

II B.A ENGLISH LITERATURE

III SEMESTER

BRITISH POETRY

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LYCIDAS

-JOHN MILTON

INTRODUCTION:

Lycidas is a pastoral Elegy written by Milton. It out distances all the previous English pastoral Elegies. The word 'pastor'. The meaning of word is 'graze'. Hence pastoral poetry deals with the lives of shepherds. It speaks about the doings, joys and sorrows of the humble dwellers of the countryside. Elegy means a mourning poem. In a pastoral Elegy the poet mourns the death of a friend. The poet in the guise of a shepherd mourns the death of another shepherd. Sir Philip Sydney and Edmund Spenser popularized pastoral poetry in English.

CONVENTIONAL NAME:

In Lycidas Milton has followed the pastoral tradition. It is a pastoral Elegy. The very name 'Lycidas' is the conventional name for a shepherd. It frequently occurs in the pastoral Elegies of Theocritus and Bion. The pastoral machinery has been made full use of by the poet. He speaks of himself as a shepherd. He speaks of Edward King, another shepherd. Both of them lived together and grazed their animals together.

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill

Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill

Further there are charming descriptions of the beauty of the countryside. This is also in line with the pastoral tradition.

CAUSE OF DEATH:

Next Milton probes into the cause of the death of the fellow shepherd. First he questioned the sea-nymphs. He asks them what they were doing at the time of death of Lycidas. But soon he realizes that the nymphs could have nothing to help his friend. Every wind was questioned by Triton. So the winds were not responsible for the death of his friend. Even the powerful goddess Calliope could not save her son Orpheus from death. Even if all the goddesses were present, they could not have saved the life of Lycidas. They are also helpless before death.

PROCESSION OF MOURNERS:

Another convention of pastoral Elegy is the procession of mourners. Milton also introduces a procession of mourners in his poem. All nature, the woods, the caves, the echoes mourn the death of Lycidas. Canes and St. Peter are the other mourners. Canes represents the Cambridge University. Canes in the name of river on which Cambridge is situated. The introduction of St. Peter gives chance of Milton to attack the corrupt

contemporary church. Such a criticism is also a part of the usual machinery of pastoral Elegy. One finds such an attack in Spenser's shepherd's Calendar and in the Elegies of Italian poets.

NOTE OF HOPE AND CONSOLATION:

Milton ends his Elegy on a note of consolation and hope. Orthodox pastoral Elegies ends in that way. Though drowned in ocean Lycidas is not dead in reality. Like the Sun he would rise again. He would live a happier and modern life in some other region. His living place would be heaven. He would be the guardian angel of the place where he drowned. In future he would protect all those who sail that area.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more

For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead.

CONCLUSION:

In spite of the artificial form of a pastoral poetry. 'Lycidas' no doubt is a successful Elegy. It has got almost all the features of an elegy. It has got almost all the features of an elegy. It is, in short a sincere lament.

ALEXANDER'S FEAST

-John Dryden

Alexander was born in July 356 B.C. to Philip II and his third wife, Olympias. The parents were far from a happy couple, and Alexander was raised primarily under the influence of his mother. At the age of thirteen, he was sent to study with Aristotle—an education that was for the most part formal. Aristotle promoted the belief that non-Greeks were naturally slaves, thus encouraging the prince's thirst for conquest. Ultimately, however, Alexander would reject this belief, at least implicitly, as he attempted to cooperate with the Persians even as he subjugated them.

Returning to Macedonia after three years, Alexander soon had the opportunity to prove his strength in battle, as he subdued rebellions and contributed to his father's famous victory over Athens and Thebes at Chaeronea. But when Philip divorced Olympias and married Cleopatra, Alexander began to fear that his father was looking for a new heir, and the father and son had a falling out. Their dispute was shortly resolved, but both remained suspicious of the other. Indeed, Philip was soon assassinated by a guard who presumably had a personal grievance, though Alexander and his mother are traditionally thought to have played some kind of role in Philip's death.

Alexander thus succeeded to the throne and began the inevitable dynastic purging of enemies. At the same time, he had to force the other Greek city-states to acknowledge his authority as Hegemon of the Hellenic League, which Philip had established. In doing so, Alexander razed the city of Thebes as an example—though many sympathized with Thebes and only grew to resent Alexander more deeply. But Alexander had more important concerns—namely, the Persian expedition. This had been Philip's dream and Alexander's inheritance, and he wasted no time in beginning.

Alexander advanced gradually and conquered territory by territory until Darius, the Great King of Persia, was forced to come out himself to face Alexander. Alexander was victorious in the two key battles at Issus and Gaugamela, and Darius was murdered by conspirators soon afterward. In the meantime, Alexander also conquered Phoenicia, Egypt, and Babylon, all of which proved to be valuable acquisitions.

Upon hearing of Darius's death, the Macedonian army assumed that the expedition was over and the war won, but Alexander insisted on pushing farther east. Here he faced a formidable opponent in Spitamenes, who possessed a smaller army but continued harassing Alexander and even slaughtered a Macedonian unit after Alexander underestimated him. Spitamenes was ultimately defeated, the rebellion fell apart, and Alexander went on to conquer the Paraetacene territory. In the Far East, Alexander founded a large number of cities that would contribute to the expansion of Greek culture.

Finally there remained India (which at the time referred to a small area in western Pakistan, not the country of modern times). Although Alexander was already the undisputed king of Asia, he would not be satisfied until he had personally vanquished the entire continent. He soon allied himself with one ruler, Ambhi, but there remained Ambhi's enemy Porus. The result was one of Alexander's greatest military achievements, but the battle was difficult, particularly because the Macedonian army had had to face a frightful experience in fighting elephants.

After India, Alexander wanted to press still farther, recognizing that Asia extended beyond what he may have expected from limited geographical knowledge. At this point, however, his troops finally refused to further, and mutinous thoughts stirred after eight hard years of combat and marching. Alexander was furious, but he was eventually forced to give in and return home.

Back in Persia Alexander dealt with administrative matters, including the replacement of various satraps, or local rulers. More important, his experience of Asia had changed his attitude toward Persians. His desire to cooperate with the Persians alienated many conservative Macedonians, who still viewed Persians as barbarians. Alexander's new attitude may even have led to his death in 323 B.C. Though the official cause of his death was a fever aggravated by heavy drinking, many historians have speculated that Alexander was poisoned by Aristotle, his former tutor, and Antipater, his close advisor, as a result of his favorable treatment of the barbarians.

ODE TO A SKYLARK

P. B. Shelley

Introduction:

The poet Shelley is pre-eminently a lyricist. The Ode “To a skylark” is one of his best. The poet abandons himself in an appreciation of the skylarks’ flight of joy. He hails the bird as it starts on its flight from its nest up to the skies.

“Hail to thee, blithe spirit!

Bird thou never wert”.

The song of Skylark from the sky:

The poet sees the skylark flying higher and higher singing with full throated ease in profuse strains of effortless art. He envies the fullness and purity of its joy. The bird cannot be seen in the dazzling lights of the sun. As it floats around “like an unbodied joy whose race has just begun”, “thou art unseen” he cries, “but yet I hear thy shrill light”.

The poet fully realises that we humans cannot truly know what the skylark is. We can only think of what is most like the skylark. The poet first thinks that it is “like a poet hidden in the light of thought singing hymns unbidden”, He wonders next if he can compare the bird to love-lorn maiden in a palace tower pouring out her love in a sweet song.

Comparison of skylark to a glow -worm and rose

The poet would like to compare the skylark to a glow- worm, golden, unseen, but scattering its light among the flowers and the grass. Perhaps it may best be compared with the rose hidden by the leaves of the bush but scattering its scent around.

Nothing can equal skylark’s music:

Whatever it may be, whether it be a ghost or a bird, the poet wonders at the sweet thoughts pouring out in melody from its heart. He is sure that no poem in praise of love or wine could pour forth such a flood of rapture. The poet is certain that no triumphal chant, no hymn of praise sung in chorus could be compared to the joyous outpouring of the bird.

Skylark enjoys acute happiness:

He would like to ask the skylark on what things the bird is singing so happily. Is it about the fields or the mountains? Is it about the sky or the endless plains? Is it about love or strife? He cannot bring himself to believe that any pain or tiredness or annoyance or love's sad satiety could be mixed up with such clear joy. The crystal stream of its music cannot be thought of as mixed with any impurity.

The poet therefore bemoans the sad state of man;

“Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought”.

6. Skylark is free from mental depression unlike man

He wonders whether, “if man could shed hate, pride and fear he could ever aspire to such joy as expressed by the bird”. He is sure that the joy of the bird and the skill in its expression was far better than any music ever created by man or all those wisdom gathered in books by man up to now.

Skylark – an ideal teacher to the poet:

He calls on the bird to teach him half its joy. He could then sing such sweet and harmonious thoughts that in their spirit and effulgence might appear as madness to other men. The world of men would then listen to him as he was listening to the joyous outpouring of the skylark.

Conclusion:

On the whole, To a Skylark is a fine lyric and a brilliant achievement of Shelley. The force of the verse, depth of imagination, beauty of expression, daring rhymes, a scintillating chain of similes and rich melody have made it a memorable poem.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

John Keats

Introduction:

Keats died of tuberculosis in the prime of his life. He has been described as a sensuous poet and as an escapist. These are derogatory terms. In the ode to a nightingale Keats certainly tries to escape from painful realities. But at the end he faces life squarely.

Keats efforts to run away from sordid realities:

At first Keats stupidly thinks that he can cast away the sorrows of life by drinking wine. He elaborately describes the particular wine which can cast a spell on him. The wine should have been in 'deep-delved earth' for a long time only then its power increases. Keats prefers the wine made in France or Greece. The French wine will enable him to experience the dance, singing and merry-making of Provence. Like the sacred fountain at Hippocrene, Greek wine will inspire him to write splendid poetry. Keats gives a list of the miseries from which he would like to escape. Physical exhaustion, tension, disease, loss of youth or beauty, despair, inconstant love- these are the problems that pester Keats.

Keats rejects wine. He prefers poetic imagination. Imagination, easily and instantaneously carries him on its 'viewless wings'. He imagines himself to be in the nightingale's forest. He imagines even the hawthorn, eglantine, violet and musk-rose found in abundance in the forest. The moon, the **mossy** footpaths, the murmuring of files all these details are imagined by the poet. It is an earthly paradise. It has not even a trace of human suffering.

Keat's death-wish:

Keats is surrounded by beautiful sights and sounds in the imaginary forest. Yet, he cannot suppress thoughts of death. He says that he has written many poems about his wish to die. His longing for death is keen at the present moment. He wants to die, listening to the nightingale's ecstatic song.

The immortality of the nightingale's song:

In the contrast to human suffering is the nightingale's immortal song. The song has given pleasure to suffers in all ages. Emperors and clowns derived pleasure from it. And so did Ruth, living in the midst of loveless aliens. The song broke down inhibitions symbolized by closed windows. The song of the nightingale opened up magic casements. It led people to gaze at the beauty of the world outside. Nightingales may

come and nightingales may go, but the nightingale's song will appeal to man. Hence, it is immortal.

Keats swings back to the real world:

Keats is not satisfied with the imaginary forest, however beautiful it might be. Illusions cannot sustain him long. He dismisses imagination as a 'deceiving elf'. He decides to face bitter realities.

ULYSSES

Tennyson

Introduction:

Browning has written a large number of dramatic monologues. Tennyson's monologues, though not many, are as well constructed and revelatory of the ins and outs of characters, as Browning's are.

Dramatic monologue:

Dramatic monologue opens at a dramatic moment and throws light not only on the character of the speaker but also on that of the listener. 'Ulysses', conforms to this pattern. It opens dramatically with Ulysses making known his resolve to leave Ithaca in search of the legendary Happy Isles. Before setting out, he deposes his son Telemachus to rule Ithaca in his stead, describing his administrative genius at length.

Character of Ulysses:

The poem shows what an indomitable warrior Ulysses is. He is very old but is full of wanderlust. He complains that life in Ithaca is very dull. His old wife cannot give him any conjugal pleasure. The natives are all barbarians who want law to be manoeuvred in their favour. The land is barren and people are living below the poverty line. Ulysses finds nothing to attract him to settle down in Ithaca. He wants to resume his adventurous career. He has a premonition that he will live only for a few years. But he considers it a crime to live like an animal, hoarding, sleeping and eating. He knows that death is inevitable. But he wants to achieve something noble in the short span available to him. He knows fully well that he and his sailors may get drowned in the process of discovering new lands. His efforts are suicidal, to say the least.

Character of Telemachus:

The poem reveals the character of Telemachus in all its solidity even though he remains a passive listener only. He possesses the qualities necessary for an administrator. He is an embodiment of patience. He can engage himself in the wearying task of civilizing the 'rugged' natives without losing his temper. Also, by conducting religious ceremonies in a proper manner, he can win over the masses. He excels in the sphere of administration just as Ulysses does in the field of conquest and expansion.

Ulysses' address to his mariners:

Addressing his brave followers, Ulysses explains his plans to them. He does not want to cheat them by giving a rosy picture of what future has in store for them. He tells them frankly that his purpose is to take them to the very end of the western horizon where the stars are supposed to bathe. Also, he wants to go to the Happy Isles, the abode of the souls of the illustrious dead. He hopes to meet there the brave Achilles who got killed in the Trojan war. Ulysses points to the mariners that in the process of discovering these new lands they may meet their death. Ulysses followers are as brave as he is. None of them is discouraged by the prospect of death.

Conclusion:

The mariners who have decided to throw in their lot with Ulysses are also effectively sketched. They share Ulysses' ideas and ideals. Ulysses points to them the possibility of getting drowned in the course of their wandering. Still, they follow him with as great an ardour as their master's.

MY LAST DUCHESS

Robert Browning

Introduction

In the Victorian age husbands rode rough-shod over wives. Wives were expected to meekly submit to their husbands, however brutish and unimaginative they might be. The Duke in Browning's *My Last Duchess* is such a vile husband that he misconstrues even the harmless acts of his wife.

The Duke's character:

The Duke begins by posing as a lover of art. He shows the messenger the picture of his wife's face. It has been painted on the wall by the famous painter, Fra Pandoff.

Pandoff spent a whole day, trying to reproduce the Duchess's facial expressions. The Duke draws attention to the glance and the 'spot' of joy on the wife's cheek. The Duchess had no discrimination, according to the Duke. The costly jewel gifted by him was treated by her on a par with the cherries handed by some servant. Her smiles were also bestowed indiscriminately on all sundry. When he stood by her she smiled bewitchingly on him. She lavished the same kind of smile on all passers-by. The possessive Duke could not tolerate this. He considered it beneath his dignity to advise her as to what she should or should not do. He had her murdered to stop her smiling.

The Duke is money-minded, besides being sexually possessive. He expects the messenger's master's daughter to bring with her much dowry. But he says that he would not demand it openly.

The Duke's attitude to his future wife:

Before going out, the Duke shows the messenger the statue of the sea-god Neptune taming a sea-horse. He thus implies that he would subdue his future wife also with the same ruthless ferocity.

The character of the Duchess:

The Duchess does not maintain the reserve expected of a lady of her status. She mixes freely with low-class people. No husband will tolerate such an unprincipled wife.

Conclusion:

The poem shows Browning's understanding of the varied aspects of human nature and his analysis of characters and motives. By making the Duke talk about his

“Last Duchess” in a dramatic manner, the poet offers us an insight into the Duke’s as well as Duchess’s characters.

THE WINDHOVER

G.M.Hopkins

INTRODUCTION:

G.M.Hopkins, the most original poet of the Victorian age, was a great observer of nature and sensitive to the beauty of things around him. He found a reflection of the beauty and power of God in the beauty of nature. In The Windhover, he describes the falcon in an original way, using unusual words and images.

FALCON – MORNING’S DARLING AND PRINCE OF DAYLIGHT:

The poet describes the falcon as morning's darling and the prince of the Kingdom of daylight. The falcon is drawn from his nest by the spotted sunlight. The poet makes a fresh compound word to express this beauty. He calls the falcon dapple-dawn-drawn.

THE FLIGHT OF THE FALCON:

Hopkins describes the flight of the falcon, drawing from falconry, horse training and skating. The falcon is riding as if on horseback, upon the level steady air which rolls under him. In his intense happiness he is beating his wings in order to keep his balance while circling majestically. He controls his movements like a trainer keeping his horse at the end of the rein. After a brief moment he sweeps off in the direction of the wind as though on a swing. He flies off like a skilful skater, making a bow-shaped curve.

THE GREAT REVELATION OF THE POET:

The poet is awed by the natural beauty, valour, action and pride of the falcon, which makes him surrender to the splendour of the bird and Christ. At this moment, there is a great revelation in the heart of the poet. There breaks out divine fire from the inscaped bird, supernatural in its beauty and terrible in its love.

Hopkins employs two images to describe the divine fire. It is like the plough shining in making the furrow. It is also like the cold true-blue embers of dying coal splitting open to reveal a gush of red-hot gold.

FALCON – ENDOWED WITH DIVINE FIRE:

The poet condenses many ideas in this short poem. In a few words he paints the picture of the falcon, its appearance, its flight and its energy. Such compound expressions as blue-bleak embers, gold-vermillion and to the beauty of the poem. Unlike Keats's nightingale or Shelly's skylark, Hopkins's falcon is endowed with divine fire and these expressions add substance to the meaning of the poem.

CONCLUSION:

In short, Hopkins's description of the falcon is an explication of the main theme of the poem.

A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

W.B. Yeats

Introduction

Yeats 'A Prayer for My Daughter' was written in June 1919 soon after the birth of his daughter Annie Butler Yeats. It is rather a long poem running into eighty lines divided into ten stanzas of eight lines each. The poem is about the normal expectations of an affectionate father's praying for the future prosperity and well-being of his child and told in an unusual and exquisite way by Yeats. The poem is an excuse for Yeats to project his ideals of womanhood. By saying what he wants his daughter to become, he states his ideals.

Gloomy atmosphere and the poet's prayer:

Yeats is agitated in his mind. There is storm outside. He looks at his little daughter sleeping in the cradle. In his imagination he thinks of his daughter becoming a woman. He wishes her to be a beautiful woman but not much beautiful to drive men mad. She must not be like some other women who consider beauty an end itself. Such persons are likely to lose natural kindness. The example that comes to his mind is the beautiful Helen of Troy who eloped with Paris. She found life dull and later became the cause for the War of Troy that brought numerous death and lot of destructions. Another example would be Venus who was beautiful but playful and chose Vulcan the crooked-legged ironsmith in heaven. The reason must be that beautiful women eat some wrong food that they have such strange temperaments. Yeats wants his daughter to be a laurel tree which quietly grows up with the singing bird linnet in it, singing sweetness all along.

When hatred is driven out, the soul shines:

Yeats does not want his daughter to fill up her mind with hatred. He has seen a lovely woman (Maud Gonne) act like a fool because of her opinionated mind. If hatred is driven from the mind, the soul will shine in its original innocence. It will learn that it obeys Heaven's will when it follows its own will. In such a frame of mind his daughter can continue to be happy despite all the storms of misfortune that may strife against her and the hostility of the world.

Custom and ceremony- the sources of beauty:

Yeats wants his daughter to marry and go to a house where the people observes custom ceremony. In other words there should be prosperity and joy which are the sources of beauty and innocence. These will be found only where there is no arrogance or hatred. A life lived in confirmity with customs makes for stability. Yeats compares such a life to be a spreading laurel tree.

Conclusion:

Yeats' ideal of a woman is that she must be free from the arrogance of beauty and intellectual hatred. She must be a bringer of prosperity and joy.

STRANGE MEETING

Wilfred Owen

Introduction

Owen participated as a soldier and got killed in the first World war. In the few poems that he wrote he expressed the pity and the meaninglessness of war. In Strange Meeting he shows how soldiers belonging to different nations are brainwashed into regarding one another as enemies. They indulge in indiscriminate killing without any valid reason.

The meeting in hell:

The poet escapes from the battlefield and gets into a gloomy tunnel. He finds dead and dying bodies heaped up there. One of the persons probed by the poet gets up. There is a look of recognition on his wrinkled face. He raises his hands as if to bless the poet. The poet understands that they are in hell.

The conversation between the poet and the stranger:

The stranger complains that the war has destroyed his love. Before the war broke out he loved a woman ravished by her wild eyes and hair. His passion threw him off his balance. It grieved him but there was something rich in his grief.

The stranger's views on war:

The stranger is opposed to war. Thanks to the havoc wrought by war, the world is moving from bad to worse. It is trekking not towards but away from progress. The world is 'retreating' into 'vain citadels that are not walled'. This is the stranger's hint that the world is degenerating and that the future is uncertain.

Conclusion:

The end of the poem is most pathetic. The stranger recalls how, during the course of the battle, the poet repeatedly stabbed him even though he had not personally committed any crime against the poet. At last he allowed himself to be jabbed to death by the poet. Now that they are in hell where there is no enmity, they can sleep together in peace. Hell is far better than the was – devastated earth.

WORK AND PLAY

Ted Hughes

Introduction

The poem "Work and Play" explores one of the main themes in the poetry of Ted Hughes, Man and Nature. The poet, in a rather complicated way, remarks as how when we work, relaxing is enjoyable, however when all we do is play it becomes boring. Ted Hughes has taken the bad sides of humans to contrast with all the good things of the swallow of summer.

Swallow enjoys work:

Summer, portrayed by the swallow shows that when she is doing what she likes even if it is work, she tends to enjoy life for more than humans who play all the time and have no real work to do anyways. The poet describes the swallow as a glorious and elegant nature who toils all the time. It glides through the air working hard but enjoying herself all the same. The tourists are driving their cars through the dust for 'play' "or else it will burst". They are supposed to be relaxing and having fun on their day trip but they feel miserable instead.

Man's discomfort in 'Play':

“The swallow of summer” is reflecting on the water of the beach” dipping her glow on the pond” and “being perfect”. In contrast to the cheerful bird in her work, mankind is described to be lazy, frustrated and unhappy in his “Play”. The use of the word “disgorges” her violent imagery attached to it. The ‘tomatoes’ refer to the sunburn and discomfort people.

Swallow’s enjoyment and man’s agony:

The poet describes the beautiful movement of the swallow who is called a seamstress that sews something using the sky and water. The swallow wings are compared to scissors as she cuts the ‘blue’ sky. She glides for sometimes and then halts abruptly. In comparison with the swallow, the humans are described as “laid out like wounded” (soldiers) shows their pain in sunburn. “Flat as in ovens” and “Roasting and busting” gives us the impression they men are being cooked. The work ‘torment’ shows their agony and the word ‘blue’ gives us an impression of the heat, as hot as blue flame and the sun’s harmful rays. The reference to the ‘transistors’ is that they resist the flow of electricity and let off heat. The tourists are basting with sand in their mouths and flies biting them. While summer is pleasant for the swallow, it is most unpleasant for man.

Man polluting the environment:

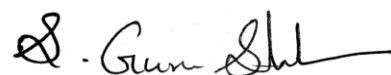
There is a change of structure in the last stanza. The poet starts off with the people this time and ends off with the swallow. The people leave from the beach in their cars. The poet tells the holiday makers to go home and end their misery. The poet also describes the people as “polluting” the environment while “inhaling petroleum”. On the other hand, the swallow is ending her day very pleasantly in a much more natural and relaxed scene, “work” in this poem is depicted as being enjoyable by the use of a swallow whilst “play” is depicted as being unpleasant with the use of man.

Conclusion:

Ted Hughes is a philosophical, metaphysical and psychological poet. He is also a poet of nature and animal world. Man has lost his mental peace in this modern age. Hughes poetry is symbolic much like the poetry of many modern poets.



Signature of the HOD



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