He lacks humour, has no sense of plot-construction, and epistolary form leads to boredom, repetition and confusion. Saintsbury argues that it is not Richardson but Fielding who deserves to be called the father of the English novel.

**Morality**

With *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the novel not only assumes a new form but also a new ethic more respectable than that founded upon utilitarianism and expressed in beautiful and edifying maxims. He parodies Richardson's hoity-toity moralising and his mawkish sentimentalism. His morality lies in goodness of heart rather than technical virtue, with sins of the flesh regarded much more lightly than sins against generosity of feeling. For the first time a writer judges a man's conduct not by his actions but by his intentions and impulses.

**Plot Construction**

It was Fielding who taught the succeeding novelists the artistic manipulation of the plot. He established the form of the novel in England. He was much concerned about the structural principles of prose fiction, a matter to which neither Defoe nor Richardson had given any serious attention. To him the novel was quite as much a form of art as the epic or the drama. B. Ifor Evans aptly writes: "He had endowed it with a conception of form, and made it an art not unworthy of comparison with the pictorial art of Hogarth."

*Tom Jones* is, as Elizabeth Jenkins says, "an amazing tour-de-force of plot-construction". Coleridge placed it among the three best-constructed masterpieces

of world literature, the other two being Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*. In *Tom Jones* Fielding conceals his art, and approaches the highest ideal of a novel in which the plot takes the colouring from the characters themselves as if both plot and character are of simultaneous birth in the imagination.



**His Realism**

As Chaucer is our first realist poet, Fielding is a pioneer of realism in English fiction. He reacted against the French romance and the effete taste of his predecessors. He also reacted against Richardson's sentimentalism as a falsifying influence on reality. His realism is therefore a great advance over the other ones. Sir lfor Evans observes that he established middle class realism. He possesses all the essentials of a great artist, goodness of heart, utter honesty of soul, catholicity and impersonality, which go to form a great realist. In this respect Richard Church opines: "It is that spirit of all-pervading charity, expressing itself in a genial but vigorous compassion, which enabled Fielding to bring to the novel, for the first time, a completely dispassionate observing mind."

**Dramatic Novel**

Fielding is regarded as the first dramatic novelist. He was a dramatist before he began writing novels. He therefore exploited every virtue of dramatic art to enrich the novel. Oliver Elton observes that in the novels of Fielding there is more of the dramatic than the epic quality. The last scenes of his novels resemble the last scene of a well-knit comedy such as one by Ben Jonson. W.L. Cross has observed that the characters of Fielding are constructed on a further development of the art of comic dramatists. Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop and Mrs. Tow-wouse are essentially dramatic characters.

**Characterization**

Fielding brought something new in the realm of characterization. For never before did we have characters so real and individual, and such a harvest of them. Diana Neille writes about his characters: "*Joseph Andrews* throbs with life. The characters boldly, brilliantly observed, are drawn from all classes of society. There are effeminate fops, cheating lawyers and brutal squires. Amorous and unlovely waiting-women are presented with rare skill, and situation are neatly

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contrived to expose their foibles, their absurdities and their contradiction." Fielding did in prose fiction what Chaucer did in poetry.

**Humourist**

Before Fielding there is no humorist in prose fiction. Fielding is therefore our first humorist. His range of humour is very extensive. We find in his comedies coarse innocent humour, parody, burlesque, farce, horseplay, satire and irony. Thus his humour rises from the coarsest farce to the heights of subtlest irony. His humour is boisterous and broad to the point of the quiet suggestiveness of Richardson. He also had in him a freakishness of wit, the excess of his grosser mood, which led to fantastic interludes in his novels. His comic characters like Partridge, Adams and Mr. Tow-wouse are very lovable and lively.

**Comic Epic Poem in Prose**

His conception of comedy, the comic epic poem in prose, is his contribution to English novel. He introduced it in his preface to *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews* in the following words: "Now a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose, differing from comedy, as the serious epic form tragedy; its action being more extended and introducing a greater variety of characters". But John Butt rather holds a different opinion from Fielding when he observes:

> *Thus when Fielding told his readers that Joseph Andrews was to be regarded as 'comic epic poem in prose' and that, this, moreover, was a kind of writing which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language, the novelty of his claim lay not so much in the notion of prose epic, not even of a Comic epic poem - for this everyone recognised in Pope's Dunciad - but in a conflation of the two*.

## 4.2 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Discuss Fielding's art of characterisation
2. Discuss the themes of *Joseph Andrews*

3. Do you believe that Henry Fielding is the father of English Novel? Support your answer with your views.

**4.** In what ways did Fielding contribute to the English novel



## 4.3 LET US SUM UP

Having finished Unit IV you have become familiarized with Henry Fielding and his classic *Joseph Andrews*. You have further become knowledgeable enough to speak on his life and works with special reference to *Joseph Andrews*.

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# UNIT-V WILLIAM BLAKE, DR. JOHNSON

## Structure



## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit V our objective is to make you acquainted with William Blake and Dr Samuel Johnson. We have selected Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* for critical appreciation. To study Dr Samuel Johnson we have selected his *Preface to Shakespeare*. You will be able to:

- Talk on these great literary men.
- Offer a summary of their works.
- Analyze their work critically.

# 5.1 WILLIAM BLAKE

**Life and Works**

William Blake, a mystic poet and artist, was born in London on November 28, 1757. His father was a hosier, living at 28, Broad Street, Golden Square. The family consisted of four sons and a daughter, and William was the second son, and the only one to achieve distinction.

In William artistic taste was manifest at an early age. At the age of ten he was sent to a drawing school in the Strand. At fifteen he was apprenticed to an engraver. He also made drawings of the monuments in Westminster Abbey. He was greatly influenced by the Gothic style. His creative faculty found an opening in the early years in poetry, some of which has survived in the thin volume of Poetical Sketches, printed for him by his friends in 1783. These pieces were composed between his 12th and 20th year of his age.

In 1779 Blake started out to earn his living as a professional engraver. He did a lot of work in this line for the booksellers and publishers. During the next twenty years or so he supported himself largely by this means. In 1781 Blake met Catherine Boucher, the illiterate daughter of a market gardener, and married her in August 1782. She made a perfect wife for him. She learned to draw and paint well enough to be able to lend him a hand in his work. She remained childless, and survived him by four years, dying in 1831.

During the years 1783-87 Blake met a number of illustrious persons, but soon he developed disgust towards it, and ridiculed it in a satire known as An Island in the Moon written in 1785. In 1788 he began to experiment with a new method of printing from etched copper-plates. It is said that the spirit of his brother Robert revealed the secret of this process to him in a vision. The first results of this process were the small dogmatic works—There is no Natural religion, and All Religions are One. It developed further with the production of Songs of Innocence, which consisted of simple lyrical poems etched on copper

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with decorations coloured by hand. The volume was finished in 1789 and was sold for a few shillings. This was to be included in the remarkable series of books in "illuminated printing" which occupied Blake in some degree for the rest of his life.

Blake's productivity as an artist was substantial. In 1795 he produced his stupendous series of large colour prints, which can scarcely be matched in the whole history of art for imaginative content and magnificence of colouring.

Blake's friends circle had become a little wider now, which now included Thomas Butts. It was chiefly Butts patronage which enabled Blake to earn a livelihood while devoting much time and energy to his symbolical works which never produced any adequate return by their sales. He even worked strenuously over a long poem, The Four Zoas. It is a poem of the greatest significance for the understanding of Blake.

During the seven years from 1793 to 1800 Blake's creative output was enormous. In 1800 Blake moved, with his wife and sister, from London to Felpham in Sussex in order to work some engravings for William Harley. However three years later he returned to London with a great sense of relief. At first he had been able to work happily enough at Felpham but soon he became more and more irritated by Hayley's patronizing airs and lack of understanding. He also experienced much spiritual discomfort at Felpham because of the visions that he incessantly saw. He was compelled to lead double life, submitting on the surface to Hayley's vanities and developing in secret his own imaginative faculties. The Felpham period was, therefore, a weirdly mixed output of second rate engravings for Hayley, of fine paintings, and of mystical poetry of great power, which was mostly embodied in the poem Milton. In January 1804, Blake was tried on a bogus charge of having used treasonable words against the King, but was acquitted. In 1805 Blake joined the engraver Gromek in a scheme for the production of a series of engravings for Robert Blair's The Grave. But here he was again deceived. Gromek paid him a small sum for the designs, and then employed another man to engrave them. Blake, already embittered by neglect, felt still more embittered and suffered from fits of depression.

In 1809 Blake held an exhibition of his works at his brother James' house in Broad Street Golden Square. Sixteen pictures were exhibited, including his

large painting of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, and each visitor to the house received for his entrance to the house a copy of the new celebrated "Descriptive Catalogue." The exhibition attracted little notice. The only criticism that appeared in Leigh Hunt's The Examiner was malicious and unfair.

During the years that followed Blake fell into complete obscurity. It is not known for certain how he earned his living during 1810-17. It has even been suggested that for part of this period he was confined to a mental hospital. Some of his acquaintances such as Robert Southey, who visited him in 1811, also regarded him as insane.

In 1818 Blake entered upon the last phase of his life, and until his death in 1827 was probably happier among his friends and in his work than he had ever been. He was now able to obtain more work, and became the centre of circle of young artists who regarded him with great fondness and veneration. In 1821 Blake moved from South Milton Street to 3, Fountain Court, Strand, and here he executed his most widely known work in creative art, the "Illustrations of the Book of Job."

Blake made greater effort in his art. In October 1825 be was asked to make illustrations of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and to engrave them. He completed a hundred watercolour designs, of which seven were engraved, and he was still at work upon these when he died on the 12th August 1827. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, the approximate place being now indicated by a tablet placed there.

Blake suffered on account of the flaw in his character. His mind was never systematically cultivated. His qualities isolated him from his contemporaries and his mind upon itself, so that the interpretation of his message to mankind cannot be made with accuracy. But through all his mental turmoil and difficulties in dealings with his fellow men, he preserved his intellectual integrity, and he never prostituted his art. All through his life he tried to exalt the things of the mind, and for him the imagination was man's highest faculty. He kept fighting against materialism ever more. He was deeply religious, though in no conventional sense. In his later years Christ became identified in his mind with Art, and this fact provides many clues for the understanding of his doctrines. But perhaps the most illuminating revelation of his mind for most readers are the aphorisms and

didactic statements which he engraved about the year 1820.

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**The French Revolution**

Revolutions and changes mark the socia1scene. During the century new ideas were germinating, new forces were gathering strength, and the Revolution (The French Revolution), when it did come in 1789, was only the climax to a long and deeply diffused unrest. Revolutionary ideas stirred literature as well as society.

**Industrial Revolution**

The seeds of the 19th century Industrial Revolution had been sown by inventions such as Arkwright's spinning rollers, Cartbetter system of transport and communication. Population increased enormously from six to nine between 750 and 1801. This led to the Agrarian Revolution. On the whole England was a land of art and elegance. Taste had not yet been vitiated by too much machine production. With increased wealth and security the aristocracy was influencing literature to a great extent. Aristocracy functioned better as a pattern of art and letters than even the old-fashioned form of Kingship. Nonetheless, "England was filled full of beautiful things of all kinds, old and new native and foreign. Houses in town and country were as rich as museums and art galleries, but the books; the engravings, the China, the furniture, the pictures were not fluctuated or crowded for exhibition, but were set in their natural places for domestic use in hospitable homes."

**Fashion of Manners**

It was a period of elegant fashions and manners. Indoors and outdoors, England was a lovely land. For the first time the sites of new country houses were chosen for aesthetic, not only for practical reasons. A taste of artificial ruins preceded by many years the 'Gothic revival' in literature, religion and architecture; Classical learning was the sign of scholarship. While the upper classes lived a richly fashionable and artificial life, the poor were still unrefined, vulgar. Gambling and drinking were very common.

The craze for coffee-houses was at its climax. Money could buy both respect and influence. Bastards were born and thrown out on the streets. It was both an artificial and a frivolous age but not so artificial and frivolous as the

Restoration Age. Simpler styles in dress were however coming in as a result of Rousseau who taught that the equality of men should extend to their clothes. Wigs were given up, swords went out of fashion, and pantaloons came in place of knee breeches. Towards the end of century, one could easily discern the Englishman's Victorian spirit of compromise.



**Religious and Philosophical Background**

As opposed to the bitter religious controversies of the seventeenth century, the general temper of the eighteenth century was that of tolerance in religious matters. About 1722 John Wesley started the Methodist sect. Whitefield rendered him help. They insisted on holiness and good order or method of Christian life. Another noteworthy feature was the emergence of Evangelical Movement. The Evangelicals were philanthropic. The ideal of a benevolent Christian society was steadily being established. Books and pamphlets intended to purify social life and so literature was published.

## SONGS Of INNOCENCE and Of EXPERIENCE

(Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul)

| Songs of Innocence | Songs of Experience |
|---|---|
| • The Shepherd | • Earth's Answer |
| • The Ecchoing Green | • The Clod & the Pebble |
| • The Lamb | • Holy Thursday |
| • The Little Black Boy | • The Little Girl Lost |
| • The Blossom | • The Little Girl Found |
| • The Chimney Sweeper | • The Chimney Sweeper |
| • The Little Boy lost | • Nurses Song |
| • The Little Boy found | • The Sick Rose |
| • Laughing Song | • The Fly |

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- A Cradle Song
- The Divine Image
- Holy Thursday
- Night
- Spring
- Nurse's Song
- Infant Joy
- A Dream
- On Another's Sorrow
- The Angel
- The Tyger
- My Pretty Rose Tree
- Ah! Sun-flower
- The Lilly
- The Garden of Love
- The Little Vagabond
- London
- The Human Abstract
- Infant Sorrow
- A Poison Tree
- A Little Boy Lost
- A Little Girl Lost
- To Tirzah
- The School-Boy
- The Voice of the Ancient Bard
- A Divine Image

## 5.1.1 SUMMARY OF SONGS OF INNOCENCE

### Summary of Songs of Innocence

The spontaneity of these songs is the spontaneity of art, not of nature, of imagination and not of experience. Nothing but the purest imagination could give so neat and stainless an image. The untainted expression of spontaneity has never been made before or since. When we compare the Song of Innocence and

Stevenson's Child's Garden of Verse, and we are at once conscious of a vast difference. Stevenson writes of his own childhood, making the reminiscent efforts and fanciful condescensions of a grown man. Blake recaptures the child's mind. He does not merely write about childish happiness; he becomes the happy child. He does not speak of or for the child, he lets the child speak its own delight and, what is more marvellous, there are no false tones in his voice. Stevenson is very particular when he writes about the memories of his own childhood; he expresses what he remembers of his own wonder or fancy, his childish hopes and fears.

The Echoing Green is not only the record of happy day, but it is also a symbolic presentation of the Day of Innocence from sunrise to sunset. Infant Joy, The Little Black Boy, and Laughing Song symbolize the three ages of Innocence—infancy, childhood and youth. A Cradle Song, Nurse's Song, and Holy Thursday are symbolic of the same three ages of man; this time in relation to society; and the remaining poems, which image the human soul in its quest of self-realization, are all of even deeper symbolic import. Reading them in the order, Blake once decided they should be placed, we pass through consecutive stages of growth from infancy to self-consciousness. It would be wrong to say that the symbolism of these poems is so unobtrusive that it can well be neglected. Without that symbolism, these poems could not have been written, and to ignore this fact is not the best way to appreciate them. Blake is different from others in that it was his whole concern. His aim was clear to him. Symbols as Freud has shown, are the only language of the soul. When Blake realized exactly what he wanted to write about, he could employ no other means but symbols.

We encounter familiar objects in unfamiliar, transfigure aspects, simple expression and deep meanings, type and anti-type. True, there are palpable irregularities, metrical licence, lapse of grammar; but often the sweetest melody, most daring eloquence of rhythm and appropriate rhythm. They are unfinished poems; yet would "finish" have bettered their bold and careless freedom? It would have brushed away the delicate bloom. It would have destroyed that visible spontaneity, so rare and great a charm, the eloquent attribute of the old English ballads and of the early songs of all nations.

These poems have the same divine afflatus as in Blake's Poetical Sketches, but now it is fuller—a maturity of expression, despite the persisting; and a maturity of thought of motive. These poems have also a unity and a mutual

relationship, the influence of which is much weakened if the poems be read otherwise than as a whole.

Only Blake, with his pure heart, his simple exalted character, could have transfigured an ordinary meeting of charity children at St.Paul's as he has done in the Holy Thursday. It is a picture at once tender and grand. The bold images, by a wise instinct resorted to at the close of the first and second stanzas and the opening of the third, are in the highest degree imaginative: they are true only as much as a poetry can be.

Highly vocal is the poem Spring despite imperfect rhymes. From addressing the child, the poet, by a transition infrequent with him, passes out of himself into the child's person showing a wide-ranging sympathy with childlike feelings.

In The Lamb the poet again changes person to that of a child. Of lyrical beauty, The Laughing Song is a good specimen, with its happy ring of merry innocent voices. This and the Nurse's Song are more in the style of his early poems but of far maturer execution. The little pastoral poem The Shepherd has a delicate simplicity. Noteworthy also is The Echoing Green with its picturesqueness in a warmer hue, its delightful domesticity, and its expressive melody. The teaching Cradle Song is irradiated by a lovely sympathy and piety. More enchanting still is the air of fancy and sympathy which animates The Dream:

*Did weave a shade o'er my angel-guarded bed:*

*Of an Emmet that had*

*Lost her way,*

*Where on grass me thought I lay.*

There are hardly any readers who would fail to appreciate the symbolic grandeur of The Little Boy Lost and The Little Boy Found, or the enigmatic tenderness of The Blossom and The Divine Image. The verses, On Another's Sorrow, express some of Blake's favourite religious ideas, his abiding notions on the subject of the Godhead, which surely suggest the kernel of Christian feeling. For a nobler profundity of religious beauty, with a grandeur of sentiment and language to suit, there is no parallel or hint elsewhere of such a poem as The Little Black Boy:

*My Mother bore me in the southern wild.*

The Chimney Sweeper, another poem calls for special notice. This and Holy Thursday are remarkable as an anticipation of the daring choice of homely subject, of the yet more familiar manner, of the very metre and trick of style adopted by Wordsworth in such poems as The Reverie of Poor Susan, The Star Gazers and The Power of Music. The little chimney sweeper's dream has the spiritual touch peculiar to Blake's hand.

Blake's Songs of Innocence carried his own peculiar blend of the earthly and the unearthly. The first stanza of the first poem has a tilt and an imaginative naiveté that belong to no one else:

*Piping down the valley wild,*

*Piping songs of pleasant glee,*

*On a cloud I saw a child,*

*And he laughing said to me.*

It is Blake's lyrics which most completely fulfil the definition of romanticism as the renaissance enjoyed by a happy child, or rather by a poet who miraculously retains a pure and inspired vision, but in the Songs of Experience the serpent has corrupted Eden. And a knowledge of age and evil and suffering and oppressive authority darken themes that before had the radiance of spontaneous purity and joy. Alexander Gilchrist, writer of Blake' biography, commented thus on the Songs of Innocence:

*As we read, fugitive glimpses open, clear as brief, of our buried childhood, of an unseen World present, past, to come; we endowed with new spiritual sight, with unwanted intuitions, bright visitants from finer realms of thought, which ever elude us, ever hover near. We encounter familiar objects, simple expression and deep meanings, type and anti-type. True, there are palpable irregularities, metrical licence, lapse of grammar, and even of orthography; but often the sweetest melody, most daring eloquence of rhythm and what is more, appropriate rhythm. They are unfinished poems yet would finish, have bettered their bold and careless freedom? Would it not have brushed away the delicate bloom, that visible spontaneity, so rare and great a charm, the*

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*eloquent of our old English ballads, and of the early songs of all notions. The form is, in these songs, a transparent medium of the spiritual thought.*

## 5.1.2 SUMMARY OF THE SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

His Songs of Experience show us that the childlike innocence, is tested and proved feeble by actual events, how much that we take for ground is not true of the living world, how every noble desire may be debased; and perverted. When he sings of this process, he is no longer the piper of pleasant glee but an angry, passionate rebel. In Infant Sorrow he provides a counterpart to his Introduction and shows that even in the very beginning of childhood there is a spirit of unrest and revolt: "Struggling in my father's hands" etc. At the start of its existence the human creature feels itself a prisoner and after its first efforts to resist, angrily gives up the struggle.

When experience destroys the state of the childlike innocence, it puts many destructive forces in its place. To show the extent of these destructive forces in its place, Blake places in the Songs of Experience. Certain poems which give poignant contrasts to other poems which appear in the 'Songs of Innocence'. For instance, in the Nurse's Song he tells how children play and are allowed to go on playing until the light fades and it is time to go to bed. There Blake symbolizes the care-free play of the human imagination when it is not spoiled by senseless restrictions.

The fear and denial of life that come with experience, receives some of Blake's harshest and hardest criticism. He regards hypocrisy as a grave sin, like cruelty because it rises from the same causes, from the refusal to obey the creative spirit of the imagination and from submission to fear and envy. He defines it by providing an antithesis to the divine image in The Human Abstract.

In Holy Thursday, Blake shows what this means and how miserably it lives in a rich and fruitful children. The horror of experience is all the greater because of the contrast which Blake suggests between it and innocence. In The Echoing Green he tells how the children are happy and contended at play, but in The Garden of Love, to the same rhythm and with the same setting, he presents an ugly antithesis.

Blake was painfully and acutely aware of the restrictions which kill the living spirit of man. His heart was outraged and wounded by the whole trend of contemporary civilization. In London he gives his own view of that "unchartered liberty" on which his countrymen prided themselves, and he exposes the indisputable, ugly facts.

Perhaps the worst thing in experience, as Blake sees it, is that it destroys love and affection. On no point does he speak with more passionate conviction. He who believes that the full life demands not merely tolerance but forgiveness and brotherhood finds that in various ways love is corrupted or condemned. The Clod and the Pebble shows how love naturally seeks not to please itself, or have any care for itself, but in the world of experience the heart becomes like "a pebble of the brook" and turns love into a selfish desire for possession. The withering of the affections begins early, when the elders repress and frighten children. The Songs of Experience are more powerful than the Songs of Innocence because they are born of a deep anguish, from a storm in the poet's soul. Blake knows that one kind of existence is bright with joy and harmony, but he sees its place taken by another which is dark and sinister and dead.

Blake felt also that, although the state of childlike innocence and happiness is wonderfully charming, it was not everything and it could not last. To reach a higher state, man must be tested by experience and suffering. This is the link between the two groups of songs of Innocence and of Experience.

In dealing with innocence, Blake seems deliberately to have set his tone quitely to show what innocence really means in his full scheme of spiritual development. He was careful to exclude from the first part of his book anything which might sound a disturbing note or suggestion that innocence is anything but happiness. That is why he omitted a striking verse which he wrote in the first version of A Cradle Song.

Blake writes not about fundamental matters like spring and love and death, but about his own original and complex views on existence. His words have an Elizabethan tilt, a music which emphasizes their meaning and conforms exactly to it. Blake indeed believes that his words were often dictated to him by some supernatural power. As he said about one of his prophetic books: "I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the authors are in

eternity." "In the strange workings of the creative mind there is a point at which words come with such force and intensity that they have a more than human appeal.

Some of the Songs of Experience produce an impression that in respect of their mode of poetic organization or structure, 'everything is held from contact' with everything else. If they have a unity it is that of sustained negative conviction. Separateness and repulsive pervade this unity. For instance, it is a sequence of separated, isolated people that Blake passes and observes in London:

*...every cry of every man*

*...every infant's cry of fear*

Man and child, church and child sweep, palace and soldier, harlot, client (it may be), child, bride and groom—each is the enemy of its counterpart: each is without a living relation to any of the others. The verbs ("appals", "runs in blood down", "blasts", "blight" and the concealed actions of fearing, cursing and weeping)—all show the same principle at work.

The Introduction to the Songs of Experience is another poem that presents a universe of disjunction and non-relation. Even the initial image of the divine presence (the "Holy Word") walking among the trees in an illustration: its essential structure is not unlike that in London, of the poet walking among his fellow-Londoners and noticing them one by one.

## 5.1.3 THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTRARIES

### What do you understand by the principle of contraries by Blake, how far is it applicable to the Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience?

The core of Blake's theory is that, in some paradoxical way, it is possible for the contraries of innocence and experience to coexist within a human being. The sin of religion was its attempt to annihilate existence "by ignoring or minimising the essential oppositions in human nature." Religion tried to follow a

process that meant the rational faculty to arithmetic and the emotions to sentimentality. The morality that based itself on such reductions—the morality of "Thou shall not"—appeared to Blake nothing less than conscious or unconscious hypocrisy.

The Songs of Experience are poles apart from the childlike innocence of the Songs of Innocence. Some were written in intentional contrast, and have identical titles in the two series. The poems in the second group record the wounds and cruelties of the civilized world. Some of them are bitter comments on the restraints forged by custom and law. Here, Blake deplores the dominance of reason, religion, law and morality and he condemns the suppression of natural impulses, and more especially the suppression of the sexual impulse.

The children are themselves unpolluted, whether they are black or white. They are compared to lambs "whose innocent call" they can hear. Both "child" and "lamb" serve as symbols for Christ. Joy is everywhere in the "joy but two days old" in the leaping and shouting of the little ones; in the sun, in the bells, in the voices of the birds; in the Laughing Songs all nature celebrates. But, above all there is security. There is hardly a poem in which a symbol of protection, a guardian figure of some kind, does not occur. In The Echoing Green, the old folk are close by while the children play. At another place there is the shepherd watching over his sheep; there are the mother, the nurse, the lion, the angels and, most important of all, God Himself. In A Dream, there are glow-worm and the beetle to guide an ant.

In the Songs of Experience, Blake's is one of disillusionment. Instead of innocence, joy and security, Blake finds guilt, misery and tyranny in the world. The protective guardians have disappeared and in their place have been taken by the tyrants. Chief among the tyrants is the fearful god; Urizen’s deputies on earth are those who occupy positions of authority—the king, the priest and the nurse. A specific reference to Urizen is made only in three poems. In Earth's Answer he is described as "Starry Jealousy" and "Selfish Father of Men”. In The Human Abstract, he is represented by such personifications as "Cruelty" and "Mystery”. In A Divine Image, we again have such personifications as "Cruelty", "Jealousy", "Terror" and "Secrecy" but Urizen's dark shadow hangs around over most of the other poems in this group. Urizen hates life and joy, and has bound the world in his iron law of prohibition.

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In The Garden of Love, a chapel has been built on the green, and the prohibition "Thou shalt not" is written on the door. A Little Boy Lost depicts the cruelty of the church and its priests, a little boy being burnt to death merely because he dared to think differently. The Little Vagabond is critical of the church for its unnecessary austerities. The School Boy shows the schoolmaster as a tyrannical influence. London shows us the misery of the blackened chimney sweepers, and the thoughtless cruelty of the king under whose orders the helpless soldier bleeds to death. The poems also make a reference to the loveless marriages, which compel men to beget illegitimate children in the homes of prostitutes. In the same poem, we have the oft-quoted phrase "mind-forged manacles" which conveys the restraints that society enforces upon its members.

The rigours of sexual morality are depicted in A Little Girl Lost, The Sick Rose, The Angel, and Ah, Sunflower. The Sick Rose demonstrates the destructive effects of sexual repression. In The Angel, the maiden realises too late what she has missed. Ah, Sunflower shows the youth "pining away with desire", and the "pale virgin shrouded in snow," because both of them were denied sexual fulfilment.

In the Songs of Innocence the prevailing symbol is the lamb which is an innocent creature of God and which also is a symbol of the child Christ. In the Songs of Experience, the chief symbol is the tiger "burning bright in the forests of the night". The tiger burns metaphorically with rage and quickly becomes for some a symbol of anger and passion. The poet asks crucial question here: Did God who made the lamb also made the tiger? The lamb, innocent and pretty, seems to some the work of a kindly, comprehensible Creator. The splendid but terrifying tiger makes us realise that God's purposes are not easily understood. The tiger represents the created universe in its violent and terrifying aspects. It also symbolises violent and terrifying forces within the individual man, and these terrifying faces have to be faced and fully recognised. The two poems called ‘The Lamb’, and ‘The Tiger’ do, indeed, symbolize two contrary states of the human soul. No contrast could have been more vivid and more striking.

But while there is evil and misery in many of the songs of experience, the note of hope and optimism is not missing. In the Introduction to these songs, *The Bard* calls out to Earth to arise from the "dewy grass" and to start a new life, even though the answer from the Earth, which follows, voices complete despair. In the

two introductory stanzas of the poem A Little Girl Lost, the poet predicts a future golden age. The Voice of the Ancient Bard also makes a cheering prophesy about a new age of truth and light. But the prevailing mood and atmosphere of the Songs of Experience, is one of desperation and desolation just as the general mood and atmosphere of the Songs of Innocence is one of freedom and joy.



## 5.1.4 BLAKE STRONGLY DISAPPROVED OF SEXUAL REPRESSION

**What evidence do the Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience**

**provide to show that Blake strongly disapproved of sexual repression and advocate free love.**

The visionary quality of his poetry is unmistakable in the Songs of Innocence. In the very opening poem, we find either Christ or an angel or the spirit of pastoral. In The Little Black Boy a vision of god with children playing around him is described. Tom in The Chimney Sweeper sees an angel in his dream. In Night Angel, the angel showers blessings upon all sleeping creatures and sends sleep to the sleepless. In A Cradle Song, the mother sees a vision of Christ as a child. A similar vision is seen in the poem on another's sorrow. God appears in a human shape in the form of a little boy. Nor is this spiritual quality from the series too. A vision of god or Christ walking among the trees in the Garden of Eden is described.

Blake also expresses his faith in the idea that the "physical" body or the sense of man is important and vital. In the Songs of Innocence such poems as The Echoing Green, Laughing Song, and Spring, celebrate sheer animality but being poem of Innocence, they do not yet contain any suggestions of sexuality. A sexual interpretation of The Blossom has, however, been attempted by some critics and such a view of the poem, though far-fetched, may not be completely irrelevant. It has been said that The Blossom is symbolic of love and sexual intercourse. The Blossom is feminine and she addresses her mate first as a sparrow and, then, after

he changes, as a robin. The female blossom utters his contentment in both stanzas of the poem. She is neither sick nor remorseful after the sexual union. She admires the male without fear and without any inhibitions. She sees him, before the sexual union as confident, gay and pressing, going to his object swiftly as "an arrow". And she sees him, after the fulfilment, as a creature subdued, but ensnared to her. Obviously Blake recommends this attitude to sex as healthy and wholesome.

In the Songs of Experience that Blake frequently, unmistakably, and strongly advocates a free play for the human senses. He condemns artificial, social or religious restraints on sexual freedom. The very images in Introduction are sexual, while Earth's Answer confirms the sexual implications. The last two stanzas of the Introduction are spoken in the manner of lover: "Arise from out the dewy grass" and "Turn away no more", says the Bard to Earth who is treated as a woman. In the second poem the Earth does not respond in the role that the Bard had hoped for a fulfilled and joyous woman who had risen refreshed and vigorous, and not as an old worn and disillusioned wife might be after a sexual intercourse with a husband to whom she is bound in a servile and joyless union.

# 5.2 Dr. SAMUEL JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield on September 18,1709. The son of a bookseller, he was precocious. Early in life he fell a victim to scrofula. He had a good mastery of Latin that surprised all his teachers. He spent three years at Oxford and was forced to return without a degree because of a collapse of his father's business. The friend who guaranteed support withdrew and Johnson had to retire to Lichfield. Soon after, his father died leaving him a little inheritance. He was, therefore, compelled to depend on his own wits in his bitter struggle with poverty. He tried conducting a school and did some hackwork. It was all a failure. In these trying circumstances he met a widow Mrs. Porter who was older than him. They were married and now life became more tiresome and troublesome.

Johnson left for London and began doing miscellaneous work for the publishers. In May 1738, appeared his poem London. This brought him recognition and was followed by his Life of Savage, which made him famous.

This led to his great work of compiling a Dictionary of English. Save for some rare help, he completed it single-handed, though it took him eight years. This work stirred up at last the belated patronage of Lord Chesterfield. In a famous letter to him Johnson rejected the patron, and with that patronage of letters passed into the hands of the public.

While the lexicon was in progress, Johnson published the poem, *Vanity of Human Wishes*, in imitation of Juvenal. He wrote a series of essays that is now known as Rambler (1750). After the Dictionary (1755), he wrote some essays to a paper he started the Idler (1758). These essays are ethical and religious in nature. To meet the funeral expenses of his mother he wrote the allegorical tale, Rasselas during the evenings of one week.

These works brought Johnson to the notice of government. The Government granted him a pension of Pound 300 a year. He received subscriptions for a good edition of Shakespeare. The money was spent even before the work was

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planned. Churchill's attack gave him the stimulus and the text of Shakespeare was published in October 1765. This edition is valuable for its reading and interpretations even today. These activities did net leave him alone for he was essentially a clubbable man. His friends' circle included great many poets, philosophers, statesmen and politicians. They formed into a club wit, Johnson as their president, and met regularly in the Mitre Tavern. It was felt that he revealed his tremendous gift for brilliant conversation: and the devoted James Boswell records these conversations for posterity. Boswell the man of genius came from Scotland and Johnson who did not have much love for the Scotch, was deeply attached to him. Johnson was also acquainted this time with Mrs. Thrale whose house in London and in the country made him comfortable. When Mrs. Thrale lost her husband, she married an Italian fiddler, Mr. Piozzi. This separated Johnson from her. He lived in solitude and reflection thereafter. During this period he wrote the famous lives of the poets, published in 1784. He was buried in Westminster abbey, as Macaulay said "among the eminent men of whom he had been the historian".

Scrofula disfigured Johnson's appearance. Unwieldy bulk, scarred cheeks and defective eyesight were prominent in him. His walk had an awkward gait. He spoke spasmodically and ate ravenously. He was never patient in company. He never allowed others to be vocal in his presence, the only exception being Edward Burke. And yet if he was loved and respected by every one, it was because of his moral intellectual qualities.

In spite of his desultory reading, he read extensively. As a lexicographer he read those periods of English literature, which were held to be outmoded. He knew Latin literature, the literature of his own say, and the works of the seventeenth century very thoroughly. To this study was added a stupendous memory, which could provide an apt illustration for any and every occasion. He had an analytical mind which could discern the important and the significant, and which enables him to argue succinctly and effectively. But in conversation, he did not show off his scholarship. His charming manner of talk won of him devoted listeners and admirers. The talk was always that of a typical Englishman. He was the embodiment of the British public. As Bailey observed: "He is still for us the great scholar and the strongly marked individuality, but he has gradually attained a kind of apotheosis, a kind of semi-legendary position, almost rivalling that of

the great John Bull himself, as the embodiment of the essential features of the English character". Shakespeare or Milton cannot be taken as a typical Englishman. The British public do not find themselves in Hamlet, or Lear, or Clarissa, or Ravenswood, but they do in Falstaff, Tom Jones, or Jeanie Deans, or Gabriel Oak. They are all plain people, " with a certain quiet and downright quality which Englishman are apt to think the peculiar birthright of the people of the island." It is that quality." says Bailey, which was the central thing in the mind of Johnson and it is to his possession of it, and to our unique knowledge of it through Boswell, that more than anything else he owes the position of the typical Englishman among our men of letters, in Johnson we are our own magnified and glorified selves. Johnson possessed the typical Englishmen's common sense, love of independence, scrupulous regard for truth, and sincerity which is frank and honest. The sturdy common sense was the expression of his intense practical nature. He was interested deeply in life as it is here and now, not in life as it was in the past, nor in life as it will be. This led him to reject the speculative philosophies and theories. And so he claimed to have refuted Berkeley by thumping his foot on the floor. He could argue theoretically, but he commonly used the bludgeon stroke of practice to give his opponent the final blow. This is the approach that most of us wish to adopt, but we do not have the power of expression required for it. Johnson gave a permanent expression required or it. Johnson gave a permanent expression to our sentiments, attitudes and beliefs, he may not have originated new or fine ideas but collected the common stock of wised, tested it in life, found its truth logically and analytically, and applied it to a given situation effectively. The abstract discussion is made living by the "brief principle of general application." The plain sayings are never mere common places in his hands, but things relishing fresh life and experience. This gives him a great place in the history or letters.

Even in the days of pressing poverty, he maintained his independence; he spurned any offer of charity. There was the episode of his tattered shoes at oxford. When one of the fellows placed a fresh pair of shoes at his door, he threw them out in great indignation. He rejected lord Chesterfield's belated offer of patronage, a rejection which Bailey said, is the Blast of Doom this study independence also explains this great veracity. He spoke the truth without caring for the consequences. He told Macpherson that he was a fraud. He admits frankly the defects in his *Dictionary*. Bailey said, "Truth is his measure and honesty his

knife." Another remarkable trait is his great sincerity born of his seriousness.

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Johnson also wrote four political tracts, one is entitled "Thoughts on the Late Transactions respecting Falklands Island" (1771). In 1773, he visited the Hebrides. His account of a "Journey of the Western Islands of Scotland" had to be read along with Boswell's Journal. One gives a picture of Scotland and the other of Johnson, the man.

Johnson was not sensitive to the beauties of nature. He had weak eyesight and a defective ear. He felt that "one blade of grass is like another" and he preferred the towns. His ear could respond only to the most regular beat of verse. He had a wide acquaintance with the Latin classics, and a less wide knowledge of the Greek works. He was more through with the revived artificial Latin of the renaissance. He wanted even his epitaph to be in Latin. He knew little of the modern languages. Early in life he came under the spell of Dryden and Pope, and he also came to accept the neo-classic school in criticism. He was out of sympathy with the emergence of the new strands in religiosity, strong passionate temperament, and a tendency to be violent in taste and opinions.

## 5.2.1 JOHNSON AS AN EDITOR OF SHAKESPEARE

### Johnson as an Editor of Shakespeare

The last section of the *Preface* speaks of Johnson's own worth as an editor. Here we have the best possible introduction to the study of Shakespeare. Johnson was the first "to call criticism back from the paths that led nowhere," and to suggest directions in which discoveries might be made. He put an end to the fantastic desires of the editors and critics to alter the revised text. He first stemmed the tide of rash emendation and the ebb, which began with him, has continued ever since. If we want to correct the text, we must know which is an error, and where the error is. But what appears to be an error to us may be only an obscurity. Johnson pointed out the various reasons for the obscurity of Shakespeare's text. The great caution with which he took up the task of emendation is an ideal, worthy to be followed. Johnson may not have always hit upon the correct emendation, but he was guided by a sound principle.

The task of the editor is given a status and an importance by Johnson. No longer is it the "dull duty of an editor" as Pope called it. He very well discharged the duties and responsibilities of this task as fulfilled the qualifications required by the job. He stressed the value and significance of quoting the texts, the dangers of rashly arriving at emendations and the necessity of notes. The editorial work is shown to be as exciting as that of the creative artist. It can safely be said that since Johnson, the work of the Shakespearean editor has become an important and respectable vocation.

He was impatient of the quarrels of the commentators and he spoke of the absurdity of their bitter debates. They are concerned only with words, phrases and passages. These may exercise only the wit, not their passions. It is likely that their achievements in textual criticism maybe forgotten soon, or mixed up with those of others yet to come. An intellectual controversy should always be kept at that level. If it awakes the emotions and passions, considerable damage might be done to the textual criticism of any author.

Johnson had the loftiest conception of a Shakespearean editor. He brought with him a determined will and a greater sincerity. He begins to tell us about his work with the words: "I can say with great sincerity of all my predecessors, what I hope will hereafter be said of me, that not one has left Shakespeare without improvement, nor is there one to whom I have not been indebted for assistance and information." This is symptomatic of the great open-mindedness and progressiveness that Johnson stands for. As far as possible, he claims he acknowledged his obligation—Where this does not appear, the information belongs to Johnson himself. Literary honesty, scrupulous attention to the minutise of textual exegetics, and devoted zeal to restore the text are all evident in this undertaking.

Johnson confessed to having borrowed notes, which illustrate and explain a difficult passage, which are judicial in pointing out the faults and virtues, and which are emendatory. If the explanations given by others are found to be correct, he retained them as such. Some passages that needed an explanation are elaborately interpreted. This may appear as too much or too little, but he admits that it is difficult to decide in such cases how much an editor should necessarily give. It has to be left solely to the taste and judgment of the editor. Still he felt that there are many passages, which he was forced to leave unexplained. Either the

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passages are too difficult and obscure, or the reader must exert himself to understand them. His opposition to spoon feeding is too well-known.

Johnson agreed with the fact that he could not be systematic in the judicial part of the notes. No reader would prefer his appreciation of the play anticipated by the editor- critic. Yet the reader is to be initiated to some extent so he merely tried in this part to stimulate the reader to make his own discovery of the beauties of the play. This is again the anti-neo-classical trend bearing the appreciation and judgment of the literary work in the hands of the diligent and sensitive reader.

Emendatory criticism is the most tricky job wherein collation and conjecture are also involved. In order to collate, the editor must have as many different copies as possible. Johnson sadly admits that he could not obtain all the copies though he made a diligent use of the available material. The second part of the emendatory criticism refers to conjecture. Here he has been very careful. He could not trust it when he realized that he was making more use of it. The first transcribers of the text had the authorised text before them and they could be more certain and confident of their readings than those modern editors who had to depend upon their imagination. Hence he was extra-cautious in altering the readings of the early editions. It's more honourable, said the Romans, to save a citizen than to kill an enemy, and therefore it is more "virtuous to protect an early reading than to attack it. This point of view leads him to speak of the pleasures and perils of a criticism based upon conjecture. Conjecture has no principle as its basis and probability of committing a mistake is always there. Yet it is highly fascinating making one experience to proud joy of originality and invention. But a conscientious editor, we are told, should not be led away by this lure, and he should not give up conjecture merely because it is perilous. When it is conducted within limits and with great care, it can yield very good results.

There are many other facets to the editorial work which do not call for any argument for or against, according to Johnson himself. In this connection, Johnson admits that he took a few liberties in altering punctuation and in the disposition of the particles. He warns the reader not to depend on the notes blindly. And he concludes the Preface with the magnificent utterance: "Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient, and I should feel little solicitude about the sentence were it to be pronounced only by the skilful and the learned."

**The Preface**

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The most valuable component of Johnson's edition of Shakespeare is the *Preface*. Approaching the dramatist from the standpoint of neo-classicism, he reveals the genius of Shakespeare and at the same time he puts an end to the idolatry of Shakespeare. Rymer and Voltaire condemned the dramatist because he violated the rules of correctness. But Johnson rejects the extremes of neo-classicism and of idolatry. Johnson was aware of the two approaches to Shakespeare. The followers of Dryden admired the mighty though untutored genius of the dramatist. One of the points that emerge clearly from his criticism of Shakespeare is that the character drawing, the passions, and the poetry are of more account in just drama than the structure. There was Rymer, 'the strict interpreter of the rules of Aristotle and the exemplar of narrowness and pedantry in their application. Rymer attacked the lack of structure and the violation of the unities. While Dryden emphasised the subject-matter and poetry. Rymer was interested only in the form of the drama. Johnson prefers to follow Dryden in his evaluation of the content. When he comes to the form, he boldly asserts that the rules cannot apply to Shakespeare because he obeyed the laws of nature and not the laws made by man. Surprisingly enough this is the beginning of the modern romantic approach and, it comes from a classicist. There is also Johnson's regard for both and this does not allow him to be a complete romanticist. He is alive to the many defects and drawbacks in Shakespeare and he points them out. Johnson strikes the golden mean.

Johnson emphasises that the plays of Shakespeare are a faithful mirror of life. This is a principle coming from Cicero, and the method accordingly is neo-classical though the interpretation is romantic. As Dr. Houston observed, "To Johnson as to the whole century just representations of general nature were the essential characteristics of the classical ideal and Shakespeare appealed to all as the great poet of nature, who held up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. Neither his greatness as a poet nor his delightful romantic situations came first to the minds of the critics who regarded Dryden and Pope as the supreme expression of the poetical spirit; they turned rather by preference to what they deemed his interpretation of human nature in terms of universal experience. Johnson's mind was stocked with principles depending on nature and truth as formulated by classical critics and whose temper was essentially reasonable, found these sentiments too congenial for him to adopt and other approach to this

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poet. He found that Shakespeare made nature predominate over accident, that he depicted the influence of the general passions and that he successfully presents life in its native colours. With his great genius the dramatist preserved the individuality of his characters. These characters are individuals who are 'universalised into the type, whose actions and conduct may have their application to ordinary men and ordinary life.' In this he obeyed the Aristotelian principle that art imitates Nature and his art was formed by experiences. This position leads Johnson to contrast Shakespeare with the barbarous romances which are sensationalistic. Shakespeare offers characters that talk, speak and act as the normal human beings in like situation. The dialogue is levelled with life because he "approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful" He reveals human nature as it appears in real situations and as it would be in various trials and tribulations. Here Johnson makes the dramatist acceptable to his own insistent realism.

The language of the characters is natural and as such truthful. The incidents determine the speech and the speech agrees with the character. The dialogue has the ease and simplicity which belong to common conversation. The natural disposition of Shakespeare, we are told, was towards comedy; and the dialogue in comedy is refreshing and pure. The characters are true to life and hence durable and we have a faithful "discrimination of true passion. Here we have the conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue."

Then Johnson turns to the weaknesses of Shakespeare. In this part of the Preface, "We have Johnson the neo-classicist and the moralist. He accuses Shakespeare with lacking in morality. He sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more careful to please than instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his person indifferently through right and wrong and at the close dismisses them without further care and leaves their examples to operate by chance for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place."

Johnson attacks Shakespeare's anachronisms as violating probability. Decorum is upheld as he speaks of the futility of the "reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm." Shakespeare's jests, we read "are commonly gross and their pleasantry licentious", and the dramatist had not chosen the best modes of gaiety. Propriety too has been ignored in the matter of diction, for there are "the exchanges of mere smartness in the comic dialogue, the inflated language and the set speeches in tragedy and the excessive use of conceits and quibbles throughout his plays."

Then Johnson proceeds to discuss Shakespeare's lapses in dramatic composition. First, there are tragi-comedies, which are neither tragedies nor comedies. These plays "exhibit the real state of sublunary nature which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination, and expressing the course of the world." These plays are not in accordance with the rules. But "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." The end of poetry, he admits, is to instruct by pleasing. "That the mingled drama may convey all the instruct of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both its alternations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life." The mingled scenes do "produce the intended vicissitudes of passion," and "all pleasure consists in variety" He, therefore, observes: "Whatever his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story without vehemence or emotion through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference. When Shakespeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire vanish away."

Johnson defends vehemently Shakespeare's violation of the unities. He accepts only the unity of action. The other unities are "the accidental prescriptions of authority." He compares "a correct and regular writer to a garden accurately formed and diligently planted and the plays of Shakespeare to a forest with all its splendid luxuriance of verdoys and of weeds and cramble."

Johnson draws our attention to Shakespeare's humanity and moral power and to his great and untrammelled genius. This approach did put an end to a good deal of underbrush, and it paved the way for the great Romantic critics; Johnson clearly marked the parting of the ways in the approach to Shakespeare. From

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Johnson onwards the critics are to interpret Shakespeare not on the basis of classical or neo-classical principles, but on the basis of sympathetic understanding.

The native critical vigour of Johnson and his prejudice are evident here. Yet there is compromise and there is reservation. He does not fully accept the neo-classic system, nor does he fully reject it.

**Fusion of the Comic and the Tragic**

Cautiously Johnson introduces the problem of mixing comic and tragic scenes in Shakespeare and observes that this "deserves more consideration." Dryden too referred to this charge and answered it by referring to principle of variety and the spirit of the people. Johnson is more systematic in his examination of the problem. .

Shakespeare's plays, he argues are neither tragedies nor comedies if we take the terms in a technical way. They are a new kind of form. They represent the real state of life, which offers a succession of joy and sorrow, and of good and evil. Life is a mixture of these two aspects. The ancient dramatists selected one of these aspects and portrayed it dramatically, calling one a comedy and the other a tragedy. Since then there grew a distinction which introduced an artificial breaking up of the unity of life. Shakespeare refused to accept this artificial division and hence he introduced both the serious and the comic into the same play just as they are found in actual life. Then the Shakespearean play is much closer to life than a pure tragedy or a pure comedy. This is an argument drawn from realism from truth to life. But the realism of Johnson is thoroughly unlike the native realism of a later day. .

But the rules nowhere allow such a mixing up of the two elements. Johnson admits it. But he observes that "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature". It is truth to nature or life that Johnson demands not truth to the rules of a critical theory. If something is true to nature and if it fulfils the function, it is intended for, then one can dramatise it in spite of the rules. The rules are of secondary importance only. The end of all literary composition being instruction by pleasing, we have only to find out whether the Shakespearean play achieves this end successfully. If it does, then it is preferable to the other variety of the so-called pure play because it is true to life or experience. As Johnson would put it, there it a two fold pleasure in such a play.

If a comic scene follows a tragic one and vice versa, it might interfere with the development of the emotions or thoughts. This argument, says Johnson, is faulty, though it appears to be convincing. The "interchange of mingled scenes seldom fails to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion."

Moreover, a change from the tragic to the comic or from the comic to the tragic is a welcome change. The former provides the relief from the tragic tension, and the latter prepares us for the tragic emotion. This argument comes from Dryden, and Johnson does not appear to hold to it very strongly, for he does plot elaborately. Then again the audience is made up of different types of persons. Some may love the comic aspect, others the tragic, and yet others the transition from the one to the other, "Different auditors have different habitudes, and upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety." Here the appeal is to the complexity of life, and life is greater and, more important than a body of critical rules.

Johnson reminds us that in the times of Shakespeare people did not have a rigid classification of plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories. It was the nature of the ending that determined the designation of the type. A tragedy could easily be converted into a comedy in those days. As such we should not judge Shakespeare by the standards of the present day. He must be judged by the standards prevailing in his day. This historical approach was not developed. The few observations he makes are not very encouraging to the times. Possibly he did not have sufficient date to work upon.

Shakespeare practice has been justified by the test of time. But we come across a serious limitation in Johnson's approach when he observes that Shakespeare's natural disposition was towards comedy, that he had to struggle with his matter in his tragedy, and that his tragedy seems to be “still” while his comedy "appears to be instinct" He was actually fighting against this very distinction and he his led into the error of Rymer.

Shakespeare wrote without having any models before him either of creative writing or critical writing. Since, according to Johnson, Shakespeare had to struggle hard with his tragic material he often sought a chance to introduce the comic. This would make the comic element in a tragedy look adventitious. Johnson himself referred to the relief from tragic intensity and this he forgets in the present observation.

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The comic scenes of Shakespeare have retained even today their value in spite of the changes in the manners and language. These are the scenes where characters are presented as having been affected by passion. The critics who refuse to accept the fusion of the comic and the tragic are those who forget that "all pleasure consists in variety."

**The Three Unities**

Aristotle spoke of the Unity of action in his Poetics. The Italian critics of the Renascence added the Unities of time and place. By the Unity of time is meant that the action represented in a play must not exceed a "single revolution of the scene," if it were to take place in actual life. In order to make it more realistic, the French critics of the seventeenth century wanted the time in actual life to coincide exactly with the dramatic time. The Unity of place means that the dramatic action must take place in the same locality or in contiguous areas. The Unity of action, according to Aristotle, implies that the action must be single. It must be a whole with a beginning, middle, and an end which are related to one another according to the laws of probability or necessity. The later critics argue that an action is single if there is no sub-plot.

Castlevetro argued that these Unities are found in Aristotle and that the Unity of action is dependent on the other two. The first English critic to challenge the Unities of time and place as un-Aristotelian and unnecessary was Dryden. The neo-classicist of France considered the three Unities essential and inviolable. Shakespeare ignored the Unities of time and place in all his plays except The Tempest. And yet the plays were popular. Johnson and others could find delight and instruction in them even though the Unities were not observed. Then how are we to explain the rule regarding the Unities?

Dryden opposed the Unities and yet he commended them where they were observed. Rymer condemned Shakespeare for ignoring them. Rowe attributed Shakespeare's practice to the condition of the age. Till Johnson came there was no systematic defence of the practice of Shakespeare prior to the writing of the Preface, Johnson accepted the Unities and followed them in his tragedy, Irene. Now he questions the very propriety of the rules governing the Unities. He argues that the Unities have given more trouble to the poet than pleasure to the spectator. As Bailey put Johnson's position: "The first breath of the facts, as known to every

one who has visited a theatre, is brought to demolish the airy castles of pedantry: and it is shown that Unity is required not for the sake of deceiving the spectators, which is impossible, but for the sake of bringing order into chose, art into nature, and the immensity of life within limits that can be compassed by the powers of the human mind. The Unity of action which assists the mind, is, therefore, vital; the Unities of time and place which are apparently meant to deceive it, are empty impostures." "The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first Act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and the players only players," says Johnson. .

Johnson exempts the history plays from a rigid application of these rules because in the historical play the dramatist is expected to present several incidents in a logical sequence, thereby making the action appear as one and whole. This is the Unity of action. The other Unities are not necessary here. In his comedies and tragedies, Shakespeare did observe the Unity of action.

When the spectator believes that the stage is a certain specific place, he will find the absurdity if he were to believe that the stage is only a stage. No one believes it to "be Alexandria or Rome. If the spectator imagines the stage to be Athens in one scene he can as well imagine it to be Rome in another, and Alexandria in the third. As we can imagine different place on the same stage, so we can imaginatively divide the interval of time. The time taken in action is to be accepted as the actual time. The time, through which a story is spread, may be taken as between the Acts. The spectator thinks that this movement of time is possible and therefore the drama moves forward. The drama moves by sympathy. That is, those who demand the Unities are actually confusing a representation with actuality. A representation can have set of conventions which do not appear in actual life. Here Johnson gives up realism and gets back to the classicism of Aristotle.

We have, therefore, many valid arguments against the Unities of time and place, even though all authority is in their favour. But there is always an appeal beyond the court of the critic to that of nature of life. In the history-plays, for instance, we demand that one scene inevitably follows another and that the characters are kept natural and distinct. Shakespeare observes this Aristotelian Unity of action with a beginning, middle, and an end which are related to one another according to the law of probability or necessity. Only, he does not show a strict coherence between complication and resolution.

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When we witness a dramatic action, we are affected. We do not imagine ourselves to be the actors or actresses. We retain our identity. We experience the dramatic situation from the imagined possibility of the misery presented. When this takes place, the dramatic action becomes convincing. The dramatic action revives in our mind the recollection of the actualities around us. Such actions are pleasing in the theatre if they are comedies, and they move us more in the study if they are tragedies. A play affects us equally well both in and out of the theatre. This is the eighteenth century looking forward to the Romantics. The preference for comedy belongs to the century, and the closer approach is not far from that or Lamb.

Johnson observes that we do not know whether Shakespeare knew of the Unities. But he violated them accidentally and persisted in that habit. He does observe only the Unity of action. Here Johnson presumes too much. He admits that Ben Johnson was a close friend of Shakespeare. Then Shakespeare could have known about the Unities from him. Moreover, the text of Sidney was available to him, and Johnson declared that Shakespeare was a diligent reader.

The Unities of time and place he says are not essential. If one writes a play following these Unities, the play may become a literary curiosity. It would be a piece of superfluous and ostentatious art. But if one can write a play following these rules and at the same time preserve the truth to nature, he deserves praise. But as far as Shakespeare is concerned, Johnson asks us to remember that the dramatist was ignorant of the rules. This is not correct.

**Shakespeare's Learning**

Rove and Dennis thought that Shakespeare had no learning, while Golden, Upton, and Gray thought otherwise. The many errors in the plays and the infrequency of references to the writers of antiquity are taken to be enough evidence in favour of the first view. The others thought that Shakespeare was learned because of the Italian sources of his plays and because of his use of Italian and French expressions. Ben Jonson said long ago "Shakespeare had small Latin and no Greek." Johnson accepts his statements as correct in broad outline. Ben Jonson was the friend of Shakespeare, and he made 'the statement when Shakespeare's achievement was well known to the public. Hence there is no reason to doubt the statement of Ben Jonson.

If Shakespeare successfully imitated the Ancients, it does not prove that he was learned in the works of antiquity. He may have drawn his materials from the translation or from others who treated similar subjects. When Shakespeare said, "Go before I'll follow," it was "suggested that he was translating "I pare, sequer," and when Caliban wished after pleasant dream that “he cried to sleep again,” it was said that this was a rendering of a passage from Anacreon. But Johnson argues that it was not Anacreon alone but every one must have had the same wish on the same occasion.

Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* was based on the Menaechmi of Plautus. But Shakespeare did not exploit the other plays of Plautus because they were not translated into English. It is quite likely that Shakespeare knew the other plays of Plautus, because Ben Jonson spoke of "little Latin and small Greek." Only Shakespeare might have felt that they are not suitable for his purpose. If there are French scenes and Italian words, it does not mean that Shakespeare knew well these modem languages. He may have got them translated. But it would not detract from his greatness even if he knew those languages.

Shakespeare was a great genius and a diligent reader. Many good books were available in English translations. Johnson misquotes Ben Jonson and makes Shakespeare having 'no Greek." while in reality he had 'small Greek.' If Shakespeare lacked anything by way of books; he had tremendous powers of intuition. Even though there were no recognised plays of an excellent standard or rules of a critical nature, he was able to compose excellent plays. Evidently, Johnson did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the Elizabethan drama before Shakespeare. Then alone can we explain his sweeping generalisation.

There are many branches of knowledge which appear scattered in the pages of Shakespeare. These may not have come to him from books. If one saw and felt life with open eyes, he could have got this information. Hence, Johnson remarks: "He that will understand Shakespeare must not be content to study him in the closet but must look for this meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop."

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## The Merits and Demerits of Shakespeare

John Bailey observed: “Never certainly has the central praise of Shakespeare as the master of truth and universality been better set forth than by Johnson. Our ears are delighted, our powers of admiration quickened, our reason convinced, as we read the succession of luminous and eloquent paragraphs in which he tries Shakespeare by the tests of time, of nature, of universality and finds him supreme in all the collective judgment of the ages in relation to Shakespeare make him a great dramatist.”

Johnson states that love is not the only passion in Shakespeare and that it has only a little part to play. This might strike as odd but it is true. We have only to compare Shakespeare with the other dramatists and then we discover that there are many plays of Shakespeare where love is not a prominent feature.

Shakespeare's characters are strongly individualised. Each character is distinguished from the others. Johnson states: “No poet has kept his personages more distinct from each other: I will not say with Pope that every speech may be assigned to the proper speakers because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristic; but though some may perhaps be equally adopted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can properly be transferred from the present possessor to another claimant The choice is right when there is reason for choice.” The characters, however, act under the influences of the universal human passions and principles, thereby becoming a faithful mirror of manners and life.

Next we observe that Shakespeare "has no heroes; his scenes are occupied by man who act and speak as the reader thinks he should have himself spoken and acted on the same occasion" This view was taken up in later times by Ruskin. The plays, says Johnson, present a system of civil and economical prudence. The men and women are real, they are taken from life, and they speak the normal language. "Even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life. Shakespeare approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful." Even if the events described be impossible, they are never improbable: for, Shakespeare was interested only in the revelation of human nature. "A poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition".

Regarding diction and style, he observes: “There is a conversation above grossness, and below refinement, where property resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue." He approximates his characters and sentiments to real life, and therefore he is convincing. We cannot transfer the speech of one character to another because each reflects the specific characteristics of the person speaking it

When Johnson speaks of the defects of Shakespeare, he is the voice of the English neo-classicism of the century. Shakespeare does not often show the so-called poetic justice. This would be a fault if literature should have a moral function. The plots of some plays are loosely constructed. Some plays end abruptly or in an improbable way. There are anachronisms that violate probability. The reciprocations of smartness are unsuccessful. The tragedies are said to be at times tedious and obscure. The narrations are in some places pompous. The declamations are cold and weak. The sentiments are trivial and unwieldy. There is a love of fun, quibbles and conceits. The defects are listed carefully because Johnson is eager to show that he is not praising Shakespeare indiscriminately, that he does not have a blind veneration for the Bard. As he told Charles Burney: "We must contest the faults of Shakespeare to gain credit to our praise of his excellencies. He that claims either for himself or for another the honours of perfection will surely injure the reputation which he designs to assist.”

The faults of Shakespeare enumerated by Johnson are the results of carelessness or of an excess of conceit. These faults may be the consequence of super-abundant powers of genius. The faults are amply compensated by the virtues. This spirit dominates Johnson's defence of the mingling of the comic and the tragic, and of the violation of the Unities of time and place. Johnson also points out the future lines of approach to Shakespearean interpretation.

He shows that Shakespeare has more references than others to the traditions and superstitions of the common people. This necessitates knowledge of these on the part of the readers. Campbell and others have tried this line of approach in the twentieth century. But we cannot say with confidence that such attempts enable us to understand the dramatist more thoroughly.

Johnson observes that “nothing can please many, and please long but just representations of general nature." This is the first virtue of Shakespeare that he is

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the poet of nature. "This, therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms, which other writers raise up before him, may here be covered of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language." Shakespeare did not represent the particular habits of men, nor does he allow his fancy to guide him fully.

From Shakespeare alone we can make a complete book of axioms concerning life. To accept this as the major merit of Shakespeare is to fall a prey to the moralistic approach. But Johnson's bias to the moral function is clearly evident throughout his treatment of poetry and drama. At the same time, we read the indictment that Shakespeare wrote without any natural purpose in view because he was more anxious to please. There is no systematic teaching of moral precepts. There does not appear to be any disapprobation of the wicked. Thus Johnson attributes to the crude times in which the dramatist lived, and remarks that a great author must rise above his age. Even where there are opportunities to moralise, Shakespeare allowed them to go unexploited.

Still Shakespeare did represent and reveal human nature as it acts in real situations, and as it would act in situations that could not come its way. On this ground, Rymer, Dennis, and Voltaire advanced the charge of violating decorum.

## 5.2.3 DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON AS A CRITIC OF SHAKESPEARE

### Dr. Samuel Johnson as a Critic of Shakespeare

Dr. Samuel Johnson as a Shakespearean critic reveals the virtues of his own personal and reasoned approach to Shakespeare keeping in view the vices of the age. The 8$^{th}$ century was seeking to modify the neo-classical theory of poetry and drama to suit its tradition and taste. The neo-classical school had faith in the unchallengeable authority of the rules derived from the Greco-Roman. A work of art was estimated in the light of those rules. The critic was a kind of judge about to pass a judgment praising or condemning the work according to the accepted standards. Their duty included drawing of our attention to the defects in the work. Johnson points out the shortcomings to show that his praise has been impartial

and genuine. The defects he mentioned were the loose construction of some plots, the improbable ending in some plays, and the improper use of quibbles and conceits in some places. Those defects are accepted by one and all to be true. He mentioned many other drawbacks and these are more the result of the critical ideas prevalent in the 8th century.

Being a neo-classicist, he emphasized the fact that poetry must instruct by pleasing. Poetry must have a purpose. Johnson was an uncompromising moralist and he condemns a play if it does not exhibit the so-called poetic justice. But the real criterion of instructing by pleasing also enables him to ignore the use of poetic justice when he is determined to draw his reader's attention.

Johnson follows the neo-classicist in observing that Shakespeare's characters are commonly types and not individuals. But as Hazlitt commented, "He in fact found the general species or didactic form in Shakespeare's characters, which was all he sought or cared for; he did not find the individual traits of the dramatic distinctions which Shakespeare has engrafted on this general nature because he felt no interest in them."

In England the neo-classicists preferred comedy to tragedy. For that reason Johnson saw skill in tragedy and instinct in comedy. Even the tragedies of Shakespeare were rewritten as comedies, in that century.

Besides, there are other problems where Johnson moves along independent lines. The blending of the comic and the tragic was vehemently opposed by the neo-Classicists. Shakespeare has tragic-comedies and also comic scenes in tragedies. These plays do please us in spite of the rules. Dryden attempted a defence of these plays on the basis of the principle of contrast, and also on that of the spirit of the times. But it was left to Johnson to vindicate Shakespeare's practice thoroughly and systematically.

The neo-classicists cling fast to the three Unities and Dryden rejected the unities of time and place. Johnson takes up the problems and offers an account of Shakespeare's practice. His arguments have not been improved upon.

It was Dryden who initiated in modern times the historical and comparative approaches to works of art. Johnson develops these points of views. In the *Preface*, he observes: "Every man's performance to be rightly estimated

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must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities." He further states: "Shakespeare has more allusions than other poets to the traditions and superstitions of the vulgar which must therefore be traced before he can be understood." A study of these may not be “very illuminating if the emphasis of the reader were to be as with Johnson, on the just representation of general nature.” Obviously, there is a contradiction in this approach, and it cannot be determined.

Besides Johnson gave us a full account of the sources of the obscurities in the text of Shakespeare. The duties of an editor of Shakespeare have been determined once for all. Some of the sources of difficulties that crept into the scripts for players, the mistake introduced by the scribes, the mutilations made by the actors in shortening the speeches, and the errors introduced by the printers themselves. Some difficult readings are integral to Shakespeare's perplexed and obscure style. They arise from “the foulness of Shakespeare's ideas,” for “the rapidity of his imagination hurried him to a second idea before he had fully expressed the first.” This is closer to what Shelley said later about the conflicting speeches of inspiration and composition. Shelley would accept Johnson's statement that Shakespeare paid greater attention to the series of ideas than of words, and his language not being designed for the desk, was all that he desired it to be if it conveyed his meaning to his audience.

Johnson's *Preface* also reveals his limitations. To say that Shakespeare's tragedies are the worse for being acted is far from the truth, if we do not consider only King Lear. That he does not observe poetic justice is negatived at least by the great tragedies. That he made the language corrupt by “every mode of depravation” is fantastic. Johnson’s stress on a historical estimate is sound in principle: “Every man’s performance, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his particular opportunities.” But he does not follow the principle and asks of us to aim at understanding Shakespeare’s plan.

Johnson insists that Shakespeare has not faithfully observed Poetic justice, that he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and that he seems to write without any moral purpose. But as Leavis pointed out, there are "ways in which all works of art act their moral judgment.” For Johnson, a thing is either stated, or it isn't there. Johnson could not see that a moral idea could be embodied in a myth

or in a symbol. But in his candid statement of the so-called defects, we do find Johnson revealing his inability to be intimidated.



Shakespeare is great for the reason that he has been successful in achieving the first objective of a writer. His "first purpose is to excite" him that reads his work, to read it through. This is the result of Shakespeare, offering us not the subjective reactions but the grasp of the living world around, his grasp enabled the dramatist to present the inexhaustible variety of truth. The dramatic and other literary conventions embodied in the rules of the neo-classical criticism are the abstractions and constructions from the living world.

Although Johnson does not like to 'number the steaks of the tulip' and even though he is opposed to abstracting from 'the living world' he does insist upon unity of impact, selection, economy, and decorum. But propriety, he says, has a thousand forms. As he said in the *Rambler*: "There are qualities in the products of nature yet undiscovered and combinations in the powers of art yet untried." The diverse forms of selection are possible and each one has its validity depending on its relations to life. This is the principle invoked in the defence of Shakespeare.

Johnson's approach offers a prominent place to the structural unity of a Shakespearean play. Though we can collect fine passages replete with moral principles, the greatness of Shakespeare, he says, is "not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen."

## 5.3 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. What do you understand by the principle of contraries by Blake, how far is it applicable to the *Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience*?

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2. What evidence do the *Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience* provide to show that Blake strongly disapproved of sexual repression and advocate free love?

3. Discuss Johnson as an Editor of Shakespeare.

**4.** Discuss Dr. Samuel Johnson as a Critic of Shakespeare.

## 5.4 LET US SUM UP

After having read Unit V you have made yourself acquainted with William Blake and Dr Samuel Johnson. Now you can effortlessly discuss Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* for critical appreciation. Further you have enlightened yourself enough to express your views on Dr Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*.

## SUGGESTED READINGS


1. Edward Albert A History of English Literature
2. Hudson An Outline History of English Literature
3. Ifor Evans A Short History of English Literature
4. M H Abrams A Glossary of Literary Terms
5. M. H. Abrams (ed.), The Norton Anthology of English Literature, London: Norton
6. Pat Rogers (ed.), The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature, London, Oxford University Press.
7. A N Jeffares (ed.), The Macmillan History of Literature, London, Macmillan.