

POETRY

B.A. III

**Directorate of Distance Education
Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001

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Nature of questions to be set on Echoes in Eternity, the book of poems, prescribed for BA Part-III, according to the syllabus (together with the distribution of marks):

- There will be one question requiring explanation of an excerpt from some prescribed poem (with internal choice) with reference to the context.

(5 Marks)

- There will be one short answer question (with internal choice) on the book of poems, requiring critical understanding of the poem.

(5 Marks)

- There will be one essay-type question (with internal choice) on the book of poems, requiring first-hand study of the poems.

(10 Marks)

- There will also be ten short answer questions based on the book of poems out of which the students would be required to attempt five questions.

(5 Marks)

The Lunatic, The Lover and The Poet

William Shakespeare

Introduction to the Poet

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) has been universally acknowledged as one of the greatest figures in the world of letters. Born on 23rd April, 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon, a town in Warwickshire, England, Shakespeare became the most popular playwright of the Elizabethan Age. Apart from writing famous tragedies like Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and King Lear and equally famous comic plays like As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, The Tempest, etc., Shakespeare wrote a series of 154 sonnets, which were published together in 1609. While 126 of these sonnets are addressed to an unknown friend called 'Mr. W.H.', 28 of them revolve around a 'dark lady'. His plays as well as his sonnets exhibit an exceptional understanding of life and a remarkable insight into the complexities of human nature. Shakespeare was a gifted poet and a dramatist who possessed, as Dryden rightly remarked, 'the largest and most comprehensive soul'. Some of his plays also contain poems which will continue to give pleasure to the readers through all ages.

Introduction to the Poem

'The Lunatic, The lover, and the Poet' is a passage taken from Shakespeare's play A Midsummer -Night's Dream. These lines are spoken by Theseus, Duke of Athens, to his betrothed Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in Act V, Scene i. A mad man, a lover and a poet, the Duke explains, share the faculty of intense imagination, which enables them to create and inhabit a world of fantasy. The poet emphasizes the power of imagination in both transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary and creating entirely new fanciful situations from almost non-existent realities. Such imaginative constructs, the poet lightly observes, remain the exclusive domain of lovers, poets and madmen, away from the commonplace and the humdrum in ordinary mortal life. The lover for example, sees 'Helen's beauty' in 'a brow of Egypt', while the poet has the creativity to produce concrete shapes to 'airy nothing'. The lovers, poets and mad men are generally away from the ordinary worldly life and remain in their own world of imagination. The central idea of this poem is the power of imagination that invents imaginary joys and fears from imaginary causes.

Explanation of Important Passages

(Lines 1—5)

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;

Word-meanings: 1. compact = made up; 2. vast = large; 3. brow = face; 4. frantic = insane, wild, excited; 5. lunatic = brow of Egypt = a gypsy; the reference is to the belief that the gypsies were of Egyptian origin.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet' written by William Shakespeare. This poem is an extract from Shakespeare's play A Midsummer-Night's Dream. In this poem, the poet brings out the similarity between a lunatic, a lover and a poet. This similarity lies in the faculty of their imagination.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that a mad man, a lover and a poet are wholly made up of imagination. One of them sees more devils than even the vast hell can hold. He is a madman. The lover has an equally insane mind. He sees Helen's beauty in the face of an Egyptian gypsy woman. There is no doubt that the lunatic, the lover and the poet are highly imaginative persons. The lunatic imagines shapes and figures which do not actually exist. Anyone who has ever seen the behaviour of a lunatic would agree on this point. The lover too has his own illusions. He thinks his beloved to be the most beautiful woman on earth, though she may be a woman of average beauty. The poet too has his own imagination. His imagination can soar to heights which even the imagination of a lunatic or a lover cannot reach.

(Lines 6—11)

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Word-meanings: 1. Frenzy = madness; 2. glance = look; 3. bodies forth = gives a shape to; 4. airy nothing = something that does not exist at all; 5. eye = the eye of imagination.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet', written by William Shakespeare. This poem is an extract from Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream. In this poem the poet brings out the similarity between a lunatic, a lover and a poet. This similarity lies in the faculty of their imagination.

Explanation: In these lines the poet explains how the power of imagination works in a poet. His imagination moves from heaven to earth and earth to heaven. By his power of imagination the poet can give a name to the unknown things. He can give a concrete shape even to imaginary and intangible things. Thus the poet has a great gift of imagination. The eyes of a poet roll in a fine glow of inspiration. They wander from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Thus they cover the entire universe. While the poet's eyes are rolling everywhere, his imagination creates forms and shapes which are completely divorced from reality. Then through his pen, the poet describes those forms and shapes in such a way that they seem real to the reader.

(Lines 12—16)

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!

Word-meanings: 1. apprehend = find, sense; 2. comprehends = grasps, perceives; 3. tricks = arts; 4. bringer = cause.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet' written by William Shakespeare. This poem is an extract from Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream. In this poem the poet brings out the similarity between a lunatic, a lover and a poet. This similarity lies in the faculty of their imagination.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that a strong imagination has wonderful faculties. If it invents some kind of joy, it can invent the cause of that joy also. If one imagines some frightening object in the

darkness of the night, even a bush appears to be a bear to such a person. In these lines the poet tells us about the power of imagination. According to him imagination is very powerful. It can bring joy as well as fear. When an imaginative person finds joy, he imagines the bringer of that joy also. At night, a man sees a bush. In his imagination, he may take the bush to be a bear. Thus imagination can give both joy and fear to a man.

Stanzas for Comprehension

(Lines 1—5)

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
 Are of imagination all compact.
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
 That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;

Questions

1. What is the similarity between the lunatic, the lover and the poet?
2. What does the lunatic/madman see?
3. What does the lover think about his beloved?
4. Who was Helen?
5. How does the poet compare the lover with the lunatic?
6. What does the poet mean by 'a brow of Egypt'?

Answers

1. They are all led by intense imagination.
2. The madman sees more devils than the vast regions of hell can hold in his imagination.
3. He thinks she is as beautiful as Helen of Troy.
4. She was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. She was the wife of the king of Sparta but ran away with the Prince of Troy.
5. The poet says that the lover's imagination is as frantic as that of the lunatic.
6. By 'a brow of Egypt' the poet means an Egyptian Gypsy girl.

(Lines 6—11)

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
 And, as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name

Questions

1. Name the source of the poem?
2. What has been said about the poet's eye?
3. What does the poet's imagination do?
4. What does the poet's pen do?
5. What is meant by 'airy nothing'?

Answers

1. This poem has been taken from Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
2. The poet's eye has a fine glow of inspiration. It rolls from the sky to the earth, and from the earth to the sky.
3. The poet's imagination gives concrete shape to things that are unknown or non-existent.
4. The poet's pen describes the imaginary forms and shapes in such a way that they seem to the reader as realities.
5. By 'airy nothing' means something that is non-existent and purely imaginary.

(Lines 12—16)

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!

Questions

1. What happens when the imagination apprehends some joy?
2. When does the imagination mistake a bush for a bear?
3. Does the imagination always lead to joys only?
4. What do the following words mean in the given lines:
 - a. tricks
 - b. bringer
5. Who is the writer of these lines?

Answers

1. When the imagination apprehends some joys, it can invent the cause of that joy also.
2. In the darkness of the night, the imagination mistakes a bush for a bear.
3. No, the imagination leads to fears also.
4. (a) Tricks—(devices and arts) – A strong imagination has wonderful tricks. It can invent joys in life.
(b) Bringer—(cause) – A strong imagination can invent the cause of joys.
5. Shakespeare is the writer of these lines.

Short-Answer Questions

- Q. 1. In what respect are the lunatic, the poet and the lover alike?
- Ans. The lunatic, the poet and the lover, all have intense imagination. The poet says that the lunatic in his imagination sees so many devils that even hell cannot hold. The lover's imagination is also very strong. With his power of imagination, a lover finds Helen's beauty in every beautiful woman. And a poet's eye of imagination rolls from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. His pen gives concrete shape to things that are unknown or completely non-existent. In this way the lunatic, the lover and the poet are alike.
- Q. 2. Give Shakespeare's account of the power of imagination?

Ans. Shakespeare says that imagination is very powerful. It can bring joy as well as fear. When a person finds joy, he imagines the bringer of joy also. At night, a man may imagine a bush to be a bear and may become afraid of it. For example, a mad man will see devils all around him. A lover will see Helen's beauty in his beloved's face. A poet will give concrete shape to unknown or non-existent things. Thus the power of imagination makes unreal things look real.

Q. 3. How does Shakespeare describe a poet's power of imagination?

Ans. The poet's imaginative eye has the fine glow of inspiration. It rolls from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. It can visualize each and every corner of the universe. The poet's imagination gives concrete shape to things unknown or things that are non-existent. Then his pen describes them in such a manner that they seem to the reader as real things.

Essay Type Question

1. Give a critical analysis of the poem: 'The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet'

OR

Outline the development of the central idea of the poem.

Ans. 'The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet' is a poem taken from Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream. These lines are spoken by Theseus, Duke of Athens, to his betrothed Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in Act V, scene i. A madman, a lover and a poet, the Duke explains, share the faculty of intense imagination, which enables them to create and inhabit a world of fantasy. The poet emphasizes the power of imagination in both transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary and creating entirely new fanciful situations from almost non-existent realities. Such imaginative constructs, the poet rightly observes, remain the exclusive domain of lovers, poets and madman, away from the commonplace and the humdrum, in ordinary mortal life. The lover for example, sees 'Helen's beauty' in 'a brow of Egypt', while the poet has the creativity to produce concrete shapes to 'airy nothing'. The lovers, poets and mad men are generally away from the ordinary worldly life and remain in their own world of imagination. The central idea of this poem is the power of imagination that invents imaginary joys and fears from imaginary causes. The poet illustrates it by giving the examples of the lunatic, the lover and the poet. He says that they are all made up of imagination. They are led by their imagination entirely. For example, the madman sees devils all around him. The lover sees Helen's beauty in the face of his beloved. And the poet 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name'. In other words, he describes his imaginary shapes and forms in such a way that the reader takes them as truly real. Such is the power of strong imagination. Thus imagination is a source of both joy and fear.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Who was Helen?

Ans. Helen was a Greek lady. She was the most beautiful woman of Greece.

Q. 2. What is the similarity between the mad man, the lover, and the poet?

Ans. They all have intense imagination.

Q. 3. How is the lover's imagination?

Ans. The lover's imagination is frantic.

Q. 4. What does the lunatic see?

Ans. The lunatic sees devils in his imagination.

Q. 5. What does the poet mean by 'a brow of Egypt'?

Ans. By 'a brow of Egypt' the poet means an Egyptian gypsy girl.

Q. 6. What are the tricks of imagination?

Ans. The imagination can give strange shapes to things.

Q. 7. What does imagination do in case of joy?

Ans. It creates the bringer to that joy.

Q. 8. What does the lover see in the brow of his beloved?

Ans. Helen's beauty

Q. 9. Who gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name?

Ans. The poet.

Q.10. Fill in the blanks

- a. The Lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact.
- b. The madman sees more devils than vast hell can hold.
- c. The lover sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
- d. The poet's eye doth glance, from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.
- e. The poet gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.

The Solitary Reaper

William Wordsworth

Introduction to the Poet

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is considered to be the best of the Romantics. He is better known as ‘a poet of Nature’. He brought about a revival and revolution in English poetry. His mighty expressions and vivid imagination changed the artificiality of poetic diction into clarity and simplicity. He derived his themes from the simplest objects of nature. Afterwards, he would recollect those simple objects in tranquility, giving birth to a spontaneous and continuous flow of poetry.

Wordsworth had ‘an eye’ to visualise God in every beautiful object of Nature. The serene beauty of the ‘Lake District’ where he lived made him a ‘worshipper of nature’. He believed that nature was alive with a spirit of its own. He expressed his relationship with nature in a very simple language. That is why, his poems speak of ‘a man speaking to men’.

Introduction to the Poem

This beautiful poem was written in 1807. It is one of the well-known poems of William Wordsworth.

‘The Solitary Reaper’ presents a beautiful scene of Scottish Highland. A peasant girl is singing a melodious song while reaping the crop. The song is echoing in the solitude of the valley. The melody and sweetness of the song touch the poet’s heart and make him stand there “motionless”. The song resounds in his memory even when it is heard no more.

This is an ordinary experience but the poet mingles ‘divinity of nature’ with it. Thus the whole experience becomes mystical and exalted.

Using the rhyme scheme – ab ab cc dd, the poet presents a spontaneous flow of lyric. Choicest words have been used to produce romantic atmosphere. Exquisite imagery lends a pictorial quality to the poem.

Detailed Summary

‘The Solitary Reaper’ is a very beautiful short lyric written by William Wordsworth. Once the poet was strolling in the Scottish Highlands. Suddenly, he heard a very sweet and sad song. That song was being sung by a simple Scottish peasant girl. She was all alone in the field busy reaping the harvest. She was cutting and binding the grain. The whole valley was overflowing and resounding with the sweetness of her song.

The poet compares her song with the song of a nightingale and a cuckoo-bird. The nightingale’s song appears very sweet to the group of tired travellers who have come across the Arabian Desert. The nightingale welcomes them in an oasis and relieves them of their weariness by her sweet song. But the poet says that the song of the girl was more delightful than the song of the nightingale.

Then the poet compares her song with the song of the cuckoo bird. In spring season, a cuckoo bird sings joyfully in the Hebrides Islands. Its voice reaches the far off lands breaking the silence of the seas. But this girl’s song is much more melodious.

The poet was a little bit uneasy because he was not able to understand the theme of her song because she sang in a dialect which was foreign to the poet. He was very curious to know the subject matter of the song. Since there was nobody to help him out, he started guessing. Perhaps her song was about some sad happenings of the past. The song might be telling about some battle fought long ago. It was also possible

that the girl sang about some common matters of life. She could have been singing about some natural loss, sorrow or pain which had troubled her or might trouble her again. Whatever might be the subject for her song but music is above all these barriers of language and nationality and touches the heart of the listener.

The poet then stopped guessing about the theme and found that the song seemed to have no ending. The girl was bending over her sickle while reaping the harvest. At the same time, she was continuously singing the song. The poet listened to it as if mesmerised by it and then started climbing the hill. But the sweetness of the song had made a permanent impression on his heart. He could not hear the song but the memory of the song was still resounding in his heart like any other beautiful thing of nature, the song gave him permanent joy.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! For the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

Word-Meanings: 1. behold = See!; 2. single = alone; 3. solitary – lonely; 4. lass = girl; 5. reap = to cut the crop; 6. grain = a cereal-corn; 7. melancholy = sad; 8. strain = music, song; 9. vale = valley; 10. profound = deep.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem ‘The Solitary Reaper’, written by William Wordsworth. In this poem, the poet describes a lonely girl who is reaping grain in a field and simultaneously singing a sweet and sad song. On hearing the song, the poet is attracted towards it and wants that it should be continued without any disturbance.

Explanation: These are the opening lines of the poem. The poet sees a lonely young girl reaping the harvest in the field. While reaping and binding the grain, she is singing a sad song. The poet advises himself that she should not be disturbed.

If she watches someone, she would stop singing out of shyness or modesty. He feels surprised at the loneliness of the lass. She is all alone in the solitary surroundings and her song is filling the deep valley with sweetness.

So these lines show how aptly the poet sketches the romantic surroundings with the help of words.

Stanza 2

No Nightingale did ever chant
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Word-Meaning: 1. chant = to sing; 2. welcome = sweet; 3. notes = songs; 3. weary = tired; 4. bands = group; 5. some shady haunt = oasis a shaded place to take rest; 6. thrilling = causing sensation; 7. farthest = distant.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘The Solitary Reaper’ written by William Wordsworth. The poet is spell-bound by the sweet song of a lonely girl who is cutting and binding corn. He compares the song of the reaper with that of a cuckoo bird and a nightingale and finds that her song is the sweetest.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet compares the song of the solitary reaper with that of a nightingale. When some tired travellers reach an oasis in the Arabian Desert, the song of the nightingale gives them comfort and happiness.

In the same way, during spring season, a cuckoo bird which sings in the distant Hebrides islands, breaks the silence of the seas. Its thrilling voice echoes over the sea and welcomes the sailors.

But the poet thinks that the song of the girl is better than any other song.

In these lines, the poet takes the help of comparisons and images to prove that the song of the girl had an enchanting effect.

Stanza 3

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
 For old, unhappy, far-off things,
 And battles long ago:
 Or is it some more humble lay,
 Familiar matter of to-day?
 Some natural Sorrow, loss, or pain,
 That has been, and may be again?

Word-Meanings: 1. what she sings = what is the theme of her song; 2. plaintive = sad; 3. number = song; 4. far off = distant; 5. lay = song.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘The Solitary Reaper’, written by William Wordsworth. The poet saw a lonely girl singing all alone. Her song left an everlasting impression on his heart. Her song was better than that of even a nightingale or a cuckoo-bird.

Explanation: The poet is very curious to know the theme of that sweet song. The girl is singing in a different dialect, and he is not able to understand her language. He starts guessing about the theme.

He thinks that the girl might be singing about some old happenings or ancient battles. He imagines that she might be describing common matters of life in her song.

This is also possible that she might be wondering about the loss or pain that has happened in her life and might happen again.

So, in these lines, the poet desperately asks if anyone could tell him the subject-matter of that sweet and sad song.

Stanza 4

Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sang
 As if her song could have no ending;
 I saw her singing at her work,
 And o’er the sickle bending;—
 I listen’d, motionless and still;
 And, as I mounted up the hill,
 The music in my heart I bore,
 Long after it was heard no more.

Word-Meanings: 1. maiden = girl; 2. sickle = a reaping hook; 3. motionless = without any movement; 4. still = calm; 5. mounted = climbed; 5. bore = carried.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem ‘The Solitary Reaper’, written by William Wordsworth. The poet tells about the enchanting effect of the song of a young girl who is reaping and binding grain. He is not able to understand the language of the song and keeps on guessing the theme of that sad song.

Explanation: Unable to guess the theme of the song, the poet again delves deep in the sweetness of the song. Her song was endless. She was bending over the sickle to cut the harvest. Her work continued with her enchanting song. The poet heard the song and was spell bound. He stood there calm and motionless. After sometime, he went away climbing the mountain. Physically, he could not hear the song but the melodious voice had left a permanent impression in his heart. The voice was resounding in his heart.

The poet wishes to say that beautiful things become the source of eternal and permanent joy.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Stanza 1

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! For the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

Questions

1. Whom does the poet behold?
2. What is the girl doing?
3. Why does the poet say, “stop here or gently pass”?
4. Which words and phrases does the poet use to say that the girl was all alone in the field?
5. What type of the song is she singing?
6. What is the effect of the song on the valley?

Answers

1. The poet beholds a young girl who is all alone in a field.
2. The girl was reaping the crop and at the same time she was singing a melodious song.
3. The poet wants that the girl should not be disturbed by any noise. If she becomes aware of his presence, she would stop singing.
4. The poet stresses the solitude of the reaper by using several words and phrases to this effect. These are: ‘solitary’, ‘singing by herself’, ‘alone she cuts and binds’ and ‘single in the field’.
5. She is singing a sad song.
6. The valley is resounding with the sweetness of the song.

Stanza 2

No Nightingale did ever chant
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard

In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
 Breaking the silence of the seas
 Among the farthest Hebrides.

Questions

1. Name the poet and the poem?
2. Describe the place, the listeners and the impact of the nightingale's song on them?
3. What does the poet mean by 'weary bands'?
4. What is the effect of the cuckoo bird's song?
5. Both the places described in this stanza are remote. What effect do they create on the reader?

Answers

1. The name of the poem is 'The Solitar Reaper' and it is written by W. Wordsworth.
2. The nightingale is singing in the Arabian Desert. Her song gives comfort to the tired travellers.
3. 'Weary bands' means tired groups of travellers.
4. The song of the cuckoo-bird thrills everybody and breaks the silence of the sea over Hebrides islands.
5. Both the places – the Arabian deserts and Hebrides – are remote. The poet lifts the reader from his world and makes him feel the charm and romance of these places.

Stanza 3

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
 For old, unhappy, far-off things,
 And battles long ago:
 Or is it some more humble lay,
 Familiar matter of to-day?
 Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
 That has been, and may be again?

Questions

1. What does the first line of this stanza mean?
2. The poet makes several guesses about the theme of the girl's song. What are they?
3. Why doesn't the poet understand the theme of her song?
4. Who is the 'she' in these lines?
5. What does the poet want to convey in these lines?

Answers

1. The first line means that the poet doesn't understand the wordings of the song.
2. The poet guesses that the girl might be singing about tragic events or battles of the past. She might be singing about a routine, everyday matter.
3. The girl was singing in her Scottish Highland dialect. So he fails to understand the language of her song.
4. The 'she' in these lines is a highland girl.

5. The poet wishes to convey that every beautiful object is above the boundaries of language and country and it gives joy and happiness to everyone.

Stanza 4

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
 As if her song could have no ending;
 I saw her singing at her work,
 And o'er the sickle bending;—
 I listen'd, motionless and still;
 And, as I mounted up the hill,
 The music in my heart I bore,
 Long after it was heard no more.

Questions

1. Whose song is the poet referring to in these lines?
2. Name two activities the girl is doing?
3. What did the poet do after some time?
4. What was the effect of the girl's song on the poet?
5. Write the rhyming scheme of the stanza?

Answers

1. The poet is referring to the song of a lonely highland girl.
2. She is cutting the crop and singing a sweet song.
3. After some time, the poet climbed up the mountain and went away.
4. The poet was simply overwhelmed by the melody of the song. He listened to it without making any movement.
5. The rhyming scheme is: ab ab cc dd.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. Who was the solitary reaper? What was she doing?

Ans. The solitary reaper belonged to the Scottish Highland area. Amid the beautiful, vast and solitary surroundings, she was singing and cutting the crop. Both the activities went simultaneously. Her song was very sweet and contained a sad tone. The whole of the valley was flooded with her song.

Q. 2. The song of the reaper is sweeter than the song of the nightingale. How?

Ans. The song of the solitary reaper is compared to the song of the nightingale. The nightingale sings and welcomes the tired travellers in the oasis of the Arabian deserts. The song of this bird fills fresh life in them. But the poet says that the song of the solitary reaper is sweeter than the song of the nightingale.

Q. 3. What is the effect of the song of the cuckoo-bird?

Ans. The poet, with the help of imagery, transports the reader to the distant islands of Hebrides. During spring season, a cuckoo bird is singing its song there. Its thrilling notes break the silence of the sea and make the whole environment musical. But, the poet concludes that the song of the solitary reaper is even more thrilling than that of the cuckoo-bird. With the help of all these comparisons, the poet wants to emphasise the enchanting quality of her song.

Q. 4. Why does the poet guess about the theme of the reaper's song?

Ans. The girl is singing in some Scottish dialect. The poet doesn't understand it. But the melody and music of the song knows no boundaries and directly reaches the poet's heart. He wants to know about the theme of that sad song. So out of curiosity, he guesses the theme of the song.

Q. 5. Bring out the Romantic qualities of the poem 'The Solitary Reaper'.

Ans. Music, imagery and emotion are the essentials of romantic poetry. In this poem, the poet mentions remote places in such a way that the readers are transported to those worlds and they feel the charm and romance of the place. The beautifully suggested sight-effects and sound-effects provide romantic qualities to this poem.

Q. 6. How does the poem reflect Wordsworth's views on Nature?

Ans. Wordsworth, being a worshipper of Nature, always felt the presence of the divine in every beautiful object. The song of the solitary reaper is a common but very beautiful experience. For the poet, the song becomes immortal in his memory and mingles with the divine.

So this poem reveals that Wordsworth, like Keats, believed that a beautiful thing always give joy and happiness.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. What is the theme of the poem 'The Solitary Reaper'?

Ans. 'The Solitary Reaper' is one of the finest lyrics written by Wordsworth. The theme of the poem is to establish intimate relationship between the ordinary life of humble rustic folk and the nature. For this, the poet chooses a simple peasant girl as the subject matter of his lyric.

The poet was once moving across a valley. He saw a highland girl there. She was singing a melodious song while reaping the crop. The song had a magical and magnetic effect on the poet. The solitude of the valley combined with the melody of the song presented a celestial atmosphere. The song of the solitary reaper sounded more melodious than the song of a nightingale or a cuckoo-bird.

The poet was unable to understand the meaning of the song because she was singing in a dialect foreign to Wordsworth. Still, it gave immense joy to him. The poet wants to say that every object of nature gives joy to the beholder. He connects this song with the nature. This song will always fill his heart with ecstasy like the flowers of daffodils (another beautiful object of nature).

As he says:

The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

So, this poem illustrates his theory and philosophy of 'recollection of emotion in tranquility'. Like Keats, he also believed that 'a thing of beauty is a joy for ever'.

Q. 2. Give a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Solitary Reaper'.

Ans. Substance:

This is a very beautifully composed lyric. Wordsworth composed it in 1807. The poet tells us that he was taking a solitary walk in a valley. He suddenly came upon a sight that filled him with delightful wonder and gaiety of heart. A peasant girl all alone in the surroundings was cutting and singing simultaneously – 'Reaping and singing by herself'. He is unable to understand the theme of that sad song. But the song was so sweet that he had never experienced that sweetness before.

Language:

The language used is very simple. There are no difficult words e.g.

'Alone she cuts and binds the grain...'

Q. 3. Trace the development of thought in the poem 'The Solitary Reaper'.

Ans. 'The Solitary Reaper' is a short and beautiful lyric composed by a great romantic poet, W. Wordsworth. The poet picks up a simple theme. At the onset, a simple peasant girl is shown cutting the crop and at the same time she is singing a sweet song. A romantic atmosphere is created.

In the second stanza, the poet soars high with his imagination. He compares the song of the reaper with the sweetest songs of a nightingale and a cuckoo-bird. But the song of the reaper is found to be superior to any other song of these birds.

Then the poet shows his anxiety to know the theme of the song. She is singing in a dialect unknown to the poet. He guesses about the theme. Perhaps she is singing about the old and unhappy events or battles. She may be singing about common sorrows and matters. But words can't bind music. Music is the food of soul and it touches the soul breaking all the barriers of language or region.

At last, the poet reaches a stage when physical objects give way to spiritual ones. He goes away, his ears can't hear the voice; but the music is resounding in the soul or in the heart.

Imagery:

The poet has created two word pictures in the second stanza – tired travellers in the Arabian desert and the cuckoo bird singing in the spring season.

Sound effects:

The poet has created beautiful sound effects using alliteration and repetition. e.g.

"... and sings a melancholy strain ..."

"... perhaps the plaintive numbers ..."

Romantic qualities:

The poem is marked with the romantic power of the poet especially the imaginative one. With the help of imagination, he transports the readers to different lands. Through the power of description, he makes the readers feel what he felt. This poem is, infact, 'the voice of the heart' and leaves an everlasting impression on other hearts.

So, we see as the poem develops, the poet transcends from the physical to spiritual levels.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Who attracts poet's attention while he was walking?

Ans. The poet is attracted by a single girl in a field.

Q. 2. What is that girl doing?

Ans. She is cutting and binding corn and singing a song.

Q. 3. What is the poet's dilemma?

Ans. He wonders whether he should stop or gently pass.

Q. 4. What type of a song is she singing?

Ans. She is singing a sad song.

Q. 5. What is the effect of the song on the valley?

Ans. The valley is echoing with the sweetness of the song.

Q. 6. How does a nightingale cheer up the travellers?

Ans. It welcomes the tired travellers by its sweet song.

Q. 7. What is the effect of the cuckoo's voice?

Ans. The thrilling voice of the cuckoo bird breaks the silence of the sea.

Q. 8. Whose voice is sweeter than the nightingale's song?

Ans. The solitary reaper's voice is sweeter than the song of the nightingale.

Q. 9. What is meant by 'Arabian sands'?

Ans. 'Arabian sands' means deserts of Arabia.

Q. 10. Who welcomes the 'weary bands'?

Ans. A nightingale welcomes the weary bands or tired travellers.

Q. 11. In which season does the cuckoo bird sing?

Ans. The cuckoo-bird sings in the spring season.

Q. 12. What does the poet want to know?

Ans. The poet wants to know the theme of the song.

Q. 13. Why doesn't the poet understand the theme of the song?

Ans. Because she is singing in Scottish dialect which is unknown to the poet.

Q. 14. What ancient matters might the girl be singing about?

Ans. She might be singing about old unhappy happenings or old battles.

Q. 15. What familiar matters of life might the girl be singing about?

Ans. The girl might be singing about some natural sorrow or pain.

Q. 16. What type of a song was she singing as far as duration of time is concerned?

Ans. She was singing a song which had no ending.

Q. 17. Why was she bending?

Ans. She was bending over the sickle to cut the crop.

Q. 18. How did the poet listen to her song?

Ans. The poet listened to her motionless.

Q. 19. Why was the poet motionless?

Ans. He didn't want to disturb her or she might have stopped out of shyness.

Q. 20. What did the poet do after some time?

Ans. He went away climbing the mountains.

Q. 21. What was the effect of the song on poet's heart?

Ans. The sweet song of the girl remained in the poet's heart forever.

Q. 22. Write the rhyming scheme of the stanzas?

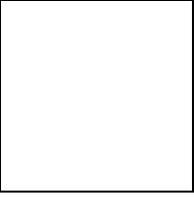
Ans. Ab ab cc dd.

Q. 23. Which word suggests that the song was full of sadness?

Ans. The poet uses 'plaintive' and 'melancholy' to suggest this.

Q. 24. Pick out the words which suggest that the girl was all alone (Any two words or phrases)

Ans. The words are: 'single', 'solitary', 'by herself', 'Alone' etc.



POETRY

Ode to a Nightingale

John Keats

Introduction to the Poet

John Keats (1795-1821) was a great romantic poet. He acquired an immortal status in the annals of English poetry. He is known as a 'master artist of sense perceptions'. He was a student of medicine but his passion for poetry compelled him to change his career from 'pills to poetry'. He could see only 26 springs in his life time. But before the terrible tuberculosis could devour him, he composed an unsurpassable treasure of great poems. His great poems include Hyperion, Endymion and Lamia. But Keats odes are matchless in English Romantic poetry.

Keats was a great lover of beauty which alone was the truth for him. He perceived every aspect of beauty with his senses. Every thing of beauty gave him eternal joy and made him forget all the pains and sufferings of his own life.

In February 1821, he met with his end but geniuses like him leave their marks on the sand of time.

Introduction to the Poem

An ode is a poem which is addressed to somebody or something. Keats is known for his beautiful odes. 'Ode to a Nightingale' is among the most popular odes. It has a strong subjective element in it. It highlights his personal life which was full of pain and misery. The contrast between the misery of human life and the bliss of art has been beautifully depicted in this poem. His own pain is compared to the joy of the nightingale. The contrast between the two worlds is so intense that he feels like escaping into the world of the nightingale. That is why, he is often termed as an 'escapist'. But at the end of the poem, he realises that imagination can't be permanent and he returns to the real world full of harsh experiences. The sweet song of the nightingale also disappears in the infinity.

Detailed Summary

It is a very beautifully composed ode. As the poem starts, the poet, sitting in a forest in the evening time, listens to the happy song of a nightingale. He becomes so happy that his heart starts aching. He doesn't feel jealous of her happiness rather he drowns himself in the ocean of her happiness.

He thinks that he should take a draught of good wine which should have been cooled by burying it deep in the earth. He wants to enjoy life by singing and dancing like the people of Provencal area. In his imagination, he transports himself to the south of France. He wants to drink a cup of wine there. He aspires for a vivid poetic inspiration from the Greek Muses who often visit the warm area of Southern France. He wishes that he should drink the wine and leave the world to go into the forest with the nightingale.

The poet has very unhappy experiences with the world. He finds miseries, tiredness, disease and dejection everywhere. People meet and talk about their pains. In this world, beauty and love are also short-lived.

Now, the poet rejects the idea of taking wine for escaping from this world. He owns a powerful imagination. With the wings of imagination, he flies into the gay world of the nightingale.

In this world of the nightingale, the night is gentle. Queen moon is surrounded by fairies of stars. The poet is sitting in a dark place. When the blowing breeze moves the branches, some moon light shines and the zig zag ways full of moss become visible.

In the next stanza, poet's extraordinary perception for smell has been shown. Because of darkness, he can't see any thing but he can guess each flower by its sweet fragrance. He can tell all the things around him – the trees of wild fruit, hawthorn and musk roses.

Then, the poet becomes strongly subjective. In the blissful world of the nightingale, he is reminded of his disease. He longs for a painless death. He wants to die at this particular moment and the sweet song of the nightingale would become the song of mourning for him.

The poet calls the nightingale 'an immortal bird' because her melodious voice will always remain in the world. Her voice has been giving happiness to countless people since time immemorial. She, once, consoled the heart of Ruth. Her song was heard by kings as well as common people. This same song was heard in a fairy castle in a lonely island.

With the word 'lonely', he is reminded of his own loneliness in the world. He realises that he can't escape the harsh realities. The song of the nightingale gradually fades away. His dream is over. He wonders whether he is asleep or awake.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Word-Meanings: 1. aches = pains; 2. drowsy = sleepy numbness – powerlessness of feeling; 3. hemlock = a plant having narcotic effect; 4. opiate = a drink of opium; 5. Lethe = mythological river; 6. dryad = fairy of a forest; 7. melodious = sweet sounding.

Reference to the Context These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' written by John Keats. In this poem, the poet hears the song of a nightingale and with the wings of imagination escapes into the world of the nightingale. But, at last, he has to land back on to the grounds of reality.

Explanation: The poet says that the song of the nightingale strikes the strings of his heart and he feels heart-ache. He feels sleepy as if under the intoxication of a drug. He reaches a stage of forgetfulness. He makes it clear that he is not jealous of the nightingale but he wants to share happiness with her. He fondly calls her a fairy who is singing about the beautiful summer in some grassy plot full of beech trees.

So in these lines, we see the excellent romantic quality of Keats. He makes images with his words.

Stanza 2

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
 Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
 O, for a beaker full of the warm South!
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
 And purple-stained mouth;
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Word-Meanings: 1. draught = quantity of a liquor drunk at once; 2. vintage = wine; 3. deep-delved = deep-dug; 4. mirth = joy; 5. flora = Roman goddess of flowers; 6. blushful = bloomy; 7. beaded = round; 8. winking = bursting (here); 9. brim = upper edge.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the immortal poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' composed by Keats. In this poem, the poet describes how he feels after listening to the song of a nightingale. His heart aches and he feels numbness. He wants to leave this world of misery and become happy with the nightingale.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet wishes for a cup of good wine which would help him to forget this weary world. Showing his peculiar perception for taste, the poet wishes that the wine should be made cool and rich by keeping it in the deep dug earth, such a wine would remind him of Flora, the goddess of flowers. Then he will dance and sing like the people of Provence (in South France). The poet wants to receive poetic inspiration. For this, he asks for a cup of southern wine full of the rosy waters of Hippocrene – the spring sacred to the muses. The beaker is full to the brim with bubbles bursting and breaking as soon as they are formed. These bursting bubbles of red wine make the mouth of the drinker stained.

In this way, by using the vehicles of imagination and sedation, he wants to leave this world. His aim is to reach the painless world of the nightingale.

In these lines, the poet exhibits deft handling of imagery and metaphor. His love for the mythological things is also visible.

Stanza 3

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Word-Meanings: 1. dissolve – to vanish weariness – tiredness; 2. Fret = annoyance; 3. groan = sound of grief; 4. palsy = paralysed; 5. spectre = ghost; 6. lustrous = shining; 7. pine = distress.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from John Keats' immortal ode 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The poet hears the beautiful song of a nightingale. He becomes aware of the contrast between the world of the nightingale and our own world of misery. He wants to escape into the world of the nightingale by having a drink of some good wine.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet is reminded of all the pains and sorrows of human life. The nightingale is unaware of all these troubles as she remains hidden in the leaves. Every one in the world is unhappy. Whenever two or more men meet, they talk of pain only. Here, old people have been weakened by diseases. Young people also grow pale and thin and ultimately they die. (Perhaps, the poet remembers his brother who died of T.B.). So this is a world where beauty and youth are not permanent. Even love is transient like other things of this world.

Stanza 4

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

Already with thee! Tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

Word-Meanings: 1. charioted = riding on a chariot; 2. Bacchus: God of wine; 3. pards = leopards, 4. perplex = to confuse; 5. retard = to make slow; 6. tender = sweet; 7. haply = perhaps; 8. fays = fairies; 9. verdurous = covered with green.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' composed by John Keats, the master artist of sense perceptions. In this poem, the poet hears the song of a nightingale. He wants to leave this world to reach the happy world of the nightingale.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet wants to leave the sick and weary world and fly to the world of the nightingale. But, he condemns his previous idea of taking the help of wine. With the help of the poetic fancy, he wants to fly higher and higher. Those who can imagine have wings — the invisible wings. The poet is with the nightingale now. It is night time. Moon is surrounded by stars. It looks as if queen moon is surrounded by fairies of stars. But the poet is sitting among trees and there is complete darkness all around. When the wind blows, the leaves give way for a little bit of moon light. In this light, he watches zig-zag ways full of moss.

These lines have been decorated with figurative words, metaphors and images.

Stanza 5

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Word-Meanings: 1. incense = fragrance; 2. embalmed = to fill with sweet scent; 4. endows = to present; 5. ticket = a bush of flowers; 6. hawthorn = name of a flower; 7. pastoral = natural, beautiful; 8. eglantine = a flower; 9. musk-rose = sweet scented rose; 10. haunt = to visit frequently.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale', written by John Keats. In this poem, the poet, charmed by the happy song of a nightingale reaches her world on the wings of imagination. Using his sense perceptions, the poet visualises and feels every object of the nightingale's world.

Explanation: The poet feels himself in the world of the nightingale which is full of darkness as it is night time. He is not able to see what flowers are below his feet. He can't guess what flowers are hanging on the branches above. But, he is able to tell their names by their fragrance. He describes that a number of flowers like white hawthorn, the eglantine, the violets are present there. His favourite flowers of the middle of May – the musk-roses are also present. These flowers are full of nectar and the murmuring bees hover over them.

We don't see such a sensuousness elsewhere in English literature as these lines present.

Stanza 6

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,

Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Word-Meanings: 1. darkling = who lives in darkness; 2. mused = thoughtful; 3. rhyme = poem; 4. pouring forth = flowing into; 5. requiem = a song sung at the death of some one.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' written by John Keats. In this poem, the poet listens to the beautiful song of a nightingale and wants to reach her world which has no trace of the misery, disease and pain of a man's world. He takes the flight with the invisible wings of imagination.

Explanation: The poet hears the song of the nightingale in darkness. He tells that he has always longed for a peaceful and painless death. In many of his poems, he invokes death and asks her to take away his breath silently. He thinks that it is the most suitable time to die. If he dies listening to the song of the nightingale, it would be a painless death and the song of the bird will become a death-song. The song will continue till eternity but he will not be there to hear it.

Stanza 7

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown;
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Word-Meanings: 1. immortal = deathless; 2. tread = to walk on; 3. clown = joker; 4. alien = not one's own; 5. casements = windows; 6. perilous – dangerous.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' written by John Keats. In this poem, he hears the song of a nightingale, gets attracted by the happiness of the song and the gaiety of the bird's world. He reaches the world of the nightingale on the wings of fancy. He pines for a peaceful and painless death hearing the sweet song of the bird.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet calls the nightingale 'an immortal bird' because the world has been listening to her sweet song since time immemorial. Perhaps this was the song which comforted the sad heart of the home-sick, Ruth. Perhaps it is the same song which had enchanted the ears of captive maidens in the magic castles surrounded by dangerous seas. They opened the windows to listen to the song of the nightingale. Their aching hearts got some relief by the sweet songs of the bird.

Stanza 8

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu! Adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

Word-Meanings: 1. forlorn = lonely; 2. adieu = to bid farewell; 3. plaintive = sad; 4. anthem = song; 5. glades = open space; 6. vision = object seen in imagination only.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' written by John Keats. In this poem, the poet inspired by the sweet song of a nightingale, transcends into the ecstatic world of the nightingale. The fancy and imagination, make him forget all the miseries he has to face in the world. In this bliss, he wishes to sleep for ever, never to wake up again. The nightingale has become an immortal bird for him.

Explanation: The poet reawakens on hearing the word 'forlorn' which sounded like a bell ending his dreamy flight into the world of the nightingale. He becomes conscious of his presence in this mortal world. He realises that fancy can't keep us spell bound for long. The little bird, nightingale can't cheat him any more because he knows the difference between reality and illusion. The music of the nightingale goes back from the meadows to the stream and then across the hills till it dies below the valley. The poet wonders whether it was a dream or a vision. At last, he finds himself in a doubtful gesture standing on the harsh realities of life.

Comprehension of Important Stanzas

Stanza 1

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Questions

1. How does the poet feel?
2. Why does he feel having sunk in Lethe?
3. Why does his heart pain?
4. Where is the nightingale singing?
5. What name does the poet give the nightingale?
6. Write the rhyming scheme of this stanza.

Answers

1. The poet's heart aches and his senses have become numb.
2. The poet is in a state of forgetfulness. So, he thinks that he has taken a dip in the Lethe, the river of wine.
3. On hearing the song of the nightingale, he feels pain in his heart.

4. The nightingale is singing in a green plot of beech trees.
5. The poet calls her 'Dryad of the trees' which means the fairy or nymph of the forests.
6. The rhyming scheme of this stanza is: a b a b c d e c d e

Stanza 2

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Questions

1. What does the nightingale not know?
2. What do the men do when they sit together?
3. What happens to the old?
4. What is the fate of the young people?
5. What are the limitations of beauty and love?
6. Why does the poet want to leave this world?

Answers

1. The nightingale doesn't know about the pains and diseases of the world.
2. When men sit together they talk about their troubles and problems.
3. The old people fall prey to diseases like paralysis etc. and they feel sad.
4. The young people also grow pale and thin. They also ultimately die.
5. Love and beauty are short lived.
6. The world is full of miseries, pains and weariness, so the poet wants to leave it.

Stanza 3

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown;
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Questions

1. What name is given to the nightingale?
2. At what hour of the day does the poet hear the song?
3. Who had heard the nightingale's song in ancient days?
4. What is the effect of nightingale's song on Ruth?

5. How does the song of the nightingale charm the castles in lonely islands?

Answers

1. The poet calls the nightingale the 'immortal bird'.
2. The poet hears this song at the time of the night.
3. The song of the nightingale was heard by both-kings and the common men.
4. The sad heart of Ruth fills with joy on hearing the song.

Or

The song of the nightingale soothes the sad heart of Ruth.

5. When the song of the nightingale reaches the fairy castles in lonely island, the windows of the castle are opened.

Stanza 4

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is famed to do, deceiving elf
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

Questions

1. Which word sounds like a bell?
2. What does the poet feel about 'fancy'?
3. Whom does the poet bid farewell?
4. What has happened to the song of the nightingale?
5. Where has the poet come back?
6. What is the dilemma of the poet?

Answers

1. The word 'forlorn' sounds like a bell.
2. The poet feels that fancy can't give permanent escape from pain.
3. The poet bids farewell to the nightingale and her song.
4. The song is gradually fading away over the valleys.
5. The poet has come back to the real world which is full of pain and weariness.
6. The poet wonders whether he has seen a dream or that was an illusion.

Or

The poet wonders whether he is asleep or awake.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. Why does the poet feel pain in his heart?

Ans. The poet hears the sweet and happy song of a nightingale. This song casts a spell on his senses. He is intoxicated by the tone of happiness in her song. His heart starts paining because he becomes aware of the contrast between his own drab and dreary world and the peaceful world of the nightingale. He forgets the fever and fret of this world and wants to share the happiness of the nightingale.

Q. 2. What type of sedatives does the poet want to take at first? Why does he reject that idea?

Ans. At first, the poet wants to lose all his physical senses so that he may reach the painless world of the nightingale. For this purpose, he wants to take a draught of a good wine which have been cooled by burying it deep in the earth. Then he thinks of the good wine of south of France. Then he gets the inspiration and thinks that the wings of imagination can take him to the desired world. He is a gifted poet and he can transport himself with the help of fancy. So, he seeks divine inspiration to lift him up.

Q. 3. Why does the poet want to leave this world?

Ans. Keats had experienced and seen only pain, sufferings and death in his life. So, in his poetry, he always wants to acquire 'eternal beauty' and 'eternal love'. This world is full of despair. People sit here, and talk of their pain. Young people grow pale, thin and die. Old people are full of diseases and melancholy. Even love and beauty are short lived. This is the reason, he wants to escape from this world.

Q. 4. How does he feel when he reaches the world of the nightingale?

Ans. When the poet reaches the world of the nightingale on the wings of poesy, his joy know no bounds. These moments have been exhibited with such a great power of expression that one wonders how the poet perceives through his nose, ears and eyes. In the dark night, he recognises all the flowers with their fragrance. In the fading moon light, he visualises the best time of his life. He is in pure ecstasy in the world of the nightingale.

Q. 5. Why does the poet wish to die? Why does the particular moment seem to him the best to die?

Ans. The poet is unhappy with the world and its ways. He is well aware of his imminent death as he suffers from T.B. It is his earnest desire to die without the feeling of pain. At that particular moment when the nightingale is singing, he is in a state of 'perfect bliss' so, he thinks that the present moment is the best time for him to die. He will die listening to her song. This sweet song will become the song of mourning and he will be free from this dreary world.

Q. 6. By what names does the poet call the nightingale? And why?

Ans. The poet calls her 'Darkling' and 'Immortal Bird'. She is singing the song in the dark night, so she is called 'Darkling'. The poet also calls her an 'Immortal Bird' because her song is a piece of art. Our bodies are mortal but art is immortal. The song of the nightingale has always pleased everyone since the ancient times. This song consoled Ruth, the home-sick lass. Her song had magical effect on the windows of fairy castles in lonely islands. So the nightingale is immortal.

Q. 7. How does the poet feel at the end of the poem?

Ans. In this poem, the poet rides on the 'wings of poesy' and travels in a world which is free from sorrow, despair and death. But with the sound of bell, he returns to this dull world. He becomes conscious of the fact that fancy can't give us support for ever. Nobody can escape from the reality for a long time.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. Bring out the development of thought in Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

Ans. This is a very famous and well-written poem which deals with Keats' personal life. The poem opens on a personal note, describing the poet's state of mind. He hears the magical song of the nightingale. His heart aches when he compares his own spiritual drowsiness with the joy of the nightingale. He wants to drink some good wine and forget the fever and the fret of the world. He wants to reach the world of the nightingale.

The poet says that all the people of the world sit together and talk of pain and miseries. The old are unhappy and the youth is also not happy. They grow pale, thin and die. So he wants to leave that world where beauty and love are also short-lived.

As the poem develops, the poet rejects the help of wine and wants to fly high on the 'viewless wings of poesy'. He merges with the joyful world of the nightingale. In that blissful world, he recognises all the flowers by their scent.

At this moment of highest happiness, the poet wishes to die because he says: 'I have been half in love with easeful Death.'

He requests the death to kill him painlessly. He wants to die at this moment when the nightingale is singing a song.

The poet calls her an immortal bird because her song has been soothing all, from time immemorial. He is enjoying the blissful moments with the nightingale. At that very moment, he comes back to the sordid realities. The nightingale's song slowly fades away. He realises that 'fancy cannot cheat so well', The poet wonders whether he is awake or asleep.

Thus we see, the poem offers a gradual development of thought. He makes an imaginary journey in a painless world and then comes back. The poet has offered a cluster of sensuous images signifying the changes in thought.

Q. 2. Describe in your own words Keats' state of mind with illustrations from the text of the poem?

Ans. 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a poem which contains a strong subjective element, dealing directly with Keats' personal and passionate life. It depicts a mood of pessimism rising out of his experiences with life. He is passing through a phase of life when he is tormented by pain and grief. He is so full of grief that this ardent worshipper of beauty finds that love and beauty are short-lived in this world and says:

"Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow".

The poet expresses a keen desire to leave this fretful world for ever. He concludes that death is the ultimate end of everything. He wants a peaceful and painless death. He addresses to the nightingale and tells her:

"I have been half in love with easeful Death."

"To cease upon the midnight with no pain."

His wish to die in the moment of highest joy is expressive of his desire to get away from the world 'of sorrow/And leaden-eyed despair'.

But the painful reality is too real to allow him any escape.

Q. 3. Discuss Keats' poetic vision in the poem. How would you support the view that it is a typical romantic poem?

Ans. John Keats belonged to the younger generation of English romantic poets. In this poem, we visualise the vision of a great genius who is 'William Shakespeare'. The tragic circumstances of his life made him acutely aware of the pain inherent in life. The idea of death became an obsession with him. All these ideas are presented in this poem.

This is a typical romantic poem because of the presence of strong subjective element, superb imagery, unsurpassable sensuous images and the poet's dissatisfaction with the world. This poem is

a great piece of art. Each word and each line is pregnant with underlying meanings. He takes the reader to distant lands along with him. His flight of imagination takes the reader to South France singing and dancing with Provençal people. Then the reader is transported to the mystical world of the nightingale. Next moment, travelling over the lonely island, the poet lands back to the sordid realities.

As far as language is concerned, it's full of similes and metaphors. Alliteration in the line 'with beaded bubbles winking at the brim' is noteworthy.

So, this poem is essentially a great piece of art showing typical romantic qualities.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. When does the poet's heart ache?

Ans. On hearing the song of the nightingale, the poet's heart aches.

Q. 2. What does the poet imagine to have drunk?

Ans. The poet imagines as if he has had drunk hemlock, a poison.

Q. 3. What is Lethe? Why does the poet refer to it?

Ans. Lethe was a mythical river of 'forgetfulness'. When the poet feels that he has forgotten all the miseries, he thinks that he had a dip in Lethe.

Q. 4. Where does the nightingale sing?

Ans. The nightingale sings in a beautiful plot full of beech trees.

Q. 5. Is the poet jealous of the song of the nightingale?

Ans. No, the poet is not jealous rather he wants to share her happiness.

Q. 6. What type of wine does the poet want to drink.

Ans. He wants to drink a good wine which should have been cooled by burying it deep in earth.

Q. 7. Why does the poet refer to Provence?

Ans. Provence is a state in southern France which is known for writers and singers. The poet wants to sing and dance like them.

Q. 8. Why does the poet want the drink from the 'Hippocrene'?

Ans. Hippocrene was one of the two fountains that were favourite haunts of the Greek Muses. The poet wants to have poetic inspiration from that drink.

Q. 9. What has the nightingale not known?

Ans. The nightingale has not known the pain, the fever and the fret of the world.

Q. 10. Why do men sit together?

Ans. Men sit together to hear of each other's pains and troubles.

Q. 11. What is the fate of the youth?

Ans. The youth grows pale, thin and ultimately meets with death.

Q. 12. What does the poet say about love and beauty.

Ans. He says that both love and beauty are short lived.

Q. 13. Who is Bacchus? Why doesn't the poet want his help?

- Ans. Bacchus is the god of wine. The poet wants the help of poetic imagination to reach the nightingale's world, so, he doesn't want his help.
- Q. 14. In utter darkness, how does the poet know about the flowers around him?
- Ans. The poet recognizes the flowers using his smell perception. He knows about them by their scent.
- Q. 15. Why is the nightingale immortal?
- Ans. Because her song is being heard by people since ages.
- Q. 16. What has the poet been in love with?
- Ans. The poet has been in love with painless death.
- Q. 17. What word sings like a bell to the poet?
- Ans. The word 'forlorn' sings like a bell to the poet.
- Q. 18. What does the poet feel about 'fancy'?
- Ans. The poet feels that fancy is not a permanent escape from realities.
- Q. 19. What happens to the nightingale's song in the end?
- Ans. The nightingale's song gradually fades away.
- Q. 20. What does the poet wonder in the last line?
- Ans. The poet wonders whether he is awake or asleep.

Ode to the West Wind

P B Shelley

Introduction to the Poet

One among the five great English Romantic poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on 4th August, 1792 in an affluent family of England. He got his education at Eton and University College Oxford. But his love for freedom and revolt against tyranny made him publish a pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* leading to his expulsion from the University. Shelley was an idealist and a dreamer, a revolutionary and a reformer. He was, in fact a man of ideas and emotions and all his poetry reflects his true spirit. His celebrated works are *'The Revolt of Islaam, Prometheus Unbound, Adonais, Queen Mab, Alaster and Cenci*. Like other younger Romantics (i.e., Byron and Keats), Shelley too, died prematurely at the young age of thirty.

Introduction to the Poem

'Ode to the WestWind' is one of the most engaging odes in English literature. The poem is a forceful, mind-blowing description of the WestWind. Shelley, here, presents the WestWind both as a creative and destructive force. According to Shelley, it is a symbol of healthy change. It sweeps all that is dead and useless and marks the beginning of new life. The poet invokes the mighty WestWind to infuse in him poetic inspiration so that he may deliver his invaluable message to the mankind. The poem is also remarkable for its revolutionary element. It, in a way, signals an end to decaying monarchies and dwindling autocracies. According to the poet, the winter season cannot last longer. After every winter, there comes always the spring. Hence, the poem ends on a strong note of optimisms.

'In Ode to the WestWind' Shelley shows his great love for liberty. He personifies the WestWind as a powerful and uncontrollable spirit. It is the breath of autumn's being. Its terrible power, is felt by the trees which shed their leaves at its approach. The leaves fly away like the "pestilence – stricken – multitudes". The WestWind sends the old seeds to their dark wintery beds. They come to life again in the spring season. In this way the WestWind acts not only as a destroyer but a preserver as well.

The WestWind is not only powerful at the earth, it is powerful in the sky also. With its force it spreads dark clouds all over the sky. They are the angels of rain. Even the ocean becomes helpless before the WestWinds' power. It disturbs the calm surface of the ocean. When the WestWind comes the waves of the Atlantic divide themselves to give way. Even the plants growing at the bottom of ocean turn grey with fear when they find WestWind approaching.

The poet requests the WestWind to lend him some of its powers. At one time even the poet was like the WestWind. He was volatile and untamed but now he feels weak and shackled because of his age. He finds himself fallen on the thorns of life and is bleeding. So, he requests the WestWind to come to his help. He wants it to lift him as he would lift a wave, a leaf, or a cloud.

The 'poet is a champion of liberty'. He wants to spread his message of hope through all mankind. His thoughts are like grey withered leaves. He is without hope. He wants the WestWinds to revitalize him. He should give him strength by making his lyre. It should blow through his ups and bring cheer to all. The poet ends with a prophecy: "if winter comes can spring be far behind."

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1

O wild WestWind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
 Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
 Pestilence-stricken multitudes

Word-meanings: 1. Autumn's being = Having the body of autumn; 2. unseen presence = which is present but cannot be seen; 3. ghosts = evil spirits; 4. enchanter = magician; 5. hectic red = dark red; 6. pestilence-stricken = victims of some deadly disease; 7. multitudes = crowds.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Shelley's famous poem "Ode to the WestWind". He is a poet of liberty, revolution and hope. Here, he invokes the WestWind to bring change in the hopeless and helpless world.

Explanation: In the above lines the poet personifies the WestWinds. It is addressed as a wild spirit of autumn whose unseen presence drives the dead leaves. They are driven as if they are ghosts being chased by a magician. The yellow, black, pale and dark red leaves look like the victims of some plague and are seen running away.

Critical Comments: Shelly is one of the most important romantic poets in English literature. Here he presents some wonderful concrete images of the powerful WestWind. The WestWind is personified and is called, "The breath of autumn's being". The grey withered leaves are compared to ghosts which are running away from a powerful magician. This magician is no one but the WestWind. The leaves are once again compared to the "pestilence stricken multitudes".

Stanza 2

O thou,
 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
 (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
 With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Shelley's famous poem "Ode to the WestWind". Here Shelley acts as a champion of liberty and freedom. He personifies the WestWind and hills as an "unseen presence".

Explanation: In these lines Shelley calls the WestWind a mighty force which drives the withered leaves to the dark earth. There the seeds lie cold and low as if a corpse were lying in its grave. Then the WestWind's sister blows her clarion over the dreaming earth and the seemingly dead seeds sprouts into buds in colourful shades.

Stanza 3

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
 On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
 Of some fierce Maenad,

Word-meanings: 1. Angels of rain and lightning = the dark clouds; 2. thine aery surge = the waves that rise in the air or in the sky; 3. hair uplifted = hair lifted in the air; 4. Fierce = full of anger 5. Maenad = the name of a dancer.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from P.B. Shelley's famous poem "Ode to the WestWind". In this poem the poet personifies the WestWind calling it as a powerful agent of liberty.

Explanation: Here in these lines the poet hails the WestWind as a vigorous force that scatters the dark clouds in the sky. The sky is covered with the dark cloud which seem to be spread on the powerful waves of the WestWind. These dark clouds seem as if they were the bright hair uplifted from the head of the angry dancer before God of music.

Stanza 4

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's pay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day.

Word-meanings: 1. blue Mediterranean = deep Mediterranean sea; 2. lull'd = laid to sleep with the help of music and song; 3. crystalline = clear transparent; 4. pumice isle = an island that is made of rough stones; 5. Baiae = an coastal city in Italy; 6. Quivering = trembling; 7. intenser day = a day full of brighter light.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Shelley's famous work, "Ode to the WestWind". In this poem Shelley personifies the WestWind and hails it as a symbol of liberty and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet describes the power of WestWind over the vast and blue Mediterranean sea. He says that the sea was sleeping lulled by the clear streams and was dreaming his summer dreams. Then came the WestWind and it destroyed the sleep of the sea which it was having near a Pumice island.

Stanza 5

Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh hear!

Word-meanings: 1. Atlantic level powers = Atlantic ocean's vast water treasure; 2. cleave = divide; 3. chasm = a deep and crack on the surface of the earth; 4. oozy woods = bushes and plants full of mud; 5. sapless foliage = leaves and flower with juice; 6. despoil = to destroy.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the famous poem of Shelley, 'Ode to the WestWind'. In this poem the poet shows the power of the WestWind over the earth, sky and ocean.

Explanation: In these lines the poet shows the power of the WestWind over the ocean. When the mighty WestWinds moves, the water level of the Atlantic ocean are divided and look like deep ravines. Even the plants and the bushes which grow at the bottom of the ocean recognize its voice. As they hear the WestWind coming, they become grey with fear and starts trembling.

Stanza 6

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable!

Word-meanings: 1. thou mightest bear = you might make me fly; 2. pant = to be breathless; 3. impulse = effect; 4. uncontrollable = that cannot be controlled.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from P.B. Shelley's marvellous poem, "Ode to the WestWind". In this poem Shelley hail the WestWind as a symbol at might or power which affects the whole world.

Explanation: In the lines under explanation the poet appeals the cloud to revitalize him. It must give him a new life. He pleads with the cloud saying that if he we were a dead leaf it must carry him in the air. If he were a swift cloud the WestWind must carry him with it in the same way if the poet were a wave the WestWind must stimulate him. In this manner he could have a feel of its power.

Stanza 7

Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Word-meanings: 1. thorns of life = pains of life I bleed, I suffer; 2. heavy weight of hours = life that is dull.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the Romantic poet, P.B. Shelley's "Ode to the WestWind". In it the poet talks of the might and power of the WestWind and his own helplessness.

Explanation: In these lines the poet speaks of his weakness, both physical and spiritual. He thinks that the negative circumstances have chained and tamed him. He has fallen on the thorns of life and is bleeding. He makes a request to the WestWind that it should pick him as he picks a wave or a leaf or a cloud and fill life in him once again.

Stanza 8

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!

Word-meanings: 1. lyre = a stringed musical instrument; 2. tumult = disturbance; 3. autumnal tone = the serious tone of autumn season; 4. impetuous = defiant one.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from P.B. Shelley's famous poem, "Ode to the WestWind". In this poem Shelley describes the WestWind as a powerful symbol of freedom and liberty. He thinks that the WestWind can regenerate his life as it can regenerate the physical world.

Explanation: The poet requests the WestWind to make his lyre. It should ignore the weaknesses of the poet. He appeals to the WestWind to blow through the poet's verses as it does through the forest. He should drive away the dead thought in the poet's mind and give birth to new ideas. Thus the poet appeals to the WestWind to infuse new life in him.

Stanza 9

And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Word-meanings: 1. incantation = recitation; 2. scatter = spread out; 3. unextinguish hearth = still burning fire place; 4. unawaken'd earth = still sleeping; 5. trumpet = a loud musical instrument; 6. prophecy = to foretell future events.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from P.B. Shelley's poem, "Ode to the WestWind". In it Shelly calls the WestWind powerful and symbolises it as liberty and freedom. He makes an appeal to the WestWind to regenerate his life and fill his life with freshness.

Explanation: In these lines Shelley appeals to the WestWind to infuse new life in him and like the ambers of an extinguished fire-place. His verses should also be spread all over the world. He urges the WestWind to become a trumpet of prophecy through his poetry. Infact the last line is full of hope as Shelley suggests that winter does not mean the end of life. The arrival of spring is must. So after pain and suffering there will be hope of joy. Thus the poem expresses the sense or tone of hope and optimism.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Part 1

O wild WestWind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotsts to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!

Questions

1. Why has the WestWind been called the "unseen presence"?
2. How are the dead leaves driven?
3. How are the winged seeds described?
4. How is the WestWind destroyer and preserver?
5. What will happen when the spring come?

Answers

1. The WestWind has been called the "unseen presence" because it cannot be seen and its presence can be felt.
2. The dead leaves are driven by the WestWind as "ghosts" run away from magicians.

3. The seeds are flying in the air because of the wind so they are called the winged seeds.
4. The WestWind destroys the old vegetations, yet it preserves the seeds for the new vegetation. In this way the WestWind is both destroyer and preserver.
5. The whole world will be covered with sweet and colourful flowers.

Part 2

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's neight,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh hear!

Questions

1. What is the impact of the WestWind on the sky?
2. What is the meaning of angels of rain and lightning?
3. What does the poem mean by the dirge of the dying year?
4. What is the meaning of the dome of a sepulchre?
5. Give the name of the poem and the poet.

Answers

1. The WestWind scatters dark clouds all over the sky
2. The meaning of angels of rain and lightning is the cloud that scatters over the sky.
3. The WestWind brings about the autumn hence it is called the dirge of the dying year.
4. The dark night which envelopes the whole world is called the dome of sepulchre. It covers the world as a coffin covers a corpse.
5. The name of the poem is "Ode to the WestWind" and the name of the poet is P.B. Shelley.

Part 3

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers

Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh hear!

Questions

1. How did the WestWind awaken the Mediterranean?
2. What happened to the sapless foliage of the ocean?
3. How were the waters of the Atlantic disturbed by the WestWind?
4. What impressions does the stanza give about the power of the 'WestWind'?
5. What is meant by summer dreams?

Answers

1. The WestWind awakened the Mediterranean ocean by creating a storm in it.
2. The sapless foliage of the ocean was frightened.
3. The level waters of the Atlantic were divided because of the force of the West Wind.
4. The WestWind is very powerful and with its wild energy, it can disturb anything.
5. The 'summer dreams' mean that Mediterranean sea was calm.

Part 4

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip the skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Questions

1. What does the poet think about the WestWind's power?
2. What is the poet's wish?
3. Is the poet happy about his life?
4. What prayer does the poet make to the WestWind?
5. What qualities did the poet share with the WestWind?

Answers

1. He thinks that the WestWind is very powerful and can sweep anything in the world.
2. The poet's wish is to become a friend to the WestWind.
3. No, the poet is not happy. He is in pain and suffers life.
4. The poet prays to the WestWind to lift him like a wave or a leaf or a cloud.
5. Like the WestWind the poet was also untamed and proud.

Part 5

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
 Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!
 And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
 Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Questions

1. What is the poet's wish in the first line?
2. What does the poet compare his thought to?
3. What kind of help does the poet seek from the WestWind?
4. What is the message conveyed in the last line of the poem?
5. Explain the term 'trumpet of a prophecy'.

Answers

1. The poet wants to be the lyre of the WestWind.
2. The poet compares his thought to the dead leaves.
3. The poet wants to scatter his verses all over the earth like the leaves.
4. It is a message of hope. Joy would come after grief.

5. By the term the trumpet of prophecy means that the poet's verses would proclaim the beginning of a new joyful life. The poet shows his optimism here.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. Describe the effect of the WestWind on the leaves, the clouds and the sea waves?

Ans. As the WestWind comes the leaves of trees turn pale in fear. They fall from the trees. They fly away like ghosts running away from a magician. Their hue turns yellow, black and hectic red. They look like pestilence driven multitudes. The WestWind scatters the dark clouds which look like the bright hair uplifted from the head of fierce maenad. The WestWind disturbs the ocean also.

Q. 2. How is the WestWind harbinger of a new life?

Ans. It destroys all that is dead. The dead leaves are taken away by the WestWind. Along with the dead leaves the seed are also transported to new places on the right opportunity. These seeds sprout into new buds. In this way the WestWind becomes the harbinger of a new life.

Q. 3. What effect does the WestWind have on the ocean?

Ans. The WestWind creates a storm in the ocean. It divides the waves of the ocean. Even the sea flowers at the bottom of the ocean are disturbed.

Q. 4. What is the effect of the WestWind in the sky?

Ans. It scatters the clouds in the sky. It brings about rain. It comes near the end of the year and seems to be the mourning song for the dying ear. The poet feels that WestWind brings rain, shiver and thunder.

Q. 5. How does the poet compare himself to the WestWind?

Ans. The WestWind is very powerful. It cannot be tamed. The poet was also equally powerful when he was young. He was also untamed and wild. But now because of the burden of time he has become weak. He has fallen on the thorns of life and he is bleeding.

Q. 6. How is the WestWind both a destroyer and a preserver?

Ans. According to the poet the WestWind is both a destroyer and preserver. When it blows it drives away the dead and dry leaves. But it is a preserver as well. It takes the seeds also with it and burries them in distant places. Given the right condition these seeds grow into big trees. In this sense the WestWind is a preserver also.

Q. 7. What is the message the poem gives at the end?

Ans. The poet wants to suggest that after grief there will be joy. After winter there will be spring. He seeks the help of the WestWind to bring a message of hope and joyful life.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. Write a critical summary of the poem, "Ode to the WestWind" bringing out its theme.

Or

Trace the development of the thought in "Ode to the WestWind".

Ans. Shelley was a rebellious poet. He greatly loved liberty and wanted all mankind to be free from all kinds of bondage. In this poem he gives a loud and clear message that joy would follow grief. After despair there would be hope.

The poet uses the WestWind as a symbol of wild untamed energy. He personifies it and shows its impact on the earth, the sky and the ocean. He calls it the breath of autumn. It drives away the dead

and rotten seeds. They fly away like pestilence driven multitudes. But while the WestWind brings death to old and rotten leaves, it carries seeds to distant places thus bringing rebirth.

The WestWind scatters the clouds all over the sky. They look like bright hair uplifted from the head of some fierce maenad. The WestWind awakens the ocean sleeping peacefully. It ruffles its waves and clefts them. Even the plants at the bottom of ocean feel its power. They turn grey on hearing its terrible thunder.

The poet requests to the WestWind to lend him some of its power. These was a time when the poet was as wild and untamed as the WestWind but now the life has tamed him. He has fallen on the thorns of life and is bleeding. Now he needs the help of the WestWind to give support. He wants the WestWind to lift him as a wave or a lead or a cloud.

The poet wants to spread his message of hope throughout the world. But his thoughts are dull and grey like the dead leaves. That is why the poet wants WestWind to make him his lyre. In this way he would be able to spread his message of hope and joy to the whole world.

Objective Type Questions

- Q. 1. What is the wintry bed?
Ans. The cold earth is the wintry bed.
- Q. 2. Why are the leaves called pestilence-stricken multitudes?
Ans. They are dead and rotten and they are in large numbers.
- Q. 3. Who is the azure sister of the WestWind?
Ans. Spring is the azure sister.
- Q. 4. Who are the angles of rain and lightning?
Ans. The clouds are the angles of rain and lightning.
- Q. 5. For whom the Atlantic waves part?
Ans. They part for the WestWind.
- Q. 6. Why do the plants at the bottom of the ocean turn grey?
Ans. The plants turn grey out of the fear for the WestWind.
- Q. 7. What is message of the poem?
Ans. The message of the poem is to have hope for the future.

My Last Duchess

Robert Browning

Introduction to the Poet

Robert Browning (1812-89) was an optimist poet. He believed that “God is in his heaven – All’s well with the world”. Robert Browning was the son of wealthy and cultured parents. Like Shakespeare, he had little formal education and was privately educated. But he studied Greek at University College, London for a year. He also learnt Latin, French and Italian. Browning is famous for the creation of a new poetic form called the ‘Dramatic Monologue’. Robert Browning was influenced in his early life by the poetry of major Romantic poets like Shelley and Keats. He married Elizabeth Barrett, another contemporary poet, and was greatly influenced by her. As a poet, Browning has been hailed as a great love poet, celebrating the love relationship between men and women. But even his love for poetry is known for its intellectual vigour and his psychological studies of human nature. He was an incorrigible optimist who held a cheerful view of life and believed in the freedom and sanctity of the individual. Browning has the reputation of being an obscure poet. *Sordello* (1840) is a fine example of Browning’s obscurity and ambiguity. Compressed speech, colloquialism and sudden jumps in the narrative often result in difficulties while interpreting his poems. Among his most famous works are – *Dramatic Lyric* (1842), *Men and Women* (1855), *The Ring and the Book* (1867).

Introduction to the Poem

‘My Last Duchess’ is one of Browning’s major dramatic monologues. Written around the year 1842, and published in *Dramatic Lyrics*, the poem gives ample demonstration of Browning’s poetic genius and reflects all the constituent elements of a dramatic monologue: a speaker, his audience, revelation of the character and implicit dramatic tourism. ‘My Last Duchess’ corresponds closely to the life history of a cold Renaissance aristocrat, Alphonso II (born 1533), fifth Duke of Ferrara. The speaker in the poem is the Duke and the listener is the envoy of the Count whose daughter he is likely to marry. The dramatic monologue provides Browning ample scope to delineate the complexity of the Duke’s mind and motivation as he narrates the story of the life and death of his former wife.

In a dramatic monologue, the speaker’s apprehension of reality is different from objective reality, and therefore, enables the reader to comprehend reality in its totality. From the Duke’s monologue, the sinister aspects of his own character and the innocence and graciousness of the Duchess’ lie immediately revealed to the objective reader. In Arthur Symon’s words, this monologue evokes ‘the concentrated essence of a complete tragedy.’ To conclude we can say that ‘My last Duchess’ is one of the best poems written by Robert Browning. It has been universally praised. The speaker of this poem is a 16th century Italian Duke. He is a widower. He has received a messenger from a neighbouring count, who has sent a marriage proposal offering the hand of his daughter to the Duke. The Duke is a lover of art. He shows the messenger a big painting of his former wife. The Duke talks about his late wife. He comments on her habits, nature and character, while doing so, he expresses his opinions and reveals his own character.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

(Lines 1—5)

Ferrara
That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 Will't please you sit and look at her?

Word-meanings: 1. Piece = portrait; 2. Fra Pandolf = the name of the artist; 3. Ferrara = It was one the most cultured cities of Italy during the renaissance

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Browning's dramatic monologue, 'My Last Duchess'. This poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The audience is the envoy of a count whose daughter, the Duke intends to marry. The Duke shows the envoy the picture of his last Duchess, and tells him what kind of a woman she was and why she had to be put to death.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the messenger of a neighbouring count has come to the Duke of Ferrara. The Duke of Ferrara is a widower. His last Duchess has died, and he intends to marry the daughter of the count.

The Duke shows the messenger the portrait of the last Duchess. The picture has been painted on the wall. The picture has been done so well that it appears life-like. The Duke is proud of it. He considers it a remarkable piece of art. He proudly tells the messenger that the picture is the work of the famous painter, Fra Pandolf. The painter worked busily on it only for a day, and he completed such a wonderful picture. The Duke invites the messenger to sit down comfortably and look at the picture. Only then he would be able to admire its art. It is to be noted that the Duke engaged a friar to draw the portrait, and he got it completed in a single day. He did not want to leave a chance for any flirtation.

(Lines 21—24)

She had
 A heart – how shall I say?– too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Word-meanings: 1. she = Duchess

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'My Last Duchess'. This poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning. In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The audience is the envoy of a count whose daughter the Duke intends to marry. The Duke shows the envoy the picture of his last Duchess, and tells him what kind of woman she was and why she had to be put to death.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the Duke tells the messenger what kind of a woman his last Duchess was. He says that he does not have the skill of speech to describe her. All that he can say is that his last Duchess had a heart that was too soon made glad. She had a heart that was too easily impressed. She liked whatever she looked on. And her looks went everywhere. These lines show that the Duchess was a very innocent and simple hearted woman. But the Duke did not like her all embracing humanity. He did not like her looks that went everywhere. The speaker in this monologue is a Duke who reveals his inner most thoughts to the silent messenger of a count whose daughter he intends to marry.

(Lines 31—35)

She thanked men – good! but thanked
 Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-year-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling?

Word-meanings: 1. ranked = considered of the same value; 2. trifling= foolish;

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Browning's dramatic monologue, 'My Last Duchess'. This poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The audience is the envoy of a count whose daughter the Duke intends to marry. The Duke shows the envoy the picture of his last Duchess, and tells him what kind of woman she was and why she had to be put to death.

Explanation: In these lines the Duke says that his wife thanked people when they did something for her, and brought gifts to her. There was no harm in that. It was something good to which the Duke had no objection. But there was one thing which he could never digest. She thanked them in such a manner that did not behave as a duchess. Moreover, the duchess took no pride in the name of the Duke's family. The Duke's family had a nine hundred year old name. But the gift of the Duke was of the same value to her as anybody else's gift. The Duke did not like all these habits of his wife. To conclude we can say that the Duke thought that no gift could compare with the gift he had given to the Duchess. But the Duchess failed to recognize this difference. The Duke calls it a trifling. But he says that he could never stop to blame a trifling in his wife.

(Lines 43—47)

Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive.

Word-meanings: 1. gave commands = dictatorial nature; 2. below = downstairs

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Browning's dramatic monologue, 'My Last Duchess'. This poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The audience is the envoy of a count whose daughter the Duke intends to marry. The Duke shows the envoy the picture of his last Duchess, and tells him what kind of woman she was and why she had to be put to death.

Explanation: The Duke tells the count's agent why he was unhappy with the Duchess. No doubt she used to give him her smile whenever he passed by her. But her smile was not reserved for him alone. She gave it to others also. This roused his jealousy and envy. He engaged persons to kill her. Her smiles stopped for ever.

To conclude we can say that the jealous Duke could not tolerate that his wife should smile at others in the same way as she smiled at him. When he saw that the Duchess's range of humanity and generosity was going on expanding, he gave his orders. Though we are not told what these orders were and to whom they were given, the ultimate result is unambiguously clear: 'Then all smiles stopped together', the poor Duchess was murdered by the Duke's men. Now the pictured Duchess appears to the Duke 'as if alive'. He likes it more than the living Duchess because now it belongs to him and him alone.

(Lines 48—53)

I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object.

Word-meanings: 1. Munificence = generosity; 2. avowed = affirmed

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Robert Browning's dramatic monologue 'My Last Duchess'. In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The audience is the envoy of a count whose daughter the Duke intends to marry. The Duke shows the envoy the picture of his last Duchess and tells him what kind of woman she was and why she had to be put to death.

Explanation: In these lines the Duke makes clear his intention very tactfully. He says that the count is well known for his large heartedness. Naturally he will not turn down the Duke's demand for a fair dowry. The Duke, however, tries to assure the agent that he is going to marry the count's daughter for her beauty and for her qualities. Dowry is not his aim but dowry is equally necessary. Through the story of his last Duchess, the Duke gives a clear hint to the messenger about what he would expect from his new wife. And then very clearly he puts his demand for dowry also. However, the hypocritical Duke adds that his chief interest is not in the dowry but in the count's beautiful daughter. He says that he had made it clear in the very beginning.

Important Passages for Comprehension

(Lines 6—13)

'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
 Stranger like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus, Sir, 'twas not

Questions

1. Who is the speaker of these lines and to whom is the speech made?
2. Who was Fra Pandolf?
3. Why do you think the Duke mentioned his name by design?
4. Who had drawn the curtain and from where?
5. What did the strangers seem to ask?

Answers

1. The Duke of Ferrara is speaking these lines to the messenger of the count whose daughter he intends to marry.
2. He was a monk who painted the portrait of the Duke's last Duchess.
3. The Duke mentioned the Monk's name to dispel any idea of flirtation between the Duchess and the painter.
4. The Duke had drawn the curtain from the Duchess's portrait on the wall.
5. The strangers seemed to ask how such an intense and passionate glance had come in the Duchess's eyes.

(Lines 13—21)

Her husband's presence only called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
 Over my Lady's wrist too much', or 'Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat'; such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy.

Questions

1. What is it that the speaker is trying to explain?
2. What do you learn about the character of the speaker from these lines?
3. What do these lines show about the character of the Duchess?
4. Who speaks these lines to whom? Who was Fra Pandolf?

Answers

1. The speaker in these lines is trying to explain that the smiles of the Duchess were not reserved for her husband only, she could smile even at a casual remark made by someone.
2. From these lines we know about the character of the speaker that the Duke was possessive in nature. He has possessiveness for his wife, that is the Duchess.
3. The Duchess had a simple and innocent nature.
4. These lines are spoken by the Duke to the messenger of the count.
5. Fra Pandolf was the painter.

(Lines 25—31)

Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace – all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! but thanked

Questions

1. Who is 'Sir' referred to in the first line?
2. Explain the phrase: My favour at her breast?
3. Which lady is being talked about in these lines?
4. Name the poem and the poet?
5. What do these lines show about the character of the lady?

Answers

1. In the first line 'Sir' refers to the messenger.
2. 'My favour at her breast' means my gift of necklace to her.
3. In these lines the Duchess is being talked about.
4. The name of the poem is 'My Last Duchess' and the name of the poet is Robert Browning.
5. The lady had a heart that was too soon made glad. These lines show the inner beauty of the lady. She was having a simple and innocent nature.

(Lines 48—56)

The company below, then, I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed,
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir! Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

Questions

1. Who speaks these lines and to whom?
2. Why does the speaker think that his demand for dowry won't be refused?
3. Why does the speaker say; 'we'll go together down'?
4. What does the speaker want the listener to notice and why?
5. Who was Claus of Innsbruck?

Answers

1. These lines are spoken by the Duke to the messenger.
2. The speaker thinks that his demand for dowry won't be refused because he tells the messenger that the count is known for his generosity and this generosity should be a sufficient guarantee that his reasonable demands for dowry shall not be denied.
3. The speaker says that they would go down together. The hypocritical Duke wants to impress the messenger with his politeness.
4. The speaker wants the listener to notice a bronze-statue of Neptune, the sea-god because the Duke is proud of this work of art.
5. Claus of Innsbruck was a sculptor.

Short-Answer Type Questions

Q. 1. What is the situation described in the poem?

Ans. In this poem the Duke is talking to the messenger of the count. The Duke takes the visitor to his room. In that room, there is the picture of a beautiful woman on the wall. That woman is the Duke's late wife. He shows the picture to this messengers. The visitor/the messenger asks how the picture is so lively. Then the Duke tells him about his wife.

Q. 2. Why, according to the Duke, is there a spot of joy on the cheek of the Duchess in the painting?

Ans. The Duke shows the painting of his last wife to the messenger. The painting is very lively, there is a spot of joy on the cheeks of the Duchess. The Duke tells the visitor that perhaps the painter praised her while painting her picture. Perhaps he praised her beautiful wrists or the beauty of her neck. This praise made her happy and the spot of joy came on her cheeks. The Duchess took all such remarks as compliments. In her courtesy she would blush and a spot of joy appeared on her face.

Q. 3. What does the Duke say about the Duchess's heart?

Ans. The Duke says that the Duchess had a very simple and innocent heart. He says to the messenger that his wife was made happy very soon. Many simple things of life made her happy. She did not differentiate between costly and ordinary things for becoming happy. She became equally happy with the Duke's gift of a costly necklace to her or the beautiful scene of the sunset. She would feel the same pleasure when she rode her white mule round the terrace. She would praise each of these things equally. She was simple hearted.

Q. 4. Why did the Duke not point out to the Duchess the things he did not like about her?

Ans. The Duke was so obstinate that he chose not to tell the Duchess when to smile and when not to smile. Rather he chose to stop all smiles together. The Duke thought that he had done the Duchess a great favour by marrying her. He had given her his family name that was 900 years old. By marrying him she had become the Duchess of Ferrara. The Duke thought it a gift he had given to her. He thought it a gift that could not be ranked with anyone else's gift. But the simple hearted Duchess equally thanked all those who bought a gift for her. The Duke says that he could not stop to touch the Duchess and tell her what to do and what not to do.

Q. 5. Why did the cruel Duke have the Duchess killed?

Ans. The Duchess had a heart that was too soon made glad. She liked whatever she looked at. The Duchess was a very simple-hearted and innocent woman. She had an approving word for everybody. She equally thanked everyone who bought a gift for her. The jealous Duke could not tolerate this all embracing generosity of the Duchess. He wanted all her thanks and smiles reserved for him only. If he wanted he could make his wife change his behaviour. But he thought that it would be his insult. So he gave orders and got his wife killed.

Q. 6. What shows that the Duke is a lover of art?

Ans. The Duke appears to be a genuine lover of art. The Duke is greedy and cruel. But he is a lover of art. He engages the best painter for getting his wife painted. He has art objects in his palace. He shows the messenger a beautiful piece of art. It is the statue of Neptune taming a sea-horse. The Duke calls it a rarity. He says that the famous sculptor, Claus of Innsbruck, had specially cast it for him. Thus, the Duke appears to be a genuine lover of art.

Q. 7. What defect does the Duke find in the nature and character of his Duchess?

Ans. The Duke did not like the nature of his duchess. He felt that she was delighted by small things. She liked everything she saw. For her a costly necklace gifted by her husband, the scene of sun-set, an ordinary gift by some foolish admirer and a mule ride had the same importance. She liked all these things equally. She thanked others very warmly and this she did for the smallest service.

Q. 8. Who was the guest of the Duke? What was the purpose of his visit?

Ans. The guest of the Duke was a messenger of a count. He had come to the duke for negotiating the marriage of the count's daughter with the Duke. First, the Duke showed to him the portrait of his dead duchess. Then he took the envoy downstairs. He said that the count was a kind hearted person and so he was sure that all his demands for dowry will be accepted. It shows that the Duke was greedy. The Duke talks about his late wife. He comments on her habits, nature and character. While doing so, he expresses his opinions and reveals his own character.

Q. 9. How does the Duke put forward his demand for dowry?

Ans. The Duke puts his demand in a very diplomatic manner. He tells the messenger that the count is known for his generosity. He takes the count's known generosity as a sufficient guarantee that his reasonable demand for dowry won't be refused. However, he says that his main interest is in the count's beautiful daughter, and not in dowry. Thus we see that the Duke puts forward his demand for dowry in a rather diplomatic manners. But he leaves no doubt about it that he must have it.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. What is a dramatic monologue? Bring out the specific features which make 'My Last Duchess' a successful dramatic monologue?

Ans. In a dramatic monologue, the speaker's apprehension of reality is different from the objective reality, and therefore enables the reader to comprehend the reality in its totality.

Dramatic monologue is a kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character speaks to a silent audience. Such a poem does not reveal the poet's own thoughts. It reveals the mind of the impersonated character through his or her own speech. The speaker makes this revelation unwittingly. 'My Last Duchess' is one of the finest examples of dramatic monologues in English literature. Dramatic monologue provides Browning with ample scope to delineate the complexity of the Duke's mind and motivation as he narrates the story of the life and death of his former wife. From the Duke's monologue, the sinister aspects of his own character and the innocence and graciousness of the Duchess lie immediately revealed to the objective reader.

In this poem the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. The silent listener is the messenger of a count whose daughter the Duke intends to wed. In his monologue, the Duke reveals not only his own character but also the character of his last Duchess. We also come to know of some reactions of the messenger though he remains silent throughout.

The monologue has an abrupt dramatic beginning. "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall", says the Duke to the silent listener. The reader's attention is at once attracted. Through this one line the Duke reveals his egotistical and possessive nature. Then he reveals his jealousy when he says that it was not her husband's presence only that called a spot of joy into the Duchess 'cheek'. He reveals his pride when he refers to 'his gift of nine-hundred years-old name'. He reveals his heartless cruelty when he says: 'I gave commands. Then all smiles stopped together. His diplomacy becomes clear when he talks of the count's known munificence. His greed becomes clear when he puts forth his demand for dowry. His hypocrisy is seen when he says that the count's fair daughter and not the dowry, is his main object. And his love of art is seen from the beautiful creations he has with him.

The Duke, through his speech unwittingly reveals some noble qualities of his last Duchess. The image of sweet, beautiful, simple hearted and innocent girl at once springs alive before our eyes.

She had a heart that was too soon made glad. She liked whatever she looked on. Her zest for life becomes clear when the Duke says, "Her looks went everywhere". During the course of monologue we are reminded of the silent listener many a time. The Duke says to the messenger: 'will it please you sit and look at her.' And again: 'So not the first are you to turn and ask thus'. And again: 'will it please you rise? We will meet the company below! And lastly: 'We will go together down sir!'

To conclude we can say that 'My Last Duchess' is one of Browning's major dramatic monologues. The poem gives ample demonstration of Browning's poetic genius and reflects all the constituent elements of, dramatic monologue: a speaker, his audience revelation of the character and implicit dramatic tourism. So we can say that 'My Last Duchess' is one of the finest examples of dramatic monologues in English literature in Arthur Symon's words, this monologue evokes 'the concentrated essence of a complete tragedy'.

Q. 2. From your reading of 'My Last Duchess', give a brief character sketch of the Duke of Ferrara

Or

"The poem reproduces an intricate psychological process, revealing complete motivation and the personality of a stern, feudal Renaissance character." Comment.

Ans. 'My Last Duchess' is one of Browning's major dramatic monologues 'My Last Duchess' corresponds closely to the life history of a cold Renaissance aristocrat, Alphonso II (born 1533), the fifth Duke of Ferrara. The speaker in this poem is the Duke of Ferrara. The speaker in this poem is the Duke and the listener is the envoy of the count whose daughter he is likely to marry. The dramatic monologue provides Browning with ample scope to delineate the complexity of the Duke's mind and motivation as he narrates the story of the life and death of his former wife.

The Italian Renaissance was a period of intrigue, greed, cunning, cruelty and hypocrisy. But the period was also marked by a love of art. The Duke of Ferrara combines in him all these qualities. We can call him an epitome of the Italian renaissance.

The Duke has in his character all other Renaissance features also. He is jealous, cunning, hard-hearted and cruel. He cannot tolerate the all-embracing humanity of his wife. He wants to have exclusive rights over her as if she were a piece of property. He thinks that he has done the Duchess a great favour in marrying her. He has given her his 900 years old family name. He calls it a gift, that cannot be ranked with anybody else's gift.

The Duke was a cruel husband. He could tell his wife that he did not like her habits. He could tell her to change her ways. But he got sidetracked below his dignity to request a woman. So when he could not bear it, he got her killed. This clearly shows the cruelty of the Duke.

The Duke is a greedy fellow. He tells the messenger that he is interested only in the Count's daughter, whom he wants to marry. But he says that he knows the count's generosity. He knows that the count is so generous that he will not refuse his claim to rich dowry clearly, he is asking for a dowry. This shows his greediness.

The Duke begins his monologue with an appreciation of a piece of art, and ends it with his appreciation of another work of art. In the very first line of monologue, he says to the count's messenger, "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall." Obviously, the Duke is very proud of it. He calls it a wonder. The Duke had little love for his last Duchess but he loves her portrait because it is a beautiful work of art. And at the end of the monologue, he shows the messenger another work of art. It is a bronze statue of the sea-God Neptune taming a sea-horse. The Duke calls it a rarity. He says that the famous sculptor, Claus of Innsbruck, had specially cast it for him. Thus the Duke appears to be a genuine lover of art.

To conclude we can say that the Duke is the main character of this monologue. He is the speaker of the poem. The Duke has a great love for art. His wife had died. He has received a messenger from neighbouring count, who has sent a marriage proposal offering the hand of his daughter to the Duke. The Duke shows the messenger a big painting of his Duchess. The messenger shows his eagerness to know something about the last duchess. The Duke talks about his late wife. He comments on her habits, nature and character. While doing so, he expresses his opinions and reveals his own character.

Q. 3. Give in your own words a brief character sketch of the Duchess.

Ans. 'My Last Duchess' is one of Browning's major dramatic monologues. The dramatic monologue provides Browning with ample scope to delineate the complexity of the Duke's mind and motivation as he narrates the story of the life and death of his former wife.

The Duchess was a lovable soul. She was full of innocence and simplicity who fell a victim to the cruelty of her jealous husband. The Duchess was a sweet, simple hearted and innocent lady. Unfortunately she was married to a heartless Duke, who could not appreciate the inner beauty of her soul. The spot of joy on her cheek shows that she had a lovely, smiling face. The 'faint half-flush that dies along her throat' shows that she had a graceful neck and she had the glow of youth on her face.

But more than her physical beauty, the Duchess had the beauty of the heart and the soul. As the Duke himself puts it, she had a heart that was too soon made glad. She had a heart that was too easily impressed. She was so simple hearted that she liked whatever she looked on. She had such zest for life that her eyes went everywhere. Though she was Duchess, she knew no pride. She had sweet words of approval for everyone. "All and each would draw from her alike the approving speech, or blush, at least," says the Duke.

The Duchess greeted everyone with a smile. The inner beauty and light of her heart played on her face also. Anyone who passed by got a loving smile from her. But it was all very intolerable to the cruel duke. He had a very jealous and possessive nature. He could not tolerate the all-embracing generosity of his wife. He could not tolerate that his wife should smile at others as lovingly as she smiled at him. And so he says:

“This grew; I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together”. To conclude we can say that the cruel end of the helpless Duchess leaves the reader in a state of shock. We learn about the character of the Duchess from what her husband talks about her. The Duke considers her as childish, foolish and irresponsible. However, the impressions that we gather about her are entirely different from the Duke’s opinion about her. Thus we find the Duchess to be a lovable soul. She is full of innocence and simplicity who fell a victim to the cruelty of her husband.

Objective Type Questions

- Q. 1. Who is the speaker in the poem ‘My Last Duchess’.
- Ans. The Duke of Ferrara.
- Q. 2. Who is Fra Pandolf?
- Ans. Fra Pandolf is a painter.
- Q. 3. What causes the spot of joy in the lady’s cheeks?
- Ans. Her praise causes the spot of joy in her cheeks.
- Q. 4. What is the meaning of ‘My favour at her breast’?
- Ans. It means ‘my gift of necklace to her’.
- Q. 5. Who is the woman referred to in these lines?
- Ans. The Duke’s wife.
- Q. 6. What is the meaning of ‘all smiles stopped together’?
- Ans. It means that she was killed.
- Q. 7. Who is the ‘fair daughter’ being referred to here?
- Ans. The fair daughter is the matrimonial match for the Duke.
- Q. 8. What did the Duke say about stooping?
- Ans. The Duke said that he chose never to stoop.
- Q. 9. Who had cast Neptune’s statue in bronze?
- Ans. Claus of Innsbruck.
- Q. 10. What does the Duke say about the Duchess’s heart?
- Ans. He says that the Duchess had a heart too soon made glad.

Dulce Et Decorum Est

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Introduction to the Poet

Wilfred Owen was a poet who primarily wrote poetry as a protest against the brutality of war. Owen himself confesses: My subject is war and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity. Initially, after leaving school, he joined the church as a lay assistant but could never develop an easy relationship with the church. The outbreak of World War I provided him with an opportunity to leave the church and enlist himself in the Artist's Rifles. Owen fought as an officer in the battle of the Somme. During the war, he happened to meet the poet Siegfried Sassoon, whose realistic war poems exerted a major influence on Owen. Sassoon encouraged him to write directly on the subject of war. So Owen's poetry grew out of his real life experiences on the war front. His poetry is satirical in tone and largely reflects his own bitterness and anguish about the futility and senseless madness that war entails. Owen was killed in action a week before the war ended.

Introduction to the Poem

'Dulce Et Decorum Est' ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young men and women: 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country'. The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war. The idea is brought home by sharp pictorial images which present a group of exhausted and injured soldiers returning to their camp amidst exploding gas bombs. The narrating voice in the poem belongs to one of these soldiers. The description of the completely exhausted soldiers desperately fumbling for their gas-masks and helmets to escape choking is nightmarish. The central image is the agonizing scene of the slow death of a soldier who forgot to carry his mask. The image keeps haunting the other soldiers for the rest of their lives. The striking imagery of the poem successfully counters the hollowness of misplaced patriotic ideals. The images are evocative and amply eloquent in asserting the poet's own ideological standpoint. So this poem is a satire on war. There is an agonizing scene of the slow death of a soldier who forgot to carry his mask. Thus the poem exposes the hollowness of the patriotic ideals.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

(Lines 1—4)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
 knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Word-meanings: 1. hags = witches; 2. here, old and exhausted if lares = bright; 3. sludge = deposits of mud.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen. This poem ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young man and women: 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country'. The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the soldiers were so tired that their bodies were bent double. They looked like old beggars crouching under their sacks. As they walked their tired knees struck against

each other. Due to the effect of the poisonous gas, they were coughing like ugly old women. Thus the soldiers walked slowly through the thick, soft mud. They kept walking till they had turned their backs on the dreadful fires of the battlefield. In other words, they stopped turning again and again to look at those fires. Now they were walking wearily to the side of their camp, but the camp was yet quite distant.

So the poet describes some soldiers, who are running to escape the exploding gas bombs.

(Lines 5—8)

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Word-meanings: 1. limped = walked with difficulty as when hurt; 2. blood-shod = wearing the shoes of blood; 3. hoots = loud noises; 4. outstripped = left behind; 5. five-nines = a type of gas bombs

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen. This poem ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young men and women; 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country.' The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war.

Explanation: In these lines the poet describes the plight of tired and injured soldiers. They were so much tired that they were marching in sleep. As they had to run in a hurry, some soldiers had lost their boots. They were limping. Still they went on. They were blind and lame because of exhaustion. They ran like drunken men. Behind them shells of enemy guns were falling. But they were deaf even to the sound of these shells. All their attention was centred on escaping from there. In other words group of soldiers were returning to their camp. During the war they were dead tired and exhausted. They were so tired that they were asleep even while they were walking. Many of them had lost their shoes, yet they limped on. Their feet were covered with blood all over. It appeared as if they were wearing shoes of blood. They were so sleepy and tired that they saw nothing. They were deaf even to the loud noises of gas shells.

(Lines 9—12)

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...

Word-meanings: 1. flound'ring = struggling helplessly; 2. ecstasy = intense excitement; 3. fumbling = looking for something; 4. yelling out = crying; 5. stumbling = almost falling.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Dulce Est Decorum Et' by Wilfred Owen. This poem ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young men and women: 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country.' The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war.

Explanation: In these lines the poet describes the tragic scene of a soldier who dies of gas because he forgets to take his gas masks with him. The enemy is dropping gas bombs. The soldiers take their gas masks and helmets and are running. But one of the soldiers is still crying and stumbling. In other words a group of soldiers was returning to their camp during the war. Suddenly there were cries of Gas! Gas! Quick boys! All the soldiers started looking for their gas masks nervously. They were able to fit their clumsy helmets just in time. But one of them was still yelling out. He had no gas mask with him. The poisonous gas choked his breath. The narrator-soldier saw him through the misty panes of his mask. He was stumbling and struggling helplessly like one who had fallen in a fire or a lime pit.

(Lines 25—28)

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory.
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.

Word-meanings: 1. ardent = enthusiastic; 2. desperate = extremely dangerous; 3. the old lie = a lie that has been told all over the ages.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen. This poem ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young men and women: 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country'. The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that a group of soldiers were returning to their camp during the war. All of a sudden a gas shell exploded near them. The soldiers at once put on their gas masks. But one of the soldiers had lost his mask somewhere. The poisonous gas at once choked his breath. The unfortunate soldier started stumbling and struggling helplessly. The narrator-soldier saw him through the thick green panes of his mask. The soldier looked as if drowning under a green-sea. The narrator-soldier could never forget this terrible scene. It haunted all his dreams. He remembered how helplessly he had watched his fellow soldier dying before his eyes. All these are painful images of war. They are closely related to the central theme of the poem which is the futility and senselessness of war.

Important Passages for Comprehension

(Lines 1—8)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
 Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Questions

1. Who are the people being referred to in these lines?
2. What are the haunting flares referred to in the passages?
3. Why did they march in sleep?
4. Explain the phrase 'blood-shod'.
5. What were they deaf to and why?

Answers

1. They are a group of soldiers returning to their camp during the war.
2. They are the fires started by the artillery of the enemy.
3. They were so tired and exhausted that they were asleep even while they were walking.
4. Some of the soldiers had no shoes. Their feet were covered with blood all over. It appeared that they were wearing shoes of blood.
5. They were deaf to the noises of the gas shells that were being fired. They were so tired and sleepy that they heard no noises.

(Lines 9—14)

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
 Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

Questions

1. Who is the poet of these lines?
2. Why was there an ecstasy of fumbling?
3. Why was someone still yelling?
4. Why does the poet describe the soldier drowning?
5. Whom does the poet see in his dreams?

Answers

1. Wilfred Owen is the poet of these lines.
2. There was an ecstasy of fumbling as soldiers were trying to get their gas masks and helmets.
3. Someone was still yelling as he had not found his gas mask.
4. The poet describes a soldier as he saw him falling due to the effect of gas on him.
5. The poet sees the dying soldiers in his dream.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. Elaborate the meaning of the various war images in the poem. In what sense are they related to the central theme of the poem?

Ans. The poet rejects the dangerous philosophy of patriotism which has been the cause of all wars. The philosophy of patriotism says, "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country." The poet calls it an old lie. He says that we should stop telling this lie to our children. The poem is full of war images. A group of soldiers are returning to their camp during the war. They are bent double with fatigue and sleep. Due to the effect of the poisonous gas, they are coughing like hags. The unfortunate soldier dies a painful death. The painful images of war are closely related to the theme of the poem which is the futility and senselessness of war.

Q. 2. Does the poet accept the socio-cultural philosophy of patriotism in the poem? Explain the poet's own views on the meaning and implications of patriotism.

Ans. According to the poet, the misplaced patriotic ideal that it is sweet and proper to die for one's country is the old lie. He satirizes the idea. He describes the painful death of a soldier caught in an exploding gas bomb. He says that if a person has seen that soldier dying miserably, he will realize the hollowness of the old patriotic ideals that attract young people towards war. He will not tell his children that it is grand to lay down one's life for one's country. We should reject the dangerous philosophy of patriotism. He calls it a dangerous philosophy.

Q. 3. Discuss 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' as a commentary on the futility and senselessness of war.

Ans. The poet rejects the philosophy of patriotism altogether. He calls it a dangerous philosophy. It can bring nothing but death, despair, destruction and suffering. War brings nothing but pain, misery, death and destruction. Owen illustrates it through the miserable state of a group of soldiers returning to their camp during the war. The soldiers are so tired and sleepy that they are bent double. Due to the effect of poisonous gas, they are coughing like hags. The poisonous gas

corrupts the soldier's lungs and blood gargles out of his mouth. And what is the object of all this suffering? Patriotism! the poet calls it an old lie. He does not believe in saying: "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country". Wars will continue as long as we believe in such lies.

Essay Type Question

Q. 1. Trace the development of thought in Wilfred Owen's poem, 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'.

Or

What is the central theme of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est'? How has the poet brought it out?

Ans. 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' ridicules the hypocritical philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal which is fed to all generations of young men and women: 'It is sweet and meet to die for one's country'. The poem presents an intensely graphic picture of the savagery of war. The idea is brought home by sharp pictorial images which present a group of exhausted and injured soldiers returning to their camp amidst exploding gas bombs. The narrative voice in the poem belongs to one of those soldiers. The description of the completely exhausted soldiers desperately fumbling for their gas masks and helmets to escape choking is night marish. The central image is the agonizing scene of the slow death of a soldier who forgot to carry his mask. The image keeps haunting the other soldiers for the rest of their lives. The striking imagery of the poem successfully counters the hollowness of misplaced patriotic ideals. The images are evocative and amply eloquent in asserting the poet's own ideological stand point.

This is an anti-war poem. This poem is a satire on war. It ridicules the philosophy behind the old patriotic ideal that "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country." The poem is very realistic in description. In it the poet depicts the horrors of war and denounces the poisonous zeal of patriotism. A group of soldiers are returning to their camp during the war. Due to fatigue and sleep they are bent double. Due to the poisonous effect of chemical gases, they are coughing like hags. Many of them have lost their boots. Their feet are all covered with blood. It looks as if they are wearing shoes of blood. All of them are limping. They see or hear nothing. They are so tired and sleepy that they do not hear even the noises of gas shells that are being fired and which are falling at their back.

Suddenly a gas shell explodes near them. There are cries of Gas, Gas! At once the soldiers start fumbling for their gas masks. They are able to fit them just in time. But one of the soldiers does not find his mask. He has forgotten it somewhere. The poisonous gas at once affects him. He stumbles and struggles helplessly like a man fallen in a fire or a lime pit. The poisonous gas chokes his breath and raptures his lungs. Blood starts gargling out of his mouth. The unfortunate soldier dies a slow, painful death. This terrible scene haunts the soldiers in their dreams forever afterwards.

The narrator-soldier says that anyone who saw the terrible sight would stop talking of patriotism. He would stop infusing the children with dangerous zeal of patriotism. The dictum of patriotism says, "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country." The poet calls it an old lie. Death can never be sweet or meet in any form. All wars have resulted from this old lie. The poet says that we should stop telling this old lie to our children if we want to save the world from the horrors of war.

To conclude we can say that the poem is full of war images. The unfortunate soldier dies a painful death. The painful images are closely related to the central theme of the poem which is the futility and senselessness of war. The poet rejects the dangerous philosophy of patriotism which has been the cause of all wars. The philosophy of patriotism says, "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country". The poet calls it an old lie. He says that we should stop telling this lie to our children.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. The soldiers were bent double. What did they look like?

- Ans. They looked like old beggars under sacks.
- Q. 2. How were the soldiers coughing?
- Ans. They were coughing like hags.
- Q. 3. Where were the soldiers going?
- Ans. They were going to their resting camp.
- Q. 4. What were the soldiers drunk with?
- Ans. They were drunk with fatigue.
- Q. 5. What old lie does the poem refer to?
- Ans. It refers to the old lie that says: "It is sweet and meet to die for one's country".
- Q. 6. What are the five-nines?
- Ans. Five-nines are the shells of cannons.
- Q. 7. Why had most of soldiers lost their boots?
- Ans. They had lost their boots because they had to run in a hurry.
- Q. 8. Why was there an ecstasy of fumbling?
- Ans. There was an ecstasy of fumbling as soldiers were trying to get their gas masks and helmets.
- Q. 9. Why does the poet describe the soldier drowning?
- Ans. The poet describes the soldiers as drowning as he saw him falling due to the effect of gas on him.
- Q. 10. Whom does the poet see in his dreams?
- Ans. The poet sees the dying soldiers in his dream.

The Second Coming

W B Yeats

Introduction to the Poet

William Butler Yeats, the Nobel laureate is a renowned Irish poet. He was born in 1865 in Dublin (Ireland) and studied art in London. By using the power of his mighty pen, he gave his valuable contribution to the Irish Revolutionary movement. He exhibits exquisite romantic qualities in his poetry. His style, his vision and the power of imagination make him 'the last of the Romantics'. Yeats inherited colourful vision from his father who was a painter. His intense love for Maud Gonne provided the unique touch of passion to his poetry. The failure in love-affair played a major role in the growth of yeats as a poet. Today, he is considered as one of the most powerful poets of the twentieth century. Indian philosophy and literature influenced him a lot. He received the coveted Nobel prize for literature in 1923.

Introduction to the Poem

'The Second coming' is one of the best poems written by Yeats. It belongs to the later years of Yeats' poetic career. Yeats was an expert in evolving a personal mythology even while dealing with contemporary issues of his time. In this poem, the poet has beautifully exhibited this quality. This poem contains his dissatisfaction over the destabilizing forces which erupted in the world in the early years of the 20th century. The poet feels that peace and stability of the world is in danger. There is no central force which can unite and bind the world. He grieves over this collapse of good human values. Conviction, symbolized by Christ, has given place to corruption. The poet then visualizes a sphinx-like figure, with the head of a man and the body of a lion, rising in the midst of the desert. This figure is neither of God nor of man. The poet has faith that it is the second coming of Jesus. So by creating an epic vision of the present situation, the poet shows that the infant Christ may be coming in a changed form.

Detailed Summary

In this poem, the poet presents a picture of complete chaos all around. The world is disintegrating into disturbed parts. The age old moral values are no longer to be seen anywhere.

The poet says that a falcon (a bird of prey) is moving in widening circles. It can't hear the command or voice of his master. Anarchy has spread in the world. There is no one to control the things. Innocence, the basic and primitive quality, has lost its grounds. The best people have lost faith and the worst are full of wicked and sinful feelings. The poet feels that this is the right time for God to incarnate himself on the earth. Suddenly, the poet watches a huge and horrible creature. It is half man and half lion. It has a lion's body and a man's head. It is slowly moving in the desert. It is a mixture of power and intellect. The birds of the desert are terrified. They are flying in circles over this figure.

The poet thinks that this creature is a symbol of Jesus Christ. Twenty centuries of sinful living are coming to an end. This sphinx-like figure may be the second coming of Jesus. He watches that this figure is moving slowly to Bethlehem so that he could take second birth there. So this poem shows the poet's belief in the old mythological values. The poet believes that Jesus Christ will be reincarnated to relieve this world of its pain and misery.

Explanation with reference to the context

Stanza 1

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Here anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

World-meanings: 1. gyre = circular path; 2. Falcon= hawk; 3. anarchy = disordered; 4. innocence = perfect moral.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'The Second Coming' written by the Nobel laureate, W.B. Yeats. This poem depicts the poet's serious reflections on the anarchy spread in the world. Everything is going out of control and there is complete chaos in the world.

Explanation: The poet beautifully presents the picture of a falcon that is flying in widening circles. It can't hear the voice of its trainer.

Things are disintegrating. There is no central force to control. Blood is being shed everywhere. Innocence has vanished from the scene. So we see, in these lines the poet has compared man to a hawk and religion to the trainer. Man is let loose and doesn't care for what religion preaches. These lines depict dark and gloomy picture of the world.

Stanza 2

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.
 Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

Word-Meanings: 1. conviction = faith, belief; 2. passionate = full of fillings intensity: of a high degree; 3. revelation = incarnation of God (here); 4. at hand = very near Second Coming = second incarnation of Jesus Christ

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Second Coming' Composed by W.B. Yeats. In this poem, the poet expresses his resentment over the sin and anarchy which have disintegrated the world. All the good values have given place to vices. He hopes that God will reincarnate to relieve this world of sin and misery.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet says that the world has become full of bad persons and bad feelings. Even the best people have lost faith. The worst people are over powered with sinful feelings. At this time of faithlessness, the poet believes that the truth will be restored. Jesus Christ will come again in this world. So the poet is hopeful that the time of 'incarnation' has arrived.

Stanza 3

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow things, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

Word-meanings: 1. vast = huge, big; 2. Spiritus Mundi = vast store of images in our spirit; 3. gaze = stare; 4. pitiless = merciless; 5. indignant = annoyed.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from "The Second Coming" written by W.B. Yeats. In this poem, the poet paints the picture of a world which is full of sin, blood and anarchy. He feels that this

is the most appropriate time for the incarnation of God. So he eagerly looks forward to the 'Second Coming' of Christ.

Explanation: The poet thinks of the second coming of Christ. Hardly has he uttered the words 'Second Coming' when he sees a vast image. There is a big, horrible creature in the desert. It looks like the sphinx. It has a lion's body and the head of a man. The looks of this creature lack mercy like those of the sun. The birds of the desert feel terrified and are circling over this figure. The shadows of the birds are visible on the sand of the desert.

These lines express the poet's firm belief and optimism about the coming of God.

Stanza 4

The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twentieth centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Word-meanings: 1. Vexed = tossed about (here); 2. nightmare = a bad horrible dream 3. rocking cradle = reference to the infant Christ; 4. Bethlehem = the birthplace of Christ for the first coming.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been extracted from the poem 'The Second Coming' beautifully composed by W.B. Yeats. In this poem, the poet presents the picture of the early decades of the 20th century. The modern world is full of anarchy. The central force of religion has become weak and people don't care for the voice of 'the good'. He hopes that the second coming of Christ is near. Suddenly, he watches a big and horrible figure in the desert. The poet is unable to understand its full significance but he is quite convinced that it is the second coming of Christ.

Explanation: In these lines, the poet shows that darkness comes over again. The image has disappeared. The poet believes that civilization and barbarism follow each other alternatively. After Christ, the world has experienced twentieth centuries of anarchy so it is the right time for God to come out of the deep sleep and take birth. The poet feels that the beast might be the reincarnation of Christ, though he is in the terrifying form. The poet says that the beast is slowly moving towards Bethlehem to be born again.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Stanza 1

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Here anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

Questions

1. Name the poem and the poet?
2. What do 'the falcon' and 'the falconer' stand for ?
3. Explain the phrase 'things fall apart'
4. What is the condition of the centre?
5. What does the poet see everywhere?
6. What has happened to 'innocence'?

Answers

1. The name of the poem is 'The Second coming' and its poet is W.B. Yeats.
2. 'The falcon' stands for man and 'falconer' stands for religion. Man doesn't hear the voice of religion.
3. It means disintegration in the world.
4. The centre has lost its power and attraction over the circle.
5. The poet sees anarchy everywhere.
6. Innocence has vanished from the world.

Stanza 2

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow things, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

Questions

1. Why does the poet think of the second coming?
2. What happens when the poet utters the words 'The Second Coming'?
3. What does the poet mean by 'Spiritus Mundi'?
4. What troubles the poet's sight?
5. Describe the huge figure?
6. What are the desert birds doing?

Answers

1. The world is full of sins so the poet thinks of the second coming of God to relieve the world of its misery.
2. A vast and huge figure appears.
3. By 'spiritus Mundi' the poet means the vast store of images in our spirit.
4. A big beast like figure troubles the poet's sight.
5. The figure has the body of a lion and the head of a man.
6. The desert birds are reeling about the beast.

Short-Answer Questions

Q.1 Narrate Yeats' depiction of the contemporary scenes in the early years of the 20th century?

Ans. 'The Second Coming' belongs to the maturer and later years of Yeats' poetic career. He was an Irish by birth. When he composed this poem, Ireland was facing widespread bloodshed. There were the Easter Rebellion (1916), The Irish Civil war and the Great war. He was very sad to see the world disintegrating into selfish spheres. He was watching the downfall of moral values. Corruption and anarchy were the ruling forces. The poet has deftly depicted the contemporary scene in his poem. Moreover, he has presented his belief that the time of the 'second coming' of God has come near.

Q.2. Write a note on symbolism in 'The Second Coming'?

Ans. The symbolism of the poem 'The Second Coming' is remarkable and superb. In the starting, the poet shows a falcon which symbolizes the active or wanton mind and the falconer is the soul or the

morality of a man. The brain guided by rationalism doesn't listen to what morality teaches. In this way, we are heading towards destruction and disintegration. Then he depicts the huge image whose source is our spirit. He wishes to convey the message that Christian forces are dying and to reestablish them good forces will arrive on the earth.

Q.3. What is the vision that the poet sees in the desert?

Ans. The poet sees a huge figure in the desert. It has the body of a lion and the head of a man. It is moving slowly in the desert. The looks of the creature are awe-inspiring and pitiless like the sun. The poet thinks that the beast is going towards Bethlehem to be born. This will be the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Essay Type Questions

Q.1 Out line the major themes of the poem?

Ans. W.B. Yeats is a puritan by heart. He is melancholic at the disappearing of moral values from the society of the twentieth century. The world is full of chaos and anarchy. The poet believes that civilization and barbarism occurred in alternating phases of two thousand years. With the birth of Christ, barbarism came to an end. Culture and civilization came into being but now they have run their course of two thousand years. The twentieth century has come and there is upheaval in the world. Goodness and innocence have disappeared from the scene. People are full of sinful passions. These conditions show that the world has reached the highest limit of barbarism. So this is the perfect time for the incarnation of God. Only the 'second coming' will relieve the world of its misery.

Another theme of the poem agrees with the Indian philosophy—'whenever there is evil in excess, God himself takes incarnation'. The forces of evil are defeated by those of goodness. That is why the big beast like figure is slowly moving towards Bethlehem. The birth place of Christ. It will be reborn. Then the sufferings and disorder will come to an end. Only the 'second coming' of Christ can restore peace and religion in the world. So the poet ends with an optimistic note.

Q. 2. Sum up in your own words the development of thought in the poem and also underline the mood of the poet in the poem?

Ans. This is a very beautifully composed poem by W.B. Yeats. The poet develops the theme with the help of some remarkable symbols. In the beginning, a falcon is shown moving in a widening circle. It goes beyond the limit and control. It doesn't hear the voice of the falconer. Even the centre cannot control the movement. The world is full of anarchy. There is violence and blood shed everywhere. Moral values have converted into sinful passions. Purity and innocence are in danger of extinction. Faith and conviction have been uprooted from the hearts of even noble persons. In this sad and melancholic atmosphere, the poet develops a ray of hope and optimism. He says that all this disorder shows that a second incarnation of Jesus is about to appear. As this idea comes to his mind, he sees a huge creature in the desert. It is a mixture of intellect and power.

As it has the body of a lion and the head of a man, the birds of the desert are terrified to see it and they start reeling around its head. The figure is moving towards Bethlehem so that it can take second birth. The poet is quite convinced that it is the second coming of Jesus. But this time Christ is coming in a different form to give salvation to this world.

The mood of the poet is sad and pensive. He sees that old values are diminishing, the world is disintegrating and the society is destabilizing. But in the end, he gets convinced that the time of revelation has come. Everything will be changed very soon. So he ends on a hopeful note.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Give the symbolic meanings of the falcon and the falconer?

Ans. The falcon stands for the over-active and brain and the falconer stands for spirituality. The brain doesn't hear the voice of the soul or the religion.

Q. 2. What does the poet mean by 'centre cannot hold'?

Ans. It means that there is no binding force at the centre (religion).

Q. 3. What does the poet mean by 'the blood-dimmed tide is loosed'?

Ans. It means that there is blood shed all around in the world.

Q. 4. What does the poet say about innocence?

Ans. The poet says that innocence has disappeared from the world.

Q. 5. Who lacks conviction?

Ans. Even the best people lack conviction.

Q. 6. What does the poet mean by revelation?

Ans. The poet means the 'reincarnation of God'

Q.7. What do you understand by 'spiritus mundi'?

Ans. It means the vast store of images in our spirit.

Q. 8. What does the poet see?

Ans. The poet sees a huge creature in the desert.

Q. 9. How is the gaze of the beast?

Ans. The gaze of the beast is blank and pitiless.

Q. 10. Describe the body and head of the creature.

Ans. The creature has a lion's body and a man's head.

Q. 11. Who are reeling about the beast?

Ans. The birds of the desert are reeling about the beast.

Q. 12. Where is the beast going?

Ans. The beast is going to Bethlehem, the birth place of Christ.

Q. 13. Why is the best going to Bethlehem?

Ans. He is going there to be born.

Journey of the Magi

T S Eliot

Introduction to the Poet

T S Eliot (1888-1965) was one of the most famous poets, dramatists and the critics of the twentieth century. He was born in the United State of America and got the best possible education. He came to London during the world war-I and became a British citizen. His representative poem 'The Wasteland' (1922) expresses his disgust with the rootlessness of the modern life. He presents the modern world as a spiritual wasteland. He makes use of an unconventional kind of poetic language and imagery in his poetry and drama. In criticism also T S Eliot exhibits an originality of approach.

About the Poem

'Journey of the Magi' has been written in the form of a dramatic monologue. The poem is based on an episode in the Bible relating the birth of Jesus Christ. The Magi are the three wisemen from the east who came to Bethlehem where Jesus Christ was born in order to greet him. They were guided by a bright star in there journey. In this poem one of the magi is narrating experiences of journey which were very difficult. The poem is difficult because of various symbols. The poet perhaps wants to convey the idea that it is not merely a biblical story. It perhaps indicates a journey of man from his birth to death.

Detailed Summary

The poem deals with the three wisemen of the east. They were learned people and had some knowledge about the birth of Jesus Christ. One night they saw a new star in the sky and immediately knew that Jesus Christ had been born. They collected precious gifts and started towards the place of Christ's birth. They were guided by the bright star in the sky. The star at last stopped over the hut in Bethlehem where Christ was born. They greeted the child Christ, presented their gifts and came back. In the poem T S Eliot presents one of the Magi who describes the whole journey.

When the Magi started their journey it was very cold time of the year. The journey was long and the season to undertake such a journey was the worst. So they had to face many difficulties.

The camels refused to move on. The camelmen ran away saying that they wanted wine and women. The magi could bring them back only with great difficulty. The Magi had to pass the nights in the bone chilling snow. Sometimes there was no fire to warm them. The villages and cities they pass through were dirty and hostile. The people they got things from treated them. The Magi on many occasions repented for their decision for undertaking such a journey. But they somehow continued.

Finally, the magi reached the beautiful valley. The weather was pleasant. Then they reached a place where three people were gambling. They did not know anything about Christ. The Magi continued their journey till they reached Christ. In this way the end of the journey could be satisfactory. Yet the Magi were not very happy. As the people did not give up their old rotten beliefs. The speaker speculates about the nature of life in the context of Christ's birth.

Stanza 1

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey;
The ways keep and the weather sharp,

The very dead of winter'.

Word-meanings: 1. a cold coming = a difficult time; 2. ways = deep valleys; 3. sharp = very cold; 4. dead of winter = the coldest period of winter season.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Journey of the Magi' written by T S Eliot. The Magi who were the wisemen of the East undertook a long and difficult journey to greet the baby Christ. T S Eliot brings out the difficulties faced by the Magi during the journey.

Explanation: One of the Magi is describing the difficulties they faced during their journey. The Magi began the journey on a cold morning. Christ was born on 25th December. So it was the worst period of the winter season when they started the journey. The path was difficult and the weather was at its chilliest.

Stanza 2

And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The Summer places on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.

Word-meanings: 1. galled = angry and irritable; 2. refractory = ill mannered; 3. grumbling = complaining; 5. hostile = showing enmity.

Reference to the Context: Those lines have been taken from the poem "Journey of The Magi" written by T S Eliot. In these lines T S Eliot describes the difficulties faced by the Magi as they went to greet the baby Christ.

Explanation: In these lines one of the Magi describes the hardships they encountered on their way. The path was so difficult that the camels became sorebooted and rebelled. On such occasions the Magi regretted that they have set out on a journey like this. They remembered their summer palaces and the beautiful girls who brought sherbet for them.

The weather was very harsh and the camel men cursed and tried to run away. They wanted to have their liquor and women. The Magi passed through hostile cities and dirty villages. It was indeed a very difficult time for them.

Stanza 3

At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Word-meanings: 1. sleeping in snatches = Sleeping deeply at intervals.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Journey of the Magi' written by T S Eliot. Here the poet describes the hardships faced by the Magi on their way to greeting Jesus Christ.

Explanation: In these lines one of the Magi describes how they had a hard time. At last they decided to travel at night. In between they would snatch some time to sleep. In their dreams they would hear some voices which told them it was a foolish thing to go on a journey like this.

Stanza 4

Then at dawn we came down to temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,

With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
 And three trees on the low sky.
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.

Word-meaning: 1. temperate valley = pleasant valley; 2. smelling of vegetation = symbolizing the birth of life; 3. galloped = ran fast.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Journey of the Magi' written by T S Eliot. In these lines one of the Magi describes the hardships of their journey to Jesus Christ.

Explanation: In these lines the travellers reach a valley where the atmosphere is neither hot nor cold. They smelt vegetation. There was a running stream and a watermill full of light. At a distance they could see three trees. They could also see an old white horse galloping in the meadow.

Critical comments: After a long journey of hardships the Magi now finally reach a valley. The valley and the vegetation, the running stream, the water mill, the three trees and the white horse they all are symbols of life and hope. It means that now the Magi are about to reach their destination. In fact Christ himself is the symbol of life and salvation.

Stanza 5

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

Word-meanings: 1. tavern = inn; 2. lintel= a piece of wood or stone covering the door or window; 3. dicing = gambling; 4. wine-skins = Lather bottler to hold wine.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Journey of the Magi' written by T S Eliot. Here one of the Magi is presenting his experiences during the journey they made to greet the baby Christ.

Explanation: In these lines the Magi reach an inn where they find three persons gambling and drinking. They were ignorant about the great event of the birth of Jesus Christ, the saviour of man kind. At last they reached the place where Christ was born in the evening. It was a happy moment for them.

Stanza 6

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

Word-meanings: 1. evidence = proof; 2. agony = pain; 3. dispensation = system; 3. alien = strange.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Journey of the Magi' written by T S Eliot. Here T S Eliot presents the reaction of one of the Magi regarding the outcome of the journey.

Explanation: The speaker recalls that finally their terrible journey proved to be fruitful. He recalls that they had undertaken this hard journey long way back and if given an opportunity he would be willing to undertake the journey once again. He has not been able to decide whether they undertook the journey for

birth or death. It was birth indeed because they had witnessed the birth of Jesus Christ. It was a spiritual rebirth of mankind. But it was also the death of old faiths. They came back to Bethlehem but they did not feel comfortable in their own lands. They accepted Christianity but their own people did not like it. So he wishes for death. So that he can go away from the pagan world and is born again in the spiritual sense.

Important Passages for Comprehension

Stanza 1

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer places on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

Questions

1. At what time of the year did the Magi begin their journey?
2. How did the camels behave during the journey?
3. Why did the Magi regret?
4. What did they remember?
5. What does the impression 'silken girls' mean?

Answers

1. The Magi began their journey when the winter season was at its peak.
2. The camels were irritated and did not want to go on.
3. The Magi regretted having undertaken this journey because they had never expected such hardships.
4. They remembered their summer palaces where beautiful girls would bring sherbet to quench their thirst
5. The expression means girls wearing silken clothes, or girls with flawless silk-like skin.

Stanza 2

Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Questions

1. What were the camel men doing?

2. What did they want?
3. What were the conditions at night?
4. How did they find the cities and the villages?
5. What strategy did they adopt?

Answers

1. The camel men were cursing and grumbling and trying to run away from the scene.
2. They wanted their liquor and women.
3. It was very cold at night. The night fires went out quickly and there was no shelter available to them.
4. They found the cities unfriendly; the villages were dirty and the villagers charged high rates from them.
5. They decided to travel at night. They tried to sleep in snatches.

Stanza 3

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,
 With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
 And three trees on the low sky.
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

Questions

1. Where did they come at dawn?
2. What did they find there?
3. What was the old white horse doing?
4. What are the three men doing at the tavern ?
5. Did the men at the tavern had any information about the birth of Christ?

Answers

1. They came to a pleasant valley at dawn.
2. They found that there was a smell of vegetation, it had a running stream and three trees.
3. The old white horse was galloping in the meadow.
4. The three men are drinking and gambling at the tavern.
5. No, they did not have any information

Stanza 4

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and not doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

Questions

1. What does the expression in the second line, "I would do it again mean"?
2. What question was troubling the speaker?
3. Why were they not comfortable in their own home?
4. Why was the speaker glad of another death?
5. What is the meaning of 'birth' 'death' in the fifth line?

Answers

1. It means that he would undertake another journey in case Christ were born again.
2. The question that was troubling the speaker was they were celebrating the birth of Christ or their own death. Death would be in the nature of redemption for the Magi can be born as Christians.
3. They did not feel comfortable in their own house because their people still clung to their old gods and did not recognize Christ as their saviour.
4. The speaker was glad of another death because this would mean the death of all heathen beliefs.
5. The meaning of 'birth' and 'death' is not the birth of Christ only. Death also meant salvation for the mankind.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. Discuss the poem "Journey of the Magi" as a dramatic monologue ?

Ans. A dramatic monologue is a poem in which a character speaks to a silent or invisible audience. A situation is dramatically presented. In the 'Journey of the Magi' one of the three Magi is speaking to the other two Magi. He speaks about the various experiences but in the process and through his speech, reveals his own character also. We come to know about him as a sensitive man.

Q. 2. What is the meaning of 'Birth' and 'Death' as revealed in the poem?

Ans. The birth of Christ means the birth of joy and hope. It is also the birth of a new faith. This faith inspired people to give up idol worship. Death also meant the death of old beliefs. The death of Christ also symbolized redemption for the mankind. Thus, birth and death acquire the same meaning in the poem. If death means the ending of some old faith, birth means a new beginning.

Q. 3. Discuss the hardships faced by the Magi?

Ans. The journey undertaken by the Magi was difficult. The Magi began their long journey in the month of December when the winter season was at its worst. During their long journey their camels got injured and camel men revolted. They had to spend their nights under the open sky. The towns that they passed were hostile and villages dirty. In this way the journey was difficult.

Q. 4. Why was the journey important to the Magi and what did it signify?

Ans. The journey was important for the Magi. They understood that the birth of Christ brought about a new era of love and compassion. When Christ was born, spiritual values were at their lowest. People believed in strange and nasty gods. So, the journey symbolizes the qualities of hope and joy.

Q. 5. What did the Magi find in the valley?

Ans. After a long and difficult journey the Magi reached the pleasant valley. The weather was moderate here. They witnessed a stream on whose banks there was a watermill also. They also saw three trees on the horizon.

They also saw a white horse galloping. These were good omens and soon they were able to reach the baby Christ in Bethlehem.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. Give a brief account of the journey of the Magi as described in the poem 'Journey of the Magi'?

Ans. The Magi who were the three wisemen of the east decided to greet the baby Christ at Bethlehem. They were guided in their journey by a new bright star in the sky. The star led them to Bethlehem and shone over the manger where Christ was lodged. They saw Christ, paid their homage to him and they came back. In this poem one of the Magi is giving the details of the journey undertaken by them. They started when the winter session was at its peak. They faced great difficulties all the way. Their camel got injured and irritated. They refused to move further. Their camelmen revolted and tried to run away. They said that they want their women and wine. It was a very difficult time for them. They passed through unfriendly cities and dirty villages. The people in the villages tried to cheat them. Ultimately they decided that they would travel by the night.

Ultimately they reached a pleasant valley. There was a smell of vegetation. There was a stream running nearby and a water mill working on its banks. There was an old white horse also galloping nearby. At last, they were near the end of the journey. They saw baby Christ and then came back trying to understand the meaning of birth and death.

Q. 2. Write a note on the theme of the poem. "Journey of the Magi"?

Ans. 'Journey of the Magi' is a poem of redemption. It deals with the theme of man's spiritual yearnings. The Magi were the three wisemen of the east. One day they saw a new bright star in the sky. They came to realize that Jesus Christ had been born. They understood that Christ was the saviour of mankind. They decided to go and greet him. So, one winter morning they set out for a journey. They followed the bright star. After a very long and difficult journey they reached the birth place of Christ. They paid their respect to the baby Christ and came back. After the journey was over one of the Magi looks back at the whole journey. He tries to understand the significance of the journey. It was a spiritual experience for him. The birth of Christ meant a spiritual rebirth. It was the symbol of regeneration but it was also the death of old beliefs. He was full of joy for a new birth but was sorry that people of his land were still clinging to old beliefs.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Was the weather suitable for the journey?

Ans. No, it was not. It was the worst time of the winter season.

Q. 2. What happened to the camels?

Ans. They were irritated and injured.

Q. 3. What did the travellers remember?

Ans. They remembered the summer places, the terraces and beautiful girls bringing 'sherbet' for them.

Q. 4. How did the camelmene react?

Ans. They cursed and grumbled and tried to run away.

Q. 5. What did they want?

Ans. They wanted their liquor and women.

Q. 6. Did the travellers get shelter at night?

Ans. No, they did not get shelter at night.

Q. 7. How did the travellers find the cities?

Ans. They found them unfriendly.

Q. 8. What strategy did they adopt to travel?

Ans. They traveled at night.

Q. 9. What kind of a valley did they reach?

Ans. They reached a pleasant valley.

Q. 10. What did they find in the valley?

Ans. They found vegetation, a running stream, three trees and an old white horse.

Q. 11. What do the above things signify?

Ans. They signify life, rebirth and regeneration.

Q. 12. Who did the travellers meet at the tavern?

Ans. They met three gamblers at the tavern.

Q. 13. What were they doing?

Ans. They were gambling and drinking wine.

Q. 14. What did the birth of Jesus Christ mean to the Magi?

Ans. It meant the rebirth of life, hope and joy.

Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night

Dylan Thomas

Introduction to the Poet

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) was a Welsh poet. He started his career as a journalist but later on switched over to writing film-scripts and writing and reading of poetry. Dylan Thomas is known more for his experiments with the use of language rather than his concern for human issues. He believes in the unity of experience. He projects the idea that we are connected with the world we live. His poetry is dedicated to 'the love of man in praise of God'.

Brief Introduction to the Poem

'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' was published in 1951. It is a personal poem written for the poet's own father, who lay dying. The poet wants his father not to give in but to struggle against impending death. The poem is a protest against the idea of accepting death stoically the way most religions and philosophies of the world advocate while admitting the inevitability of death, the poet exhorts us to play the warrior, struggling to save life till the last. Thus the poem is a protest against those philosophies that advocate accepting death calmly and stoically. The poet believes in struggling against death and trying to remain alive as long as one can. No doubt, death is reality. It is inevitable. But we should not bow to the inevitable without giving a struggle. We should play the warrior in our struggle against death. So this poem is a protest against the conventional acceptance of death. In this poem, death has been seen as a kind of challenge. Man must accept this challenge and fight against it. This poem deals with philosophic contemplation.

Examination-Style Questions

Word-Meanings and Critical Commentary or Reference to the Context/Explanation

(Lines 1—6)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Word Meanings: 1. gentle = not violent, mild; 2. rave = protest; 3. forked no lightning – composed no poetry; 4. good night = death; 5. dark is right = the inevitability of death is suggested; 6. burn = to become excited.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night'. This poem has been written by Dylan Thomas. In this poem the poet believes in struggling against death and trying to remain alive as long as one can. No doubt, death is reality. It is inevitable. But we

should not bow to the inevitable without giving a struggle. We should play the warrior in our struggle against death. He cites many examples in this context.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that death is inevitable. But the poet exhorts us to play the warrior, struggling to save life till the last, wisemen know that death is inevitable. They know that death is a fact which cannot be denied. Even then they do not go gentle into that good night. It means they do not accept death passively. They do not dismay even if their words or writings have failed to produce any illumination among the people. They want to be known by people in their life time because after death their deeds may look very small. They think that if they could live longer, they would spread their good deeds to the world. So they fight angrily against the fading light of life. They keep their spirits up to the end of their life. As this poem is addressed to the poet's father who lay dying, the poet wants his father to rage and rage against the dying of the light.

(Lines 7—12)

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Word-Meanings: 1. frail = weak; 2. bay = a wide opening along a coast; 3. wild men = proud and arrogant men; the last wave by = when they near death; 4. the sun in flight = the youth that was passing; 5. grieved it = misused it; 6. on its way = during its period of youth.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night'. This poem has been written by Dylan Thomas. In this poem the poet believes in struggling against death and trying to remain alive as long as one can. No doubt, death is reality. It is inevitable. But we should not bow to the inevitable without giving a struggle. We should play the warrior in our struggle against death. He cites many examples in this context.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that good men spend their life by doing noble deeds. But when they are near death they realize how ineffective their deeds have been. They regret that they wasted the happy hours of their life in doing serious work only. They did not spend the life on eating, drinking and being merry. So when they are very close to their death they want to sing and dance. They rage and rage against death. They struggle with all their might to keep the light of their life alive.

Then the poet takes the example of wild men who are the opposite of good men. They spend all their youth period in seeking pleasures. They enjoy the life of eating, drinking and being merry. They pass their youthful days in singing, dancing and merry making. When their, this period of pleasure, that is youth, is past, they start grieving that they have misused it. Now they try to do good deeds. Then such men also do not go gentle into that good night. It means they also do not accept death passively. They struggle against death to their last breath. The poet means to say that nobody wants to die. Everybody wants to live a long life.

(Lines 13—18)

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray
Do not go gentle into that good night
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Word-Meanings: 1. meteors = shooting stars; 2. blinding sight = divine illumination; 3. curse bless = blessing is natural, and curse, because the son will take his father's place after death; 4. grave men = pious men; 5. blaze = shine; 6. blind eyes = the eyes of the ordinary men, those who cannot have a foresight of their death.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night'. This poem has been written by Dylan Thomas. In this poem the poet believes in struggling against death and trying to remain alive as long as one can. No doubt, death is reality. It is inevitable. But we should not bow to the inevitable without giving a struggle. We should play the warrior in our struggle against death. He cites many examples in this context.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that wild people lead a life of pleasure. But the serious minded people are proud and arrogant. But at the end of their lives, their eyes cannot see clearly. Their eyes become dim. Now they realize that nothing can stop death. Yet they hope to live. They wish that their eyes could regain their light and shine like bright stars. They want to fight against death to their last breath. The grave men see that if they had kept their eyes open to the light of life, they could have been happy. Religious men, when they are nearing their death, have a premonition of it. They know when their death is coming. Yet they do not give themselves quietly to death. The poet says that even those people who have no such premonition remain happy in their life till the last moment. They do not worry about death since they do not know when it will come. And when it comes, they struggle against it till the end.

The poet wants his father also not to give in to death, but struggle against it. He knows that death is inevitable. Yet one must struggle against it. The poet asks his father to bless him or curse him as he likes with all his emotion. But he should not just lie down and wait helplessly for death. He should rage and rage against the dying of the light. The poet prays to God who sits high above in heaven. He says that even God feels sad when He sees death on this earth. God may bless man with joys or curse him with sorrows. But the poet prays to him to show sympathy for man's love for life. God should shed tears at man's heroic fight against death. The poet once again advises readers not to accept death gently. He should fight against death till the end.

Comprehensions

(Lines 1—9)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
 Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
 Because their words had forked no lightning they
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
 Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Questions

1. Who wrote these lines and who are they addressed to?
2. What is meant by 'good night' in these lines?
3. What does the poet say about good men?
4. What do wisemen know at their end?
5. Explain the line: 'Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night'.

Answers

1. These lines are written by Dylan Thomas, and they are addressed to the poet's father who lay dying.

2. In these lines 'good night' means death, when man says 'good night' to the world and dies.
3. When good men are near the end of their life, they know how ineffective their deeds have been. They regret that they wasted the happy hours of their life in doing serious work only and never enjoyed themselves.
4. At their end wise men know death is a fact which cannot be denied. Even then they do not accept death passively.
5. 'Do not go gentle into that good night' means we must not accept death quietly and humbly. We should not go into that good night gently. We must struggle hard to live.

(Lines 10-19)

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
 And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
 Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
 And you, my father, there on the sad height,
 Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Rage, rage againse the dying of the light.

Questions

1. What do wild men learn too late?
2. What common thing does the poet point out between wild men and grave men?
3. Explain the phrase: 'On the sad height'.
4. Who do grave men see near their death?
5. What does the poet exhort his father to do?

Answers

1. Wild men spend all their youth in the pursuit of pleasures. When their youth is past, they start grieving that they have misused it.
2. The poet points out that both wild and grave men do not go gentle into the good night. They struggle to keep alive as long as they can.
3. 'On the sad height' means death is inevitable, yet one must struggle against it till the end.
4. Grave men have a premonition of death in their old age. They know when their death will come. Yet they do not give themselves quietly to death.
5. The poet exhorts his father not to give in to death, but struggle against death till the end.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. In what sense is the poem an acceptance as well as defiance of death? Explain the central idea of the poem.

Ans. The theme of the poem is courageous rebellion against death. The poet advises us not to submit to death meekly. Death is inevitable, but man should put up a heroic struggle against death. The central idea of the poem is clearly brought out in the last two lines:

'Do not go gentle into that good night
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light'.

The poet wants his father not to give in but to struggle against impending death. The poem is a protest against the idea of accepting death stoically the way most religions and philosophies of the world advocate. While admitting the inevitability of death, the poet exhorts us to play the warrior, struggling to save life till the last.

Q. 2. Explain in detail the poet's idea of heroism in facing death?

Ans. 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night' is a protest against the idea of accepting death stoically the way most religions and philosophies of the world advocate. While admitting the inevitability of death, the poet exhorts us to play the warrior, struggling to save life till the last. The poet believes that man should play the hero against death. He should fight it with all his might. It is true that death has come at last. It spares no one. But we must try toward it off for as long as we can. We should not let it overtake us so easily. The poet says:

'Do not go gentle into that good night

Rage, rage, against the dying of the light'.

So these lines clearly show the poet's idea of heroism in facing death.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. How do different men react to the inevitability of death?

Ans. In 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' Dylan Thomas shows that different people react differently to the inevitability of death. They are deeply religious men, the wild men, the good men and the wise men.

The poet says that no person accepts death meekly. Religious men have a premonition of death in their old age. They know when their death will come. Yet they do not give themselves quietly to death. They make every struggle against the dying of the light.

After religious men the poet takes up the wild men how they react towards death. Wild men are the opposite of good men. They spend all their youth in the pursuit of pleasures. And when old age comes, they realize that they have misused their youth. So they try to give themselves to some noble work. Thus such men also do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men spend all their life in doing good deeds. When they are close to death, they realize that their deeds have been too frail to produce any effect. They are filled with regret that they derived no enjoyment from life. So they want to sing and dance in their old age. So they also fight against death. And in the last the poet describes the reaction of wise men towards death. Wise men know that death is inevitable. Even then they do not bow to their death passively. In their old age, they do not dismay even if their words or writings have failed to bring any enlightenment among people. They keep their spirits up till the end of their life. They do not go gentle into that good night. In this way the poet concludes the poem by describing all kinds of people's struggle bravely against death. So the poet says to his father not to give in but to struggle against impending death. The poet says:

'Do not go gentle into that good night

Rage, rage against the dying of the light'.

Q. 2. Trace the development of ideas in Dylan Thomas's poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night'.

Ans. 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night' is a famous poem by Dylan Thomas. It was published in 1951. It is a personal poem written for the poet's own father, who lay dying. Perhaps, the father had accepted his death very passively and was considering himself already dead. But the poet wants his father not to give in but to struggle against impending death. The poet gives the examples of all sorts of people to encourage his father. He gives the example of wise men, good men, wild men and even deeply religious men.

First of all the poet describes the reaction of the wise men towards death. Wise men know that death is inevitable. Even then they do not bow to their death passively. In their old age, they do not dismay even if their words or writings have failed to bring any enlightenment among people. They keep their spirits up till the end of their life.

Good men spend all their life in doing good deeds. When they are close to death, they realise that their deeds have been too weak to produce any effect. They are filled with regret that they derived no enjoyment from life. So they want to sing and dance in their old age. They also fight against death.

Wild men are the opposite of good men. They spend all their youth in the pursuit of pleasures. And when old age comes they realise that they have misused their youth. So they try to give themselves to some noble work. Such men also do not go gentle into that good night.

The poet says that religious men have a premonition of death in their old age. Yet they do not give themselves quietly to death. They make every struggle against the dying of the light.

To conclude we can say that this poem is a courageous rebellion against death. The poet says:

‘Do not go gentle into that good night

Rage, rage against the dying of the light’.

The poet advises us not to submit to death meekly. Death is inevitable, but man should put up a heroic struggle against death. He should not make the moment of his death tame by surrendering to death gently. It is in his fight with death that man show his love of life. He should express his anger and grief through tears at the disappearance of the light of life from this world.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Who is the writer of the poem ‘Do not Go Gentle Into That Good Night’.

Ans. Dylan Thomas.

Q. 2. How should old age behave at the time of death?

Ans. Old age should burn with anger and fight against death.

Q. 3. Who do the good men cry about?

Ans. They cry that their actions might have flourished if the conditions had been favourable.

Q. 4. What do the wisemen learn at the time of death?

Ans. They learn that death is reality.

Q. 5. What do wild men learn too late?

Ans. They learn too late what they suffered in their lives.

Q. 6. What do grave men see near death?

Ans. They see that if they kept their eyes open to the light of life, they could have been happy.

Q. 7. What is meant by dying of the light?

Ans. It means death.

Q. 8. What does the poet pray to his father?

Ans. The poet prays to his father that he should curse or weep. But he should not accept death meekly.

The Unknown Citizen

W H Auden

Introduction to the Poet

W H Auden (1907 – 1973) was born in York, England. He was educated at Oxford and during this period he became the leader of a group of left-wing writers which included Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood and Louis MacNeice. In the great economic depression of the 1930's when England along with the whole western world was reeling under the upheavals resulting from closure of industries and business, leading to unemployment, Auden sought to express this turmoil and pain through his poetry. His early poetry is influenced by Marxism but later on there is a significant influence of Christianity also. In 1939, he became a citizen of America. He worked as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University from 1956 to 1961. His poetry is marked with a tinge of satire and irony.

Introduction to the Poem

"The Unknown Citizen" is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. This culture has a way of robbing human beings of all traces of individuality and reducing them to mere cogs in the industrial machine. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life, where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom. The unknown citizen has no name, only a number JS/07 M 378, leads a quiet existence, obeys all the rules of the game, follows all norms specified by the government and society. From birth to death, he leads a regular life. The biting satire comes in the concluding lines of the poem:

'Was he free? Was he happy?
The question is absurd:
Had any thing been wrong, we should certainly have heard.'

In fact, this poem is a satire on the modern civilization. The poet saw a statue raised in the memory of the unknown citizen. On this monument, the person's name was not written, but only his number was written. When he was alive he was known by this number. This man's record shows that he worked in a factory. He was a good worker and his employers were completely satisfied with his work. He was a member of his union and paid the dues of the union regularly. He was very popular among his friends and often drank wine with them. He was a successful man. He did all these things which were expected of a modern man. He purchased a newspaper daily. His reaction to the advertisements was average. He was insured. His health was good. He was admitted to hospital once but left it fully cured. He had all basic facilities of life. He changed his views according to situation. In peace, he was in favour of peace and when there was war, he was ready to fight by joining the army. In this age, he had five children which was a right number. He never interfered in the education of his children. He was an ideal citizen. He did all that his government needed from him. In the end, the question arises whether he was free and happy. But this question is foolish. If there had been anything wrong, it must have been written in his record. Thus, the poem shows that man has become a tool in the hands of various social, political and economic institutions.

Word-meaning and Critical Commentary

To JS/07/M/378

This Marble Monument is Erected by the State.
He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,
 And all the reports on his conduct agree
 That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned world, he was a saint,

Word-meanings: 1. JS/07 M 378 = Bureau of statistics refer to a man by number; 2. old-fashioned word = 'saint' not in the conventional sense, but a law abiding citizen who served not God, but the state; 3. Community = Society; 4. Conduct = behaviour.

Critical Commentary: The title and epigraph of this poem are a parody of a monument raised to the unknown soldier, which stands for thousands of other unknown soldiers. The citizen was unknown in the sense that nothing was known of him except what had been entered in the records of the state. And according to those records, he was an ideal citizen. There is satire in the very idea that a marble monument has been erected by the state to someone who is unknown. According to the records, he was one against whom there was no complaint. All reports on his conduct were good in the sense that he was a saint in the modern sense of the word. A saint in the modern sense of the word is not one who serves God but who serves the state. He served society in whatever he did.

Except for the War till the day he retired
 He worked in a factory and never got fired,
 But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
 Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
 For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
 (Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
 And our Social Psychology workers found
 That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

Word-meanings: 1. scab = an inconvenient workman who refuses to join the union on a strike; 2. Odd = whimsical; 3. master = fellow workmen; 4. Fudge Motors Inc = Company where the unknown citizen worked; 5. got fired = never dismissed from the post.

Critical Commentary: Bureau of statistics, and Fudge Motors Inc's records tell that the unknown citizen worked in a factory before the war. He followed all the conventions of the factory and this man was never dismissed from the job. He always worked to the satisfaction of his employers. The reports say that he was not an inconvenient workman who refuses to join the union on a strike. He was not whimsical in his views. He paid all the dues of the union.

The social psychologists said that he was popular with his fellow workers and he liked to take wine with them.

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
 And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
 Policies taken out his name prove that he was fully insured,
 And his Health-card shows he was once in a hospital but left it cured.
 Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
 He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
 And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
 A phonograph, a radio; a car and a Frigidaire

Word-meanings: 1. Press = radio, T.V., newspapers, Periodicals used as a news section for communication; 2. Policies = terms of a contract of insurance; 3. Instalment Plan = the system of buying things on instalment basis; 4. phonograph = gramophone; 5. Frigidaire = refrigerator; 6. Producers Research and High-Grade Living = Names of two firms.

Critical Commentary: The unknown citizen bought a newspaper every day and was guided by advertisements in making purchases. He was an ideal citizen because he behaved in a way that served the economic interests of all the commercial establishments - Hospitals, because they had not to spend much on his health-care; the press, because he bought a newspaper daily; Insurance companies, because he bought

from them fully insured policies; Sales Research Companies, because he bought things on the instalment plan and thus helped to boost their sales. He had phonograph, radio, car and refrigerator which are considered necessary to the modern man. The poet says that the modern man follows the crowd and has no individuality. Modern man does not hold any independent views on anything.

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
 That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
 When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
 He was married and added five children to the population,
 Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
 And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
 Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
 Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Word-meanings: Eugenist = a scientist whose research is centered on improving the human race through the birth of genetically 'desirable' children; absurd = foolish.

Critical Commentary: Auden employs subtle irony to show that the life of a man in modern society is shaped by the ridiculous obligations he is forced to fulfill. His individuality gets crushed under the regimented social set-up and he has to behave just like dumb-driven cattle. The modern man has lost his power of thinking independently. His views are shaped by the newspapers and other means of public propaganda. He talks in favour of peace when there is peace and he favours war when there is war. It is because the Press paints war as something horrible in times of peace, but praises it as a golden opportunity to defend the country's honour when the war actually breaks out. Thus, the modern man is swayed in his opinion by the institution of the press. He cannot think independently. The modern man is neither free nor happy, but such a consideration is irrelevant in the present day set-up. Even in the matter of producing children and in the education of his children he had no individual opinion. He was guided by the set-system or convention. But at the end of the poem, the poet raises a very searching question:

'was he free? was he happy?'

The answer is clear. But the state is not even prepared to consider this question. They call it an absurd question. They go only by their own records. Everything in their record is okay about him. So they say:

"Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard".
 But heard from where? Not from the man
 himself but from their own statistics
 which were collected on the basis of their own set patterns and questionnaires.

Type – 1

Explanation of Important Passages

(I)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
 One against whom there was no official complaint,
 And all the reports on his conduct agree
 That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned world, he was a saint
 For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet paints the picture of a perfect citizen, according to the standards laid down by the society. The title and epigraph of this poem are a parody of a monument raised to the unknown soldier, which stands for thousands of other unknown soldiers. The poet says the Bureau of statistics has collected data about the unknown citizen. The unknown citizen was a right person. There was no official complaint against him. His conduct report was also good. He was considered a saint because whatever he did was in the service of society.

(2)

Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the unknown citizen has no name, follows all norms specified by the government and society. He leads a quiet existence, obeys all the rules of the game. From birth to death he leads a regular life. He worked in the factory till the day he retired. His employer, Fudge Motors Inc. were fully satisfied with his work. Only once did he leave the factory. It was when there was war. He went for the war, and in that too he served the greater community. Thus he was a saint not in the conventional sense, but a law-abiding citizen who served not God, but the state.

(3)

Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the unknown citizen was not a rebel in his views and opinions. He conformed to all different establishments. The employers were satisfied with him and he was never dismissed. And his report was good. He always paid his union dues. He was not whimsical in his views. He always held the same views as others had. The department of social psychology found that he was popular with his fellow workers and liked drinking. The whole stress is one what establishments think of him, not on what the unknown citizen thinks of the establishments.

(4)

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day,
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in a hospital but left it cured.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the unknown citizen bought a newspaper every day and that is what the press expects everyone to do. He was considered an ideal citizen because he satisfied the expectation of all the different establishments. He satisfied the press. His reactions to the advertisements in the press were also normal in every way. He was guided by advertisements in making purchases. The insurance people were satisfied with him because all his policies were fully insured. The health establishment was satisfied with him because he did not bother them with frequent visits. His health card showed that he was only once in a hospital, but left it cured.

(5)

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that like the people of today, the unknown citizen also knew the advantages of purchasing things on instalments. Therefore, he had all those things which a man of today should possess, for example, a gramophone, a radio, a car and a refrigerator. The unknown citizen was considered an ideal citizen because he conformed to all the more different establishments. Business establishments often hold surveys to boost their sales. Producers Research and High-Grade living are two such establishments imagined by the poet. It was reported by these establishments that the unknown citizen was fully alive to the advantages of the instalment plan.

(6)

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year:
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the unknown citizen has no individuality. He is just a cog in the social machinery. He was considered an ideal citizen because he conformed to all the establishments. The thoughts of the unknown citizen on anything were not free. His opinions were always proper for the time of the year. This man had no independent opinions. He was a weather-cock that turned with the wind when there was peace, he talked in favour of peace. When there was war, he went for war. In this way he was an ideal citizen. He did all that his government wanted.

(7)

He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the unknown citizen followed the crowd. This man has no individual opinion. This man was considered an ideal citizen because he followed all the rules of various establishments. He believed what others believed. He did what others did. Auden's satire becomes delightfully forceful when he says that even in the matters of producing children, the modern man is led by the opinion of the related establishments. The poet satirically remarks, "he was married and added five children to the population... the right number for a parent of his generation". And in the matter of education also he never interfered. This showed that he was satisfied with the kind of education his children were having.

(8)

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong. We should certainly have heard.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Unknown Citizen' written by W.H. Auden. This poem is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life. Where intellectual and spiritual fulfilment have been substituted by more superficial yardsticks of happiness and freedom.

Explanation: In the last two lines of the poem, the poet raises a fundamental question – was he happy and free. The poet himself answers the questions and says that in the modern society these questions are absurd. Modern state cannot be concerned with the happiness of the individual. The modern man was considered an ideal citizen because he followed all the values of various establishments. In everything he did, he served the Greater Community. All the establishments were satisfied with his conduct. But the poet raises a very pertinent question. Was he free? Was he happy? The community says that had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard? The poet thinks that it is a foolish question. If there had been anything wrong, the government would have known that from records. The poet wants to convey the idea that the modern man is not free.

Type – II

Important Passages for Comprehension

(1)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
Or in everything he did he served the Greater Community

Questions

1. Who does 'He' in these lines refer to?
2. What did the Bureau of statistics find?
3. What do the reports say about his conduct?
4. Why has 'saint' been called as an old fashioned word?
5. What is meant hereby "The Greater Community"?

Answers

1. 'He' in these lines refers to the unknown citizen.
2. The Bureau of statistics found that the unknown citizen was one against whom there was no complaint. He was an ideal citizen.

3. The reports on his conduct were excellent in the sense that he was a saint in the modern sense of the word.
4. In the old fashioned word, a saint means one who faithfully follows the tenets of a religion. But the unknown citizen was not a saint in that sense.
5. 'The Greater Community' here is meant for society. In everything that the unknown citizen did, he followed the customs, conventions and traditions of the society.

(2)

Except for the War till the day he retired
 He worked in a factory and never got fired,
 But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
 Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
 For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
 (Our report on his Union shows it was sound)

Questions

- (1) Where did the man work and how long?
- (2) What were Fudge Motors Inc. satisfied about?
- (3) What do union reports say about the man?
- (4) What contradictory thing do you notice about the man described here?
- (5) What do you mean by the word 'scab'?

Answers

- (1) The man worked in a factory till the day he retired.
- (2) Fudge Motors Inc. were satisfied about the unknown citizen's work.
- (3) Union reports say about the man that he always paid his union dues. He was not a scab.
- (4) Contradictory thing about man is that though he was a worker in a factory he was not a scab.
- (5) The word scab means here, an inconvenient workman who refuses to join the union on a strike.

(3)

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
 He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
 And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
 A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
 Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
 That held the proper opinions for the time of year:
 When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.

Questions

- (1) What is meant by Installment Plan?
- (2) How do you think the modern man benefits by Inst. Plan?
- (3) What things are considered necessary to the Modern Man?
- (4) How do these lines show that the man had no individual opinion of his own?
- (5) What light do these lines throw on the Modern Man?

Answers

- (1) By Instalment Plan business firms book a common people to buy their products. The system of buying things on installment basis.
- (2) By Installment Plan the modern man benefits by having all the things that the modern man supposed to have.
- (3) A gramophone, a radio, a car and a refrigerator are considered necessary to the modern man.
- (4) The poet shows that modern man has no individuality. He is just a cog in the social machinery.
- (5) These lines throw light on the modern man that modern man followed the crowd. He was a weather-cock that turned with the wind.

(4)

He was married an added five children to the population,
 Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
 And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
 Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
 Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Questions

- (1) Who is a Eugenist?
- (2) Explain the satire in the words: 'the right number for a parent of his generation?'
- (3) What did the teachers like about the man?
- (4) Why do you think the question has been called absurd?
- (5) Was there really nothing wrong? Give your reasons?

Answers

- (1) Eugenist is a scientist whose research is centred on improving the human race through the birth of genetically desired children.
- (2) The unknown citizen did what others did. Even in the matter of producing children, he was guided by popular opinion.
- (3) The teachers liked that he never interfered with the education of his children.
- (4) The question is absurd because in a situation in which the unknown citizen is placed, the word 'freedom' and 'happiness' do not mean much.
- (5) There was everything wrong. There was no happiness and freedom.

Type – III

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. What are Auden's views on the nature of the individual and the society of the times?

Ans. 'The Unknown citizen' is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. This culture has a way of robbing human beings of all traces of individuality and reducing them to mere cogs in the industrial machine. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life, where intellectual and spiritual fulfillment have been substituted by mere superficial yardstick of happiness and freedom. The freedom and happiness of the individual are considered irrelevant.

Man has become just a cog in the social machinery. All his beliefs and actions are guided by social conventions. In other words, he follows the society in everything he does.

Q. 2. Bring out the main concerns of the poem 'The Unknown Citizen'

Ans. 'The Unknown Citizen' is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. This culture has a way of robbing human beings of all traces of individuality and reducing them to mere cogs in the industrial machine. A man in the present day world is judged not by his own personal qualities but by the level of his conformity to established standards. The greater the conformity, the better the individual. The protagonist in Auden's poem is considered a saint because in everything he did, he served the Greater Community. All his acts went to the benefit of the different establishments. But on the other hand, the establishments had little regard for the individual – the unknown citizen. In the end, the question arises whether he was free and happy. But this question is foolish if there had been anything wrong, it must have been written in his record. Thus the poem shows that man has become a tool in the hands of various social, political and economic institutions.

Essay-Type Questions

Q. 1. Attempt a character – sketch of the unknown citizen on the basis of your reading of the poem 'The Unknown Citizen'?

Ans. 'The Unknown Citizen' attacks the concept of a human being who is not much more than the product of all the economic, commercial and ideological pressure-groups which force him to conform to a standard pattern of life and thought. The Unknown Citizen has lost his individuality and has become a mere number. He is a tool in the hands of various social, political and economic institutions. The government has tight control over his actions and thoughts. He has to act and think according to the wishes of the state and society.

The unknown citizen has no name, only a number JS/07 M 378, leads a quiet existence, obeys all the rules of the game, follows all norms specified by the government and society. Man has become feelingless today. The unknown citizen worked in a factory till the day he retired. He satisfied not only his employers but also his union. He regularly paid all the dues of the union. He was not odd or whimsical in his ways or views. He held proper opinion for the time of year! He does not hold any independent views on anything. For example, when the government talks of peace, he supports peace. But when the government declares war, he joins the army and goes to fight. This means that he has no views of his own. In the same way, man does not decide for himself how many children he should have. He does not decide for himself what kind of education he should give them. All these things are decided by society or by the state.

The Unknown Citizen was sanked high by the Press also, because he bought a paper every day. His reactions to the advertisements in newspapers were normal in every way. The Unknown Citizen was fully alive to the advantages of the installment plan. He had got every thing necessary to the Modern Man.

Modern Man lives an artificial and mechanical life. He is neither free nor happy. But we judge him from his records. If this record speaks well of him, we take it for granted that he is a happy man. We do not bother to know the real man inside him.

The freedom and happiness of the individual are considered irrelevant. Man has become just a cog in the social machinery. All his beliefs and actions are guided by social conventions. In other words he follows the society in everything he does.

Q. 2 How is the poem 'The Unknown Citizen', a satire on the functioning of the modern state?

Ans. 'The Unknown Citizen' is a satire against life in the contemporary commercial culture of the western world. This culture has a way of robbing human beings of all traces of individuality and reducing them to mere cogs in the industrial machine. The poem projects Auden's anxiety over these developments in western life, where intellectual and spiritual fulfillment have been substituted by more superficial yard sticks of happiness and freedom. The unknown citizen has no name, only a number JS/07 M 378, leads a quiet existence, obeys all the rules of the game, follows all norms specified by the government and society. From birth to death, he leads a regular life. The biting satire comes in the concluding lines of the poem.

Was he free? Was he happy?

The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.'

In fact, this poem is a satire on the modern civilization. The poem was raised in the memory of the unknown citizen. On this monument, the person's name was not written. When he was alive he was known by this number. This man's record shows that he worked in a factory.

He was good worker and his employers were completely satisfied with his work. He was a member of his union and paid the dues of the union regularly. He was very popular among his friends and often drank wine with them. He was a successful man. He did all those things which were expected of a modern man. He purchased a newspaper daily. His reaction to the advertisements was average. He was admitted to hospital once but left it fully cured. He had all basic facilities of life. He changed his views according to situation. In peace, he was in favour of peace and when there was war, he was ready to fight by joining the army. In this age, he had five children which was a right number. He never interfered in the education of his children. He was an ideal citizen. He did all that his government needed from him. In the end, the question arises whether he was free and happy. But this question is foolish. If there had been anything wrong, it must have been written in his record.

Modern man lives an artificial and mechanical life. He is neither free nor happy. But we judge him from his records. If his records speak well of him, we take it for granted that he is a happy man. We do not bother to know the real man inside him. Thus the poem shows that man has become a tool in the hands of various social, political and economic institutions. So, this poem is a light satirical lyrical poem.

Objective-Type Questions

Q. 1. Who had erected a monument to the Unknown Citizen?

Ans. The Greater Community (the state)

Q. 2. How did the Unknown Citizen react the advertisement?

Ans. His reactions were normal in every way.

Q. 3. How many children did the unknown citizen have?

Ans. Five.

Q. 4. What did the teachers report about the Unknown Citizen?

Ans. They reported that he never interfered with the education of his children.

Q. 5. Name the writer of the poem, 'The Unknown Citizen'.

Ans. W.H. Auden.

Q. 6. What did the Union report about the Unknown Citizen.

Ans. The Union reported that he paid his dues?

Q. 7. Which factory did the Unknown Citizen work in?

Ans. Fudge Motors Inc.

Q. 8. Who did the Unknown Citizen serve in everything?

Ans. The Greater Community.

Q. 9. What did the Bureau of statistics find about the Unknown Citizen?

Ans. It found that there was no official complaint against him.

Q. 10. What number had been given to the Unknown Citizen?

Ans. JS/07 M 378

Q. 11. What does his health card reveal?

Ans. His health card shows that he was only once in hospital and left it cured.

Q. 12. What is considered necessary to the Modern Man?

Ans. Phonograph, radio, car and refrigerator are considered necessary to the modern man.

Q. 13. What was the report of social Psychology?

Ans. Social Psychology found that he was popular with his fellow workers and liked drinking.

Q. 14. Why was he considered a saint?

Ans. He was considered a saint because whatever he did was in the service of the society.

Q. 15. He did not interfere with the education of his children. What did it show?

Ans. This showed that he was satisfied with the kind of education his children were having.

Q. 16. Why does the poet say that it was foolish to ask if he was free and happy man?

Ans. The poet thinks that it is a foolish question. If there had been anything wrong, the government would have known that from records.

Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening

Robert Frost

Introduction to the Poet

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is one of the most important American poets of the twentieth century. He spent a large part of his life in the rural areas of New England, a region of the United States. On the surface his poetry is marked by simplicity and directness but then there are sudden complexities leading to a multiplicity of meanings. He gets his inspiration from nature and everyday experiences. There is a touch of realism in his poetry but we find a meditative quality in his poems also. There is an element of wit and humour through which he reveals the innate and hidden truths. Ironically, he achieved poetic success only after two of his earlier collections were, published in England, 'A Boy's will' (1912) and 'North of Boston' (1914). His poems not only talk about truth they also teach us wisdom. Frost himself comments about his poems that they begin in delight and end in wisdom.

Introduction to the Poem

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is one of the better known poems by Robert Frost. Frost himself said about his poems that they begin in delight and end in wisdom. This is a very simple and beautiful poem. The poem holds a special appeal for Indians as Jawaharlal Nehru chose the last stanza of the poem to focus on the defining aim of his life just before his death. In its simplicity, the poem captures a reflective mood amidst the delineation of the beauties of snow-wrapped woods in mid-winter. Beyond capturing moments of pure delight, the poem offers a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. Some pertinent questions about the omission of the speaker and the mystery of the place stir the reader's mind. Frost's own attitude towards nature is more complex than would meet the eye. The 'lovely, dark and deep' woods are fascinating, but the speaker must pass on to an unknown world on possibly some mysterious mission of either life or death. The reference to the horse's reluctance to stay there and the identity of the owner of the woods add to the complexity of the situation. On the first reading, this poem seems to tell nothing but a simple incident. A horse rider stops by the woods on his way. He is fascinated by their beauty. His horse gives his harness bells a shake. The rider is reminded of his mistake. He has no time to rest. He has to reach his promised goal. He has yet many miles to go. Only then he can think of any sleep or rest. This is all the poem tells us on first reading. But, on second reading, we find a deep symbolic meaning in it. The poem conveys a universal conflict in the human mind. It is the conflict between the call of duty and the temptation of physical pleasures. The woods in this poem are symbolic of physical pleasures. The poet says:

'The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
And miles to go before I sleep'.

Explanation of Important Passages

(Lines 1—4)

Whose woods these are I think I know
 His house is in the village though;
 He will not see me stopping here
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.

Word-meanings: 1. woods = forests; 2. watch = to see.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost. This poem is very simple and beautiful. On the surface it tells a very simple incident. But the poem has a hidden meaning. It suggests that we should not fall a prey to temptation when we have an aim in mind. We should prefer duty to pleasure.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the speaker stops by the forests on his way. It is snowing heavily and the woods are getting filled up with snow. The horse rider wants to take rest for some time in the lovely forest. He knows the owner of the forests. He also knows where he lives. He will not see the horse rider stopping there. He will not know that the traveller stopped there to watch the beautiful scene. The woods are here a symbol of worldly temptations. The falling of the snow symbolizes spiritual death. The underlying idea of the passage is that indulgence in worldly temptations leads to spiritual death.

(Lines 5—8)

My little horse must think it queer
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake
 The darkest evening of the year

Word-meanings: 1. queer = strange; 2. frozen = turned into ice.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost. This poem is very simple and beautiful. On the surface it tells a very simple incident. But the poem has a hidden meaning. It suggests that we should not fall a prey to temptation when we have an aim in mind. We should prefer duty to pleasure.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the horse must think it strange that his master has stopped in the jungle. There is no farm house nearby. The rider is between the jungle and the frozen lake. It is the darkest evening of the year. So in simple words we can say that on his way the rider has stopped by the forest's. No farm house is seen here. The little horse cannot understand why his rider has stopped there. On his one side, there are woods and on the other side, there is the frozen lake. The rider is standing between the two. The horse thinks it strange that his rider has stopped there though there is no farm house near by.

Here the horse is a symbol of man's conscience or the call of duty.

(Lines 9—12)

He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.

Word-meanings: 1. harness = equipment of a horse; 2. sweep = movement; 3. flake = very small loose mass of snow; 4. downy = soft like feathers; 5. easy wind = gentle wind.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost. This poem is very simple and beautiful. On the surface it tells a very simple incident. But the poem has a hidden meaning. It suggests that we should not fall a prey to temptation when we have an aim in mind. We should prefer duty to pleasure.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the horse shakes his bells. He wants to attract the attention of his master. The horse wants to know whether his master has made a mistake in stopping there. The atmosphere is very calm. This calmness is disturbed by the sound of the bells, the wind and the falling of

the snow. The only other sound that can be heard is the movement of the gentle wind and the falling of the snow-flakes.

The harness bells here symbolize the call of conscience or duty, and the snow-flakes symbolize worldly temptations.

(Lines 13—16)

The woods are lovely, dark and deep
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.

Word-meanings: 1. deep = depth; 2. lovely = beautiful; 3. dark = darkness; 4. promises = to keep words.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening’ by Robert Frost. This poem is very simple and beautiful. On the surface it tells a very simple incident. But the poem has a hidden meaning. It suggests that we should not fall a prey to temptation when we have an aim in mind. We should prefer duty to pleasure.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the scene is very beautiful. The atmosphere is very calm. At first, the rider decides to stop there. But his duty calls him. The horse rider is attracted by the beauty of the jungle. This jungle is dark and lovely. But the rider has no time to stop there. The woods are lovely, dark and deep, their beauty is captivating, but the rider cannot stop there. He has to reach some promised goal which is far away. He cannot think of resting till he reaches his goal. He says that he has miles to go before he can sleep. He has to keep his promises. He must fulfill those promises before he can think of sleep or rest. So this poem conveys a universal conflict. It is the conflict between the call of duty and worldly temptations. It goes on in the minds of all individuals. Some choose a life of duty and action while others get lost in worldly pleasures. The speaker in this poem, however, chooses the path of duty.

Stanzas For Comprehension

Lines (1—4)

Whose woods these are I think I know
 His house is in the village though;
 He will not see me stopping here
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.

Questions

1. What activity of nature is described in these lines?
2. Will he know if the poet stops in the jungle?
3. What does the poet know?
4. What is the situation described in the poem?
5. Name the poem and the poet?

Answers

1. The activity of nature is snowing in these lines.
2. No, he will not know if the poet stops there.
3. The poet knows the owner of these jungles.
4. The poet is passing through a jungle in the evening.
5. The name of the poem is ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowing Evening’ and its poet is Robert Frost.

Line (5—12)

My little horse must think it queer
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake
 The darkest evening of the year
 He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake

Questions

1. Whose horse is being referred to here?
2. What is the situation in these lines?
3. What will the horse think queer?
4. How does the poet describe the evening?
5. Who gives his harness bells a shake?
6. Why does he shake his bells?
7. What could be the mistake?
8. What is the only other sound?

Answers

1. The poet's horse is being referred to here.
2. The poet is passing through a forest in the evening.
3. The horse will think it queer that the poet has stopped there.
4. The poet says that it is the darkest evening of the year.
5. The poet's horse gives his harness bells a shake.
6. He shakes his bells to ask if there is mistake.
7. The mistake is that the poet has stopped there although, there is no farmhouse nearby.
8. The only other sound is the gentle wind and the falling snow.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. How does the poet describe the woods where he stops?

Ans. The poet says that the woods look beautiful. It is snowing gently. Near the woods there is a frozen lake. The scene is calm and beautiful. The poet says that the woods are lovely, dark and deep. There is no farmhouse nearby. It is dark, cold evening. The poet is fascinated by the beautiful sight of snow falling in the woods. The poet stops there to enjoy the beauty of the woods. But he does not stop for long and goes on.

Q. 2. What made the poet feel that he must break free of the spell of the snow-filled woods and move on?

Ans. The poet is charmed by the beautiful evening scene in the forest. The poet wants to stay there and enjoy its beauty. But his sense of duty urges him to go forward. He realizes that he has to fulfil a number of promises. He has to go a long way before sleep. When he thinks of the call of duty, he does not stop there and moves on his way.

Q. 3. What significance does the word 'sleep' have in the poem.

Ans. The word 'sleep' in this poem means 'rest'. This rest may be sleep in night and it may be sleep in death. So sleep becomes meaningful only when the promises have been fulfilled and the tasks have been done.

Q. 4. Comment on the last two lines of the poem?

Ans. The last two lines bring out the idea of going on towards one's goal and the importance of life's journey in relation to rest. Any rest becomes meaningful only after the tasks have been done and the promises have been fulfilled.

Essay Type Question

Q. 1. What is the central idea of the poem? Or

What is the message conveyed in the poem? Or

Bring out the sense of mystery and suspense in the poem? Or

The poem captures the reflective mood of the poet. Discuss? Give the summary of the poem?

Ans. 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is one of the better-known poems by Robert Frost. The poem holds a special appeal for Indians as Jawaharlal Nehru chose the last stanza of the poem to focus on the defining aim of his life just before his death. In its simplicity, the poem captures a reflective mood amidst the delineation of the beauties of snow-wrapped woods in mid-winter. Beyond capturing moments of pure delight, the poem offers a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. The lovely, dark and deep woods are fascinating, but the speaker must pass on to an unknown world on possibly some mysterious mission of either life or death. The reference to the horse's reluctance to stay there and the identity of the owner of the woods add to the complexity of the situation.

On the surface level, it is a very simple poem. But it has deeper meanings. On the surface level it is the story of a person who is passing through a jungle. It is a very dark evening and it is snowing heavily. The woods are getting filled up with snow. On one side of the rider, there are lovely woods that are dark and deep. On the other side is the frozen lake. The horse thinks it strange that his rider has stopped here. He wants to ask if there has been any mistake. He gives his harness bells a shake. The only other sound is that of the easy wind and the downy flakes. The rider is reminded of his mistake. He has no time to rest. He has to reach his promised goal. He has yet many miles to go. Only then he can think of any sleep or rest. This is all the poem tells us on first reading. But on the second reading we find a deep symbolic meaning in it. It advises us that if we want to achieve our aim we must not care for temptations in our way. The traveller did not stop to enjoy the beauty of the forest because he had an aim before him. When he stops, his horse shakes his bells. Here the horse is the symbol of man's conscience. It inspires man to do his duty. The dark jungle is a symbol of temptations. The journey is a symbol of man's life. Man must go on in spite of temptations.

Thus the poem conveys a universal conflict in the human mind. It is the conflict between the call of duty and the temptation of physical pleasures. The woods in this poem are symbolic of physical pleasures. The harness bells symbolize the call of duty. It is this conflict which the horse rider experiences in the poem. The speaker in this poem, chooses the path of duty. The poet says—

'The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promised to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.'

To conclude we can say that Frost's poem not only talk about truth, it also teaches us wisdom. It is true when the poet (Frost) said about his poems that they begin in delight and end in wisdom.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Does the narrator know the owner of the woods?

Ans. Yes, he thinks he knows the owner.

Q. 2. Where did the owner of the woods live?

Ans. He lived in the village.

Q. 3. Will he know if the poet stops in the jungle?

Ans. No, he will not know if the poet stops there.

Q. 4. Why did the narrator stop in the woods?

Ans. He stopped there to watch the woods fill up with snow.

Q. 5. What was the narrator riding on?

Ans. He was riding on a horse.

Q. 6. What did the horse probably think when the “poet” stopped in the woods?

Ans. The horse thought that its rider has made some mistake.

Q. 7. Was there any farmhouse near the woods?

Ans. No, there was not any farmhouse near the woods.

Q. 8. What had happened to the lake near the woods?

Ans. It was frozen.

Q. 9. What did the horse do and why?

Ans. The horse gave its harness bells a shake to ask its rider if there was some mistake.

Q. 10. The horse made a sound by shaking his harness bells. What other sounds were heard in the woods?

Ans. The only other sound was the falling of the soft flakes of snow.

Q. 11. What does the poet say about the beauty of the woods?

Ans. The poet says that the woods are lovely, dark and deep.

Q. 13. Why does the poet say he can't stay too long in the woods?

Ans. He says that he has promises to keep and miles to go before he can sleep.

Q. 14. How far was the destination of the poet?

Ans. It was yet miles away.

The Chariot

Emily Dickinson

Introduction to the Poetess

Emily Dickinson (1830-86) was born in a village in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the United States of America. She led a quiet life, writing poetry for her own enjoyment and to entertain her friends. She remained unmarried. Though she was not religious herself, the themes of her poetry were mostly religious. She achieved fame as a poet only after her death in 1886. The first volume of her poems was published posthumously in 1890. The major themes of her poetry relate to death, immortality, love, friendship and nature. Her poems are very simple in style. She wrote her poems in secret. She did not show her poem even to her family. She had written more than a thousand lyrics. She wrote about small pleasures brought by change of seasons of domestic incidents. Her style is precise, highly connotative and symbolic. She is closer to the Metaphysical poets in the compression of meaning in poetry.

Introduction to the Poem

"The Chariot," written around 1863, tries to capture mortal experience from the standpoint of immortality. The idea of death is treated without any of the emotions of fear, anxiety or pain that usually accompany the idea. It is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poet on a carriage ride to eternity. Another passenger in the carriage is immortality. Afterlife is therefore seen as an eternal journey. The image of the carriage and the driver is highly appropriate. The use of metaphor governs the structure of the poem. In this poem the poetess describes her imaginative experience of death. She speculates about the meaning of death and probes the mystery of life after death. 'The Chariot' is the best and the most reflective poem of Emily Dickinson. At the apparent level, the poetess describes a funeral procession upto the grave. But at the deeper level the poem describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

The poem is in the form of a narrative. The poetess personifies death as a courteous gentleman. Death meets her on the road of life. He takes her in his carriage for a ride. The poem describes this ride, and the feelings of the poetess during this ride. The ride is a symbol of man's last journey on this earth. The carriage is a symbol of the hearse.

In this poem death is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poetess on a carriage ride to eternity. Another passenger in the carriage is immortality. Thus life after death is seen as an eternal journey. The poetess had already guessed that the carriage was taking her to eternity.

Explanation of Important Passages

(Lines 1—4)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

Word-meanings: 1. labour = job; 2. He = Death; 3. carriage = chariot ; 4. held = had as riders ; 5. Immortality = deathlessness.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Chariot' by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poem describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that a man never stops to think about death in his life. But death does come one day. It ends man's journey on this earth. But that is not the final end. After the end of the mortal life on this earth, there is immortal life for us in Heaven. To conclude, we can say that the poetess was so busy that she had no time for death. But the death very gently stopped his chariot and the poetess gave up not only her work but her leisure also for him. She sat in the chariot of Death. There were only three passengers in the chariot – the poetess, death and immortality. Death himself was at the driver's seat. The poem is rich in personifications and symbolism. Death and Immortality have been personified as two gentlemen.

(Lines 5—8)

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

Word-meanings: 1. labor = Worldly work ; 2. leisure = spare time; 3. for his civility = as a mark of courtesy to him

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem "The Chariot" by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies Death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poem describes a spiritual journey that takes on the eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that one day Death himself came to her. He took the poetess for a ride in his Chariot. He drove his chariot very slowly. He was in no haste. The poetess says that she put away all her worldly activities to accompany Death. She gave up all the labour and leisure of her life. She did so in order to reciprocate the courtesy of Death. All the activities of man come to end with his death. But she accepts the fact of death calmly. There is no pain in her thought of death. To conclude we can say that the poetess honoured Death. She gave up not only her work but also her leisure for the sake of Death. Now she is sitting in the carriage along with death. Thus we find that Death is presented as a gentle friend, not a horrible thing.

(Line 9—12)

We passed the school where children strove
At recess in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun-

Word-meanings: 1. Scarcely = hardly ; 2. Strove = struggled ;

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem "The Chariot" by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies Death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poem describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that the chariot passed by a school. The children were playing there. They had hardly finished their lessons yet. Then the chariot passed by the fields. Crops were growing there. Grains were gazing at the riders. Lastly, the chariot passed by the setting sun.

In fact, the mind of the poetess goes back to the past. She thinks of the journey of life that leads ultimately to death. The school, the grain and the setting sun are respectively the symbols of childhood, youth and the old age. Thus these lines describe the journey to immortality.

(Line 14—16)

The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer, my gown,
My tipper, only tulle.

Word-meanings: 1. The = the setting sun ; 2. quivering = trembling; 3. gossamer = a thin fine fabric; 4. tippet = a scarf ; 5. tulle = a fine net material made of silk.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Chariot' by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies Death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poem describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that the setting sun passed by them. With the setting of the sun the air grew cold and wet. The poetess felt this chill because she was wearing only gossamer for her gown and a thin cloth for her scarf. The setting sun here is a symbol of old age. In this poem the poetess describes her imaginative experience of death.

(Lines 17—20)

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice in the ground.

Word-meanings: 1. Paused = stopped; 2. Swelling = rising heap; 3. Scarcely visible = could hardly be seen; 4. Cornice = an ornamental moulding of a wall below the ceiling; 5. but a mound = only a heap of earth; 6. Cornice = the invisible of the coffin lid

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Chariot' by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies Death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poem describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that the chariot stopped before a house. It was just like a swelling of the ground. The roof of this house was hardly visible. Its cornice was at the level of the ground. The house here is a symbol of the grave man's journey of life that ends in the grave. To conclude we can say that Death in this poem is described as a gentleman. He comes with his companion Immortality. They come in a Chariot. Death is like the bridegroom. The poetess is his bride. He has come to take the poetess on his chariot. At the end of the journey, they reach the house of death. They stopped before a house that looked like a grave. The roof of this house could hardly be seen. The cornice was a small mound. So here the concrete image of roof and cornice is identified with the grave.

(Lines 21—24)

Since then 'tis centuries; and yet
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity

Word-meanings: 1. Surmised = felt, guessed; 2. centuries = many hundred years; 3. eternity = heaven which is eternal and beyond death.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'The Chariot' by Emily Dickinson. In this poem the poetess personifies Death as a lover or a gentleman or a bridegroom. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poet describes a spiritual journey that takes one to eternity.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess says that centuries have passed since the end of that journey. And yet each of those centuries now seem to be shorter than a day even. The poetess says that even at the time of the ride, she had guessed that the chariot horses were leading her to eternity. In other words, she means to say that since her death she has lost count of time. For a dead man, time either flies very fast or moves very slowly. Now her soul is having a life of eternity. On the day of her death itself the poetess could guess that her body would be consigned to the grave but her soul would have its onward journey towards eternity. The given lines show the poetess's faith in the eternal life of soul after death. To conclude we can say that Death is a major theme in this poem. Death is also presented here subjectively. It also means loss. Death is here

personified as the bridegroom who comes with his friend to take away his bride. When the eternity is achieved, the power of death is no more.

Stanzas for Comprehension

(Lines 1—8)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.
We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

Questions

- (1) Name the poem and the poetess?
- (2) Who stopped for the poetess?
- (3) Who were in the carriage?
- (4) Was Death in haste?
- (5) What had the poetess done?

Answers

- (1) The name of the poem is 'The Chariot' and its poetess is Emily Dickinson.
- (2) Death stopped for the poetess.
- (3) There were Death, the poetess and Immortality in the carriage.
- (4) No, death was not in haste.
- (5) The poetess had given up her work as well as leisure for the sake of Death.

(Lines 17—24)

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice in the ground.

Since then 'tis centuries; and yet
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmise the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Questions

- (1) Name of the poem and the poetess?
- (2) What house does the poetess refer to?
- (3) Where was the cornice of the house?
- (4) How much time has passed since then?

(5) What did the poetess guess?

Answers

- (1) The name of the poem is 'The Chariot' and its poetess is Emily Dickinson.
- (2) The poetess refers to her grave.
- (3) The cornice of the house was underground.
- (4) Centuries have passed since then.
- (5) The poetess guessed that she was on the way to Eternity.

Short-Answer Questions

Q.1. Write briefly the theme of the poem 'The Chariot'.

Ans. The poem reflects the poetess's belief that body ends in death. Soul is immortal and after being liberated from the body, it attains eternal life. Emily Dickinson does not look down on Death as a feared and hated enemy. It is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poet on a carriage ride to eternity. Another passenger in the carriage is Immortality. Afterlife is therefore seen as an eternal journey.

Q.2. What is the significance of the carriage's passing by the school, the fields, and the setting sun?

Ans. The passing of Death's carriage by 'the school', 'the fields' and 'the setting sun' is quite significant. There is symbolism in these phrases. 'The school' 'the fields' and 'the setting sun' stand for the different stages of human life. They symbolize childhood, mature age and old age respectively.

Q.3. Write a note on personification and symbolism in the poem?

Ans. The use of personification and symbolism governs the structure of the poem. Death and Immortality have been personified as two gentlemen. They take the poetess to her grave in a most gentle, kindly and courteous manner. Death's carriage is said to pass by a school. Here children are playing and a wrestling match is going on. In fact, all this is symbolic. The children at play, suggest the vigour and vitality of life. The wrestling match is symbolic of the struggle in life. Also the school ground stands for childhood, ripe fields symbolise the mature age, and the setting sun is the symbol of old age. The mound-like house stands for the grave.

Q.4. Discuss the reasons for which the poetess, Emily Dickinson, did not stop for death. Base your answer on her poem, 'The Chariot'?

Ans. Emily Dickinson says that she had no time to think about death in her life. She remained all the time busy in worldly activities. She never spared time to think about death. The poetess is, in fact, telling a universal truth. Generally man never thinks about death in his life. The world is too much with turn. He thinks of death only when he nears the end of his life's journey.

Essay Type Questions

Q.1. Give the main theme of the poem 'The Chariot'?

Ans. 'The Chariot' tries to capture mortal experience from the stand point of immortality. The idea of death is treated without any of the emotions of fear, anxiety or pain that usually accompany the idea. It is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poet

on a carriage ride to eternity. Another passenger in the carriage is Immortality. Afterlife is therefore seen as an eternal journey. The image of the carriage and the driver is highly appropriate. The use of metaphor governs the structure of the poem. In this poem, the poetess personifies Death. She presents Death as a lover. She says that she had no time to think about Death in her life. She remained busy all the time in her worldly activities. Then one day Death himself came to her. He took the poetess for a ride in his chariot. There was another rider also in the chariot. It was Immortality. The poetess means to say that man does not think about death in life. But death does come one day. It ends man's journey on this earth. However, it gives man the gift of immortality.

Death is not in a hurry. He drives his chariot slowly. In other words, death comes slowly but surely. His chariot passed by a school. Children were playing there. Then the chariot passed by the grain fields. Lastly, the chariot passed by the setting sun. It is, in fact, a symbolical description of the different stages in man's life. The school, the grain fields and the setting sun are respectively the symbols of childhood, youth and old age.

After passing by the setting sun, Death's chariot stopped before a house. The house was just a swelling of the ground. The roof of the house was scarcely visible. Most of it was buried in the ground. Here the house is clearly a symbol of the grave.

Then the poetess describes her vision of life after death. She says that centuries have passed since her ride in Death's chariot. And yet each of these centuries now seems to be shorter than a day even. In other words, there is no concept of time in life after death. It is a timeless and deathless world.

To conclude, we can say that Emily Dickinson accepts death as a fact. But she does not accept it as negative force of destruction. She accepts it as a helpful lover who leads his beloved to eternity. The image of the carriage and the driver is highly appropriate. The use of metaphor govern the structure of the poem. So 'The Chariot' tries to capture mortal experience from the standpoint of immortality.

Q.2. Consider the way in which Death has been personified in the poem 'The Chariot'?

Ans. Death is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poetess on a carriage ride to eternity. 'The Chariot', written around 1863, tries to capture mortal experience from the standpoint of immortality. The idea of death is treated without any of the emotions of fear, anxiety or pain that usually accompany the idea.

In her poem, Emily Dickinson personifies Death as a lover. Death frees man from the troubles of material life. It leads him to eternity. The poetess says that she had no time to think about Death in her life. She remained all the time busy in her worldly activities. Then one day, Death himself came to the poetess. He took the poetess for a ride in his carriage. The carriage is here a symbol of the hearse which is used for man's last journey on this earth.

The poetess describes symbolically the funeral march of man. She says that Death drove his carriage very slowly. He was in no haste. His carriage passed by a school. Children were playing there. Then the carriage passed by the grain fields. Lastly the carriage passed by the setting sun. In fact, the poetess describes symbolically the three stages in man's life on this earth. The school, the grain fields and the setting sun are respectively the symbols of childhood, youth and old age.

After passing by the setting sun, Death's carriage stopped before a house. This house was just like a swelling of the ground. The root of the house was scarcely visible. Most of it was buried in the ground. Here the house has been used as a symbol of the grave.

Thus death has been personified as a lover who accompanies his beloved to the end of her journey. But it is only the end of one's earthly journey. After completing this journey, man lands in the timeless and deathless world of heaven.

To conclude we can say that the use of personification governs the structure of the poem. Death and Immortality have been personified as two gentlemen. They take the poetess to her grave in a most gentle, kindly and courteous manner. So Death is personified as a gentle friend who is taking the poet to a chariot ride to eternity.

Objective Type Questions

Q.1. Who were in the carriage?

Ans. There were Death, the poetess and Immortality in the carriage.

Q.2. Was Death in haste?

Ans. No, death was not in haste.

Q.3. Who stopped for the poetess?

Ans. Death stopped for the poetess.

Q.4. What had the poetess done?

Ans. The poetess had given up her work as well as leisure for the sake of Death.

Q.5. What house does the poetess refer to?

Ans. The poetess refers to her grave.

Q.6. Where was the cornice of the house?

Ans. The cornice of the house was underground.

Q.7. How much time has passed since then?

Ans. Centuries have passed since then.

Q.8. What did the poetess guess?

Ans. The poetess guessed that she was on the way to Eternity.

Chicago

Carl Sandburg

Introduction to the Poet

Carl Sandburg is a popular American poet of the 20th century. Like his predecessor Walt Whitman, Sandburg wrote poetry dealing with the problems of ordinary people. His poetry is the outcome of his first hand experience of ordinary life. His poems represent America in its various colours and rhythms. It is because of the fact that Carl Sandburg had varied experience of life. The focused description of common things like fog, landlords, money, etc., confirm his status as a poet of everyday life. In his poems there is a blend of realism and fantasy. He has great faith in the future of the working classes and firmly believes in the undying spirit of the common man. Carl Sandburg is also widely known for his six volume biography of Abraham Lincoln.

Introduction to the Poem

Chicago is one of America's largest cities. It is situated on Lake Michigan. This city is in the centre of great industrial and commercial activities in the world. There are manufacturing units of steel metal products, food products, chemicals and so many other industrial items.

The poem 'Chicago' is addressed to the city of that name. It begins with the description of the commercial activities of the city. It gives us a description of its tool market, wheat store, rail roads, factories and so many other business activities. Then the poem moves on to present Chicago's abstract qualities, wickedness, crookedness, brutalities and savageries. These qualities have been presented through the technique of personification. In spite of all these evil qualities the poet loves the city and strongly defend its robust character, its youth and its liveliness. In fact these qualities do not represent only Chicago, they represent the American spirit.

Detailed Summary

In this poem Carl Sandburg gives us a lively description of the vast industrial city, Chicago. Chicago is one of the greatest industrial and commercial cities of the world. It throbs with life and vitality. The poet gives a realistic description of all aspects of life in the city.

The poet feels that Chicago is the "hog-butcher" of the world as it supplies meat to the whole world. It has a large number of tool industries. It is the biggest grain market in the world. Chicago also has a vast railway network and thus the hub of transport activities. The city has a large work-force. The workers are strong, full of energy. They can work hard. They make a lot of noise while they work but they are the life of the city. Their shoulders represent the power of the city.

The poet is aware that the city is wicked and heartless. It is also corrupt and cruel. The poet has seen the prostitutes in the city trying to seduce the innocent farm boys. When the people tell the poet that Chicago is crooked he agrees because he has seen gunmen killing people brutally. He also understands that there is hunger and exploitation in the city. He knows that the city is full of corruption but the poet confronts those people who criticize Chicago with a sneer. He says that there is no city in the world which is proud, so rich and so flavour. He has found the city full of life and strength. The people here are hard-working. They may be coarse and vulgar yet they are full of joy and song.

The workers in the city are eager to work hard. He compares them with fierce dogs who are eager to jump in action. They are always busy "shoveling, wrecking, planning, building, breaking, rebuilding". No doubt

the city is dirty and the workers faces are covered with dust and smoke. Nevertheless they have a strange vitality in them. They go on working hard but they do it with joy and laughter. Work is the pulse of their life. In a way these workers represent the mighty spirit of America.

The poet is proud of Chicago and its people. They might be poor and exploited, yet they are proud to be the citizens of Chicago. The poet pays a tribute to the city and its people by saying that inspite of its evil qualities the city is one of the greatest industrial centres of the world.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

Word-meanings: 1. Hog-Butcher = one who sells meat; 2. stacker of wheat = store of wheat; 3. husky = strong; 4. Brawling = fighting.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem, "Chicago" written by Carl Sandburg. The poem is a tribute to the Chicago city and its people. The poet brings out the merits and demerits of Chicago which is a great industrial city of America.

Explanation: In the given lines the poet brings out the themes for which Chicago is known throughout the world. Chicago is known for its butcheries from where meat is supplied to the whole world. It has a large number of tool-making industries. The city is known for its big grain markets as well. It is the nerve-centre of the railways and is connected to all the major cities of America. Thus it is a very important point for the transportation of cargo. It has a wonderful port as well. But above all the city is known for its powerful people. They are men with big shoulders and are full of energy. They like to work hard and enjoy life.

Stanza 2

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have
seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring
the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is
true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill
again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the
faces of women and children I have seen the marks
of wanton hunger.

Word-meanings: 1. Wicked = evil; 2. Painted women = prostitutes, 3. Luring = tempting; 4. Crooked = dishonest; 5. Brutal = savage; Wanton = strong and great.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem, "Chicago" written by Carl Sandburg. Here in this poem the poet talks of Chicago as a great city. He talks of its merits and demerits. He is proud of the city and loves it.

Explanation: In the given lines the poet brings out the evils of the city. He knows there is corruption and exploitation in the city. There are prostitutes waiting under the gas-lamps trying to seduce the young-boys from the villages. The people say that Chicago is crooked, dishonest and he agrees. He has seen murderers out to kill people brutally. He has also seen hunger on the faces of women and children. He knows there is evil in this city.

Critical Comments: The poet presents the reality of the Chicago city in a realistic and graphic manner. The dishonesty, the brutality, the hunger and the murderers are presented with the help of vivid images.

Stanza 3

And having answered so I turn once more to those
 who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer
 and say to them:
 Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
 so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and
 cunning.
 Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on
 job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the
 little soft cities;

Word-meanings: 1. Sneer = a smile showing contempt; 2. coarse = vulgar; 3. cunning = shrewd; 4. slugger = a piece of metal, a hard-working labourer; 5. vivid = clear.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem “Chicago” written by Carl Sandburg. Here the poet indicates all the good as well as bad aspects of the city. But still he loves the city.

Explanation: In the given extract the poet shows his pride in the city. He agrees that the city is corrupt and brutal. But he throws a challenge to those people who consider Chicago an evil place. He feels it is the best city in the world because the people here are hard-working. They may be crooked and vulgar, yet they are full of life. They work hard and in this way set the face of the city. Work is always on in the city and workers here take pride in their work in the fullest sense.

Stanza 4

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
 Bareheaded,
 Shoveling,
 Wrecking,
 Planning,
 Building, breaking, rebuilding,
 Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
 Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
 Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,
 Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the hearts of the people,
 Laughing!

Word-meanings: 1. Destiny = fate; 2. ignorant = one who does not know; 3. Bragging = boasting.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem, “Chicago” written by Carl Sandburg. In this poem the poet brings out the good and the bad points of the city in spite of all the bad points he still loves the city and prides on it.

Explanation: The given lines present Chicago as a city of workers. Their fate has forced them to work under harsh conditions. There is smoke and dust on their faces even then they work hard with joy. Their white teeth glitter when they laugh. They are people born to win. They are like soldiers who go on fighting happily. They have never faced defeat. And they are confident that they will never be defeated. They are people who do their work joyfully and proudly. In this way they represent the true spirit of America.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Stanza 1

Hog Butcher for the World,
 Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
 Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler,
 Stormy, husky, brawling,

City of the Big Shoulders:

Questions

1. Why is Chicago called the “hog-butcher for the world”?
2. What is meant by “Stacker of Wheat”?
3. What is meant by player with Railroads?
4. Is Chicago stormy, husky and brawling?
5. Why is Chicago a city of big shoulders?

Answers

1. Chicago supplies meat to the whole world that is why it has been called the hog-butcher for the world.
2. Chicago is stacker of wheat because it is the biggest grain market of the world.
3. Chicago is a big junction with a great network of railroads.
4. The people in Chicago are full of life and energy.
5. Chicago is an industrial town where powerful men work having wide shoulders.

Stanza 2

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have
seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring
the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: yes, it is
true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill
again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the
faces of women and children I have seen the marks
of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer
and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and
cunning.

Questions

1. Why is Chicago wicked?
2. Why does the poet believe that Chicago is crooked?
3. What does the poet mean when he calls Chicago brutal?
4. Why does the poet sneer back at the critics?
5. Why is he proud of the city?

Answers

1. Chicago is wicked because prostitutes try to lure innocent rural workers (boys).
2. Chicago is crooked because people kill others for money.
3. Chicago is brutal for there is hunger and exploitation there.
4. The poet sneers back at the critics because inspite of its evils it is a city full of life and pride.

5. The poet is proud of the city because the workers living here are strong. They work hard and still enjoy life.

Stanza 3

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has
never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,

Questions

1. Who is the poet of these lines?
2. Who are covered with smoke and dust?
3. What is meant by the terrible burden of destiny?
4. Why do the workers laugh inspite of terrible destiny?
5. Why does an ignorant fighter laugh?

Answers

1. Carl Sandburg is the poet of these lines.
2. The workers are covered with smoke and dust.
3. The workers are poor and they are forced to work hard.
4. They laugh because they enjoy working hard.
5. He laughs because he has never lost a battle.

Short-Answer Questions

- Q. 1. How does the poet present the significance of Chicago as a city?

Ans. The poet presents Chicago as a very important city of America. It is a very big supplier of hog-meat to the world. It has a large number of tool-making factories. It is the biggest wheat market of America. It is a very big junction from where trains go to the different parts of the country. It is a very important American part also. Above all it is a city of hard-working labourers. The poet praises the workers as powerful and full of life.

- Q. 2. How does the poet presents Chicago as a “city of workers”?

Ans. The poet presents Chicago not as a city of the wealthy people but as a city of the workers. The city bubbles with their vitality. They work hard but they are not cowed down by their work. They laugh and quarrel and thus fill the city with their joy and vitality.

- Q. 3. What, according to the poet, are the evils of Chicago?

Ans. There are many people who criticize Chicago. They call it wicked, crooked and brutal. The poet does not deny all this. He has seen prostitutes trying to lure innocent boys. He has seen murderers on the prowl. In Chicago there is hunger and exploitation. There is greed and death also. He accepts all this as the part of city life.

- Q. 4. How does the poet show his pride for the city?

Ans. In spite of all the evils that the Chicago city has it is a wonderful city for the poet. It is a city full of powerful workers. They do their work with joy. They may be wild or vulgar but they are always working with joy. In Chicago, work always goes on. They are always planning, building, breaking, rebuilding. They may be shrewd or greedy but they are always working joyfully. It is the confidence and the joy of the workers in their work which gives character to the city. That is why the poet takes pride in the city.

Q. 5. How does the poet describe the happiness of the workers of Chicago?

Ans. Chicago is an industrial city. It is a city of the workers. Work goes on here day and night. The workers have to work here under harsh conditions. They are covered with smoke in their factories. Their mouths are covered with dust. They are crushed with poverty. Yet they are full of life. Their white teeth gleam with joy. They go on fighting like ignorant soldiers who have never faced defeat. Their vitality is reflected in their laughter, their quarrels and their work.

Essay Type Questions

Q. 1. On the basis of the study of the poem, "Chicago" by Carl Sandburg, attempt a sketch of the city?

Ans. Carl Sandburg has a relation of love and pride with Chicago. The city has many demerits yet the poet loves it and takes pride in it. He presents Chicago as a symbol of American pride and vitality.

According to Carl Sandburg Chicago is one of the largest centres of commercial and industrial activities. He calls Chicago as the hog-butcher of the world as it is the biggest centre of meat trading. It is a big industrial centre and there is a large number of units, manufacturings, machines and tools. It is also perhaps the largest grain-market and exports wheat to the whole world. Chicago also is a busy junction and trains from here go to all the parts of America. It has a fine port also. The city is full of activities, noise and brawls.

At first, the poet focuses on the negative aspects of the city. It is a city full of wickedness, crookedness, brutality and meanness. There are call-girls who seduce innocent young men. There are murderers who brutally kill innocent people. Even the law-agencies seem to be helpless before them. It is a city full of hunger and exploitation. The city is full of pollution and smoke. The atmosphere here is dirty, dusty and full of noise. Life is harsh and difficult for its people.

In spite of all this the poet calls Chicago the best of the cities. He accepts all the criticism of the city, yet he is proud of it. He feels that the people here bubble with life. They have a tremendous capacity for hard-work. These workers are the life and soul of the city. They work a lot and enjoy their work. Though they have to work in smoky and dusty conditions, they laugh with joy, their white teeth gleam with joy. They represent the indomitable spirit of America. The poet is truly proud of the city in which such people live and work.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. Why is Chicago called the "hot-butcher" of the world?

Ans. Because it supplies meat to the whole world.

Q. 2. What is meant by "stacker of wheat"?

Ans. Chicago is a very big grain market of the world.

Q. 3. Why is Chicago called a city of big shoulders?

Ans. Because most of the workers here are strong and well-built.

Q. 4. What is meant by "painted-women"?

Ans. The "painted-women" are prostitutes.

Q. 5. What has the poet seen on the faces of the women and children?

Ans. The poet has seen hunger on their faces.

Q. 6. Why does the poet sneer back at the critics of Chicago?

Ans. Because he loves it and feels proud of it.

Q. 7. What kind of work goes on in Chicago?

Ans. Planning, building, breaking and re-building go on in the city, Chicago.

Q. 8. Whose faces are covered with smoke?

Ans. The workers faces are covered with smoke.

Q. 9. Who laughs in spite of the burden of detiny?

Ans. The workers laugh in spite of their poverty.

Q. 10. What is meant by brawling laughter of the youth?

Ans. The sturdy youthful workers laugh and quarrel while they work.

This is a Photograph of Me

Margaret Atwood

Introduction to the Poetess

Margaret Atwood (1939-) is a famous Canadian poet, novelist and critic. She is a champion of the women's cause. All her novels have been written from a woman's point of view. In them the women's characters seek their identity in the male-dominated world. Her characters are always seen striving to understand themselves in the context of the contemporary reality. They are the symbols of the New Woman. As a poetess she writes about nature. She celebrates nature and its gifts and condemns the material world and its commercialism. Her verse collections include *The Circle Game* and *The Animals in the Country*.

Introduction to the Poem

"This is a Photograph of Me" is a poem open to many interpretations. The poem begins in a seemingly conventional manner. It describes a photograph which was taken a few years back and evokes a mood of nostalgia but in the middle of the poem there appears parenthesis a remark beginning with the two lines. "The photograph was taken. The day after I drowned." The reader is shocked and confused as he cannot understand the meaning and the cohesiveness of the content of the poem. The last three lines, however make the things clear.

The meaning of the poem can be understood by dividing it in two parts – in the first twelve lines the house is described, and in the last twelve lines the drowned speaker is presented. In the first part the picture of the house is reflected in the water. It merges with the place where the speaker was drowned in the lake. In this way the house becomes the identical double of the invisible speaker. Infact the speaker belonged to the house, loved it and even after death he is an integral part of the house. Thus, the speaker and the house become one here. This is a poem related to the theme of belonging and wakes the reader from emotional and intellectual lethargy.

Summary of the Poem

The poem gives us a description of a house through a photograph. The photograph was taken some time back. It is not a clear photograph as there are blurred lines and grey spots on it. These lines and spots blend with the paper, making the photograph unclear but as you look at the photograph closely, then you realise that at the left hand corner there is a thing resembling a branch. This branch may be a part of the tree – balsam or spruce. Then somewhere in the middle of the right corner there is a gentle slope. It is the roof of a wooden frame-house covered with boards. In the background, there is a lake and beyond the lake there are some low hills. It seems that the photograph was taken when the house was completed. Its reflection could be seen in the lake water.

The speaker suggests that his photograph was taken just the day after he was drowned in the lake. The speaker loved the house very much.

If you look at the centre of the reflection of the house in the photograph you would realise that the speaker drowned at that place. The identities of the house and the speaker are merged. The speaker loved the house. The reflection of the house is seen in the lake. The speaker drowned in the lake precisely at the same point where the centre of the house is reflected. Thus, the speaker and the house become one. The identity of the speaker is revealed in the reflection of the water in the lake.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1

It was taken some time ago.
 At first it seems to be
 a smeared
 print: blurred lines and grey flecks
 blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
 it, you see in the left-hand corner
 a thing that is like a branch; part of a tree
 (balsam or spruce) emerging
 and, to the right, halfway up
 what ought to be a gentle
 slope, a small frame house.

Word-meanings: 1. It = the photograph; 2. Smeared = stained, blotted; 3. Blurred = not clear; 4. Flecks = spots; 5. Scan = to examine closely; 6. Balsam = an aromatic or fragrant plant; 7. Spruce = an evergreen tree; 8. emerging = coming out; 9. Frame House = a wooden house.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘This is a Photograph of Me’ written by Margaret Atwood. The speaker begins with the description of a photograph. It takes him down the memory lane. He remembers how the house was completed and how the house was reflected in the nearby lake.

Explanation: In these lines the poetess begins with the description of the photograph. She informs the reader that the photograph was taken some time back. As we look at the photograph we find it full of stains. There are unclear lines and some gray spots merged with the paper. As we closely examine the photograph we find that in the left hand corner there is a branch of a tree – it may be balsam or spruce. Then there is a gentle slope and a small wooden house.

Stanza 2

In the background there is a lake,
 and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
 the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
 of the picture, just under the surface.

Word-meanings: 1. Beyond = farther from the lake; 2. Low hills = not very tall hills; 3. Just under the surface = just below the water level;

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘This is a Photograph of Me’ written by Margaret Atwood. In these lines the poetess tells us about the photograph of a house whose reflection is seen in the lake.

Explanation: The poetess has described the wooden house near the lake. Beyond the lake there are low hills. The photograph of the house was taken a day after the speaker was drowned. The speaker says that

she is in the lake at a place where the centre of the reflection of the house is. In this way the poetess and the house merge into each other.

Stanza 3

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me.

Word-meanings: 1. precisely = exactly ; 2. Distortion = change in shape making a thing look ugly;
3. Eventually = finally

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'This is a Photograph of Me' written by Margaret Atwood. There she talks of a photograph which shows the reflection of a house in the lake. This is the lake in which the speaker has drowned.

Explanation: In these lines the speaker says that it is difficult to say how large or small he is in the picture. It is because of effect of the water on light which causes distortion. But if we look at the picture more closely the reader should be able to see him.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Stanza 1

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared
print: blurred lines and grey flecks
blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.
In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

Questions

1. What is the meaning of 'it' in the poem?
2. What does it seem in the beginning?
3. What do you see in the left hand corner?
4. What do you find on the right side of the photograph?

5. Name the poem and the poet?

Answers

1. The 'it' in the poem represents a photograph.
2. It seems to be a stained print on which there are blurred lines and gray plots which merge with the paper.
3. In the left hand corner there is a branch of tree.
4. On the right side of the photograph there is a gentle slope and a small frame house.
5. The name of the poem is 'This is a Photograph of Me' and the name of the poet is Margaret Atwood.

Stanza 2

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me.)

Questions

1. In whose background is the lake situated?
2. When was the photograph taken?
3. Where is the speaker in the lake as he is already drowned?
4. Can you guess about its size?
5. What is the effect of water on light.

Answer

1. The lake is situated in the background of the house.
2. The photograph was taken a day after the speaker was drowned.
3. The speaker is in the center of the lake.
4. No, it is not possible because of the effect of the water.
5. It causes a distortion.

Short-Answer Questions

Q.1. Briefly discuss the character of the speaker of the poem?

- Ans. The poetess herself is the speaker of the poem. She is a sentimental and reflective woman. She has a sense of belonging and connectivity. As she looks at the photograph she is reminded of the house and its reflection in the water. And we find the house and the speaker merging into one identity.
- Q.2. Why is the poem divided in two parts? What is the connection between two parts?
- Ans. The poem is divided in two parts. The first part reflects the physical aspect while the second part deals with the speculative aspect. The speaker who is not physically visible is the connecting link between two parts.
- Q.3. The title of the poem is 'This is a Photograph of Me', yet the poetess is not to be seen in the photograph, why?
- Ans. No doubt, the poetess is not to be seen in the photograph. Yet her imprint is there everywhere. She is related to the house and has a sense of belonging. The house is being reflected in the lake. The poetess has been drowned in the lake as such she is at a place in the lake where the house is reflected. In this way the poetess is there in the photograph of the house even though she is not physically present.
- Q.4. Give a description of the photograph?
- Ans. The photograph seems to be an old one. It is a smeared print. The lines are blurred and there are gray spots blending on the picture. On the left side there is a branch of a tree. On the right hand side of the center there is a gentle slope and a wooden frame house.

Essay Type Questions

- Q.1. Bring out the theme of the poem. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples from the text.
- Ans. This is a poem related to the theme of belonging. The theme becomes important in the modern world where we do not feel connected to anyone or anything. The poetess does it with the help of the photograph of a house. She was much attached to the house. The photograph is old and gray. It presents the reflection of the house in the lake. The heart of the poetess lies in the house and the house is reflected in the lake.
- At this point the poetess introduces a shocking statement in the poem she suggests where the photograph of the house was taken after she had drowned in the lake. In this way the house is in the lake in the shape of its reflection and the poetess is also in the lake after having been drowned. In this way the lake becomes the connecting way between the house and the poetess.
- Though the poetess is not physically present in the photograph of the house, she pervades the photograph in a metaphorical sense. Thus the poem brings out the theme of the relatedness and belongingness in an effective manner.

Objective Type Questions

- Q.1. When was the photograph taken?
- Ans. It was taken the day after the poetess was drowned.
- Q.2. How does the photograph look?
- Ans. It looks smeared and blurred.
- Q.3. What do you find at the left hand corner?
- Ans. We find a branch of a tree at the left hand corner.
- Q.4. What do you find at the right hand corner of the photograph?
- Ans. We find a wooden frame house at the right hand corner of the photograph.

Q.5. What is in the background?

Ans. In the background there is a lake and low-hills.

Q.6. How is the speaker in the lake?

Ans. The speaker has been drowned in the lake. The reflection of the house is in the lake and she loved the house.

Q.7. How large or small is the house in the reflection?

Ans. It is difficult to say as the movement of the waves destroyed the reflection.

Enterprise

Nissim Ezekiel

Introduction to the Poet

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most famous poets in the modern age. He was born in Bombay, and educated at Bombay and the University of London. Nissim Ezekiel deals with the themes of life scattered around us. He is an extraordinary poet dealing with the ordinary facts of life.

His verse collections include *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965) and *Latter Day Psalms* (1982)."

Nissim Ezekiel is a winner of 'The Sahitya Academy Award'. His poetry is self analytical and ironical in nature. His poems try to deal with spiritual and existential themes.

Introduction to the Poem

'Enterprise' sums up a philosophy of life that we can still achieve some measure of dignity despite the essential meaninglessness and purposelessness of life. This thing has been presented with the help of the journey metaphor. In a way journey or pilgrimage is the symbol of life. A group of people set out together on their mission. They are full of hope and joy. But soon there were differences regarding the manner of continuing the journey. Then, some of the pilgrims desert the group. They lose their joy as the pressure of the journey mounts on them. Despite discouragement the pilgrims move on and finally arrive at their destination. But they do not find any joy here as the whole exercise is discovered to be futile and yet, the last line of the poem sums up "Home is where we have to gather grace". According to Ezekiel, life is not wholly a heroic enterprise.

Detailed Summary

'Enterprise' is one of the best poems written by Ezekiel. He uses the metaphor of a pilgrimage to suggest the difficulties and problems faced by man in the journey of human life.

In this poem a group of people including the poet decide to set out on a pilgrimage. Initially, all the members of the pilgrim party were full of joy and hope. Their minds were full of noble and grand ideas. They were determined to complete the 'enterprise'. They did not feel any burden but soon after having travelled some distance some of them started feeling that perhaps the journey was futile. But most of the travellers went on with courage and hope. They keenly observed the things and made detailed notes of their experiences.

But then the differences cropped up between them about how to cross a desert patch. Soon a member who could write excellent prose parted ways. This casts a shadow on the whole group of passengers. But still they went on.

Then at some place they were twice attacked. Then they forgot their path and got lost. Later on a section of the members claimed its liberty to leave the group. Thus there were difficulties and frustrations in the course of the journey. The leader of the group felt that they were about to reach the final destination. The other members of the group were not as hopeful. The number of the pilgrims was going down.

The remaining pilgrims went on without hope. They were feeling hopeless but they went on. Then they reached their destination. But this did not give them any joy. The whole enterprise seemed to be futile and yet in the last line the poet convey the idea that life is not wholly unheroic, our job is to do our duty. Only in this way man could enjoy any grace or peace of mind.

Explanation with Reference to Context

Stanza 1

It started as a pilgrimage,
Exalting minds and making all
The burdens light. The second stage
Explored but did not test the call.
The sun beat down to match our rage.

Word-Meanings: 1. Pilgrimage = A sacred journey; 2. Exalting = Which elevates or uplifts; 3. Making all the burdens light = overpowering all difficulties; 4. Rage = Passion

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Nissim Ezekiel's poem 'Enterprise'. In this poem Ezekiel presents the journey of human life with the help of a metaphor. Though human life is essentially futile, we can still achieve some measure of dignity in it.

Explanation: The poet tells us about an enterprise which started as a pilgrimage. In the beginning all the members of the group were happy and were determined to complete the journey. They were full of enthusiasm and were ready to face any difficulty. In the second stage of the journey they began to face the hardships but they were not disheartened.

Stanza – 2

We stood it very well, I thought,
Observed and put down copious notes
On things the peasants sold and bought.
The way of serpents and of goats,
Three cities where a sage had taught.

Word-Meanings: 1. Copious = detailed, 2. Sage = A wise man.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Enterprise' written by Nissim Ezekiel. In this poem the poet presents human life as a journey. In this journey of life man has to face many difficulties and frustrations.

Explanation: In the second phase of the journey the pilgrims were full of enthusiasm. They did not mind any trouble. They carefully observed the facts and wrote down detailed notes of the things they had seen. They noted how the peasants sold or bought their things. They also noted the ways of serpents and goats behaviour. They also visited three cities where a wiseman had delivered his lectures on the secrets of life.

Stanza 3

But when the differences arose
On how to cross a desert patch,
We lost a friend whose stylish prose
Was quite the best of all our batch.

A shadow falls on us – and grows.

Word-meanings : 1. When the difference arose = when the people held different opinions; 2. A desert patch = A difficult problem ; 3. Batch = A group 4. A shadow falls on us = we feel disappointed and discouraged.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘Enterprise’ written by Nissim Ezekiel. In this poem the poet speaks of the futility of the human effort. Here the poet shows how the members of the group of pilgrims have started feeling the pressure of the journey.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that the pressure of the journey started telling upon the pilgrims. There were differences among them regarding how to cross a desert patch. This means there were differences about how to solve the problems during the journey. The differences grew sharper and one of the travellers decided to leave the group. He was the best intellectual, the group had. His going away made the task more difficult and the depression of the group became bigger.

Stanza 4

Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.
A section claimed it liberty
To leave the group. I tried to pray.
Our leader said he smelt the sea.

Word-meanings: 1. Another phase = Next stage of the journey; 2. Liberty = freedom 3. Smelt the sea = they were reacting their destination.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘Enterprise’. Its poet is Nissim Ezekiel. In this poem the poet takes life to be a journey full of difficulties. In this poem we find a group of people who go on a sacred journey but soon there are differences among them and the journey becomes more difficult.

Explanation: In these lines the group of pilgrims reached the second stage of their journey. They had to face more difficult situations. They were attacked twice. Then they lost their way. After this a section of the group decided to part ways. There was a feeling of disappointment and frustration among all the members of the group. The poet tried to pray to gain strength. The leader of the group tried to encourage them by suggesting that they were about to reach their destination.

Stanza 5

We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope,
Ignoring what the thunder meant,
Deprived of common needs, like soap.
Some were broken, some merely bent.

Word-meanings: 1. Straggling = divided and scattered; 2. Little hope = No hope; 3. Thunder = omen

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem ‘Enterprise’ written by Nissim Ezekiel. In this poem the poet tells about a group of travellers who go on a sacred journey. Initially, they are full of hope, but as they move on they are full of a sense of loss and frustration.

Explanation: In these lines the poet says that all the enthusiasm was gone among the travellers. Travelling became a mechanical exercise. The whole group was divided now and was without hope. They were not ready to believe in the good omens. They were more concerned about their common needs and were frustrated and when they did not get them. Infact the spirits of some of the pilgrims were totally broken while others felt helpless.

Stanza 6

When, finally, we reached the place,
 We hardly knew why we were there.
 The trip had darkened every face,
 Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
 Home is where we have to gather grace.

Word-meanings: 1. The trip = The journey; 2. Darkened every face = brought disappointment;
 3. Grace = honours

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from the poem 'Enterprise' written by Nissim Ezekiel. Here the poet describes the human life as a journey or a pilgrimage as a group of travellers left for a pilgrimage and after a great effort were able to reach the destination. In those closing lines the poet sums up their reaction.

Explanation: In these lines the poet suggests that they finally reached their goal but there was no joy or happiness on their faces. Infact they did not know why they had come here. They realised the effort on their part was neither great nor rare anybody could have done that. The poet concludes that perhaps the human grace can be achieved only by working for a cause.

Stanzas for Comprehension

Stanza 1

It started as a pilgrimage,
 Exalting minds and making all
 The burdens light. The second stage
 Explored but did not test the call.
 The sun beat down to match our rage.

Questions

1. What is the name of the poem?
2. What is the name of the poet?
3. How did the travellers make all their burdens light?
4. How was the second stage explored?
5. What is meant by "the sun beat down to match our rage"?

Answers

1. The name of the poem is 'Enterprise'
2. The name of the poet is Nissim Ezekiel.
3. They were not worried about the difficulties.
4. They covered some distance but did not feel tired.
5. There were difficulties on the way but there enthusiasm was no less.

Stanza 2

We stood it very well, I thought,
 Observed and put down copious notes

On things the peasants sold and bought.
The way of serpents and of goats,
Three cities where a sage had taught.

Questions

1. What is meant by 'observed and put down copious notes'?
2. What were the notes about?
3. What is meant by the way of serpents and of goats?
4. What is meant by the word 'a sage'?
5. What does the poet mean by "We stood it very well"?

Answers

1. As they moved on they observed things and took down detailed notes.
2. The notes were about the various activities of the peasants – their buying and selling.
3. The way the serpents and the goats behaved.
4. "A sage" means a wise man.
5. They bore the difficulties well.

Stanza 3

But when the differences arose
On how to cross a desert patch,
We lost a friend whose stylish prose

Was quite the best of all our batch.
A shadow falls on us – and grows.
Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.
A section claimed its liberty
To leave the group. I tried to pray.
Our leader said he smelt the sea.

Questions

1. What is meant by 'How to cross a desert patch'?
2. What do you mean by "a shadow falls on us"?
3. What is meant by that we lost our way?
4. Why did the poet try to pray?
5. What is meant by "he smelt the sea"?

Answers

1. It means how to solve the problems that arose during the journey.
2. A very talented member of the group went away, this caused frustration among the members of the group.

3. It means some confusions grew in the minds of the travellers.
4. He felt frustrated and hopeless, so in order to gain strength he tried to pray.
5. The leader tried to encourage the members by suggesting that the goal was near.

Stanza 4

We noticed nothing as we went,
 A straggling crowd of little hope,
 Ignoring what the thunder meant,
 Deprived of common needs, like soap.
 Some were broken, some merely bent.
 When, finally, we reached the place,
 We hardly knew why we were there.
 The trip had darkened every face,
 Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
 Home is where we have to gather grace.

Questions

1. Why did they not notice anything as they went?
2. What do you understand by “ a straggling cloud of little hope”?
3. What is the significance of thunder?
4. Why had the trip darkened every face?
5. Explain the meaning of “home is where we have to gather grace”?

Answers

1. They did not notice anything because they were tired and hopeless.
2. Many members of the group had already left and whoever were left went on without hope.
3. The thunder signifies certain omens but these ignorant people did not understand them.
4. The trip had darkened every face because they did not get what they expected from the trip.
5. In a world where egos clash, home is only place where one can live peacefully and gracefully.

Short-Answer Questions

Q. 1. How has Nissim Ezekiel used a “journey” as a metaphor for life?

Ans. In the poem ‘Enterprise’ Ezekiel has used the technique of allegory. The surface meaning is clear but we have to find the hidden meaning also. There is a journey on the physical plane where the group goes on a pilgrimage. On the other hand there is an inner journey where the poet evolves in a spiritual sense.

Q.2. What was the first phase of the journey?

Ans. The first phase of the journey marks the beginning of the enterprise. The travellers were in a happy and courageous mood. They were ready to face any problem.

Q.3. What happened in the second phase of the journey?

Ans. The second phase of the journey was also not difficult. The travellers observed things keenly and made detailed notes. They studied the behaviour of the people they met on the way.

Q.4. What does the “desert path” suggest?

Ans. The ‘desert path’ suggests some specific problems that arose during the journey.

Q.5. What happened during third phase?

Ans. The differences among the travellers cropped up, as to how to cross a desert patch. One of the members who was considered to be the most stylized left the batch. It caused frustration among other members.

Q.6. What happened in the last phases of the journey?

Ans. In the last phases, the travellers were attacked twice. They even lost their way. Some of the travellers disobeyed the leader and claimed their liberty. This caused frustration and anger among the other members of the group.

Q.7. What was the poet’s reaction?

Ans. The poet reacted in a balanced manner. He did not take sides. He decided that he would continue the journey even if it meant more hardships.

Essay Type Questions

Q.1. On the basis of your reading of the poem evaluate the poet’s attitude towards life?

Ans. Nissim Ezekiel has been called the poet of "human balance". Amongst the bickerings of life man must retain his poise. Only then we can achieve something in life. He try to project this message through the poem. A group of travellers decides to embark on a pilgrimage. They are full of hope and enthusiasm. They are idealistic and courageous. But soon there are dissensions. This results in one of scholarly member leaving the group. There is an element of anger and frustration at this stage.

In the next phase the pilgrims face more difficulties. They are attacked and they get confused. They lose their way. Now the ego clashes among the members become more clear. Some of the pilgrims start claiming that they are independent and will follow their inclination. The poet retains his balance of mind. Though he is also depressed he tries to gain courage from prayer. The leader also shows reasonableness. He encourages them by telling them the destination is very near. He also tried to keep them united.

At last, only a small number of travellers is left behind. They keep on moving without hope but finally they reach their destination even then there is no joy of success on their face. They all seem disappointed. Nissim Ezekiel retains his balance and suggests that ego clashes never solve the problem. It is better in such cases to get grace than to fight it out among ourselves.

Q.2. Bring out the theme of the poem “Enterprise”

Ans. Nissim Ezekiel’s poem ‘Enterprise’ is based on the theme that as a human being everyone can achieve some amount of dignity. As a human being we can fulfill our destiny if we are able to do the assigned task. This poem presents the journey as a metaphor of life. The journey is a collective effort of the pilgrims. In the beginning of their journey they are confident and have a courageous mind. Everything goes on smoothly. But soon the problem arises due to scorching sun and the hardships of the desert. Due to all these sufferings one of their companions gets lost in the desert. They are confronted with inevitable sufferings but they keep on moving. Finally, they reach their destination. But they find all this exercise worthless in the end. Their high hopes from the enterprise fade away. Yet in the last line of the poem, the poet says that home is the place where we have to gather our grace.

Through this poem Ezekiel wants to give an important message to the readers. He says that graceful purposes can be achieved without setting high ambitions and without undertaking high-sounding projects. In the end, the poet gives a message that if we want to achieve something worthwhile collectively we have to avoid the clash of our egos.

Q. 3. Explore the implications of the central metaphor of ‘the journey’ for life?

Nissim Ezekiel’s poem ‘Enterprise’ is a wonderful poem. It shows that for Nissim Ezekiel life is the symbol of a journey. One has to move on. There will be problems, clashes and differences. They will lead to a sense of futility. In spite of all this we must go on.

This theme has been presented with the help of the metaphor of a journey. Some people form a group and decide to go on a pilgrimage. They start with hope, joy and a confidence in themselves. But very soon there are differences. A most scholarly person in the group decides to leave the group. But the journey goes on. This is how we live life.

In the second phase, again there is trouble. Some robbers attack them. They lose their way. There is frustration and disappointment. But they must go on till they reach the destination.

Life of a man is like a journey. He must grow and evolve. This is the idea we come across in the poem. Sometimes there would be frustration and disappointments, but we must not lose our balance and continue doing our work.

Objective Type Questions

Q. 1. What is existential philosophy?

Ans. It is a modern philosophy related to human suffering and experience.

Q.2. How did the travellers feel at the beginning of the journey?

Ans. They felt happy and were full of hope.

Q.3. What is meant by ‘Copious notes’?

Ans. The travellers took notes of what they experienced and observed.

Q. 4. What is meant by a sage?

Ans. A sage is a wise man.

Q. 5. Explain – ‘a shadow falls on us’?

Ans. They became depressed.

Q.6. What is meant by ‘lost our way’?

Ans. It means they became confused.

Q.7. What does the ‘thunder’ signify?

Ans. The thunder signifies some omens.

Q.8. What is meant by a “straggling crowd”?

Ans. It means a divided group of people.

Q.9. Why was every face darkened?

Ans. Every face was darkened because the trip did not give the desired happiness.

Q.10. Explain the line – ‘Home is where we have to gather grace’?

Ans. It means our destiny is fulfilled at home where there are no problems.