

BA1-Paper II – Understanding Poetry in English
Sample Questions & Answers.

Q.1. Critically analyse the poem, *On His Blindness*, by John Milton in your own words.

Answer:

The poem, “*On His Blindness*”, by John Milton is an autobiographical one. As we know, Milton did, in fact, go blind in the 1650s. Therefore, he is writing about his own experiences. However, if we go beyond the surface matter of this poem, we will see that it is less about his blindness and more about a philosophical exposition on the nature of **service to God**. Milton believed that each man serves God in his own way. This is the belief he expresses within this poem. This belief was based on his own study of the scriptures. The fact that he was familiar with the scriptures is amply proved by his reference to the Parable of the Talents in the 3rd line of this poem itself. This is one of the parables of Jesus, which appear in two of the canonical gospels of the New Testament. It tells the story of a master who was leaving his house to travel. Before leaving, he entrusted his property to his three servants. According to the abilities of each man, one servant received five talents, the second servant received two talents, and the third servant received one talent. A talent, in this case, was a significant amount of money in ancient time.

Upon returning home, the master asked his three servants for an accounting of the talents he had entrusted to them. The first and the second servants explain that they each put their talents to work, and doubled the value of the property with which they were entrusted. Both of these servants were rewarded. The third servant, however, had merely hidden his talent, had buried it in the ground, so he was punished by his master with death. For Milton, the word “talent” does not connote any amount of money in this poem, but is used in its more modern sense as a **unique ability** in a person.

Milton believes that God has given him the talent (unique ability) of poetic composition. In His absence, Milton ought to make use of that talent to produce great works of art. However, the prospect of blindness has shaken Milton’s confidence. He feels he shall never be able to write again. He feels guilty and believes that if he does not put his God-given talent to use, then he will be punished with death. However, God is merciful and He has a master plan for everyone on this earth. Whatever He does, He does it for a reason. Even though Milton does not understand why God has taken away his vision, he must be patient and he must learn to accept what is given him with dignity and grace. Instead of railing against our bad fortune, we ought to accept it with a smile on our faces. This is the best way to serve God and to have faith in his master plan. This is the lesson that Milton sets out to teach through this poem.

Milton laments the fact that he is going blind. He fears he shall not be able to use his God-given gift of poetic composition anymore. He asks God whether God would be cruel enough to expect a blind man to use his talents to produce goods as a price for giving him the talent in the first place. However, Milton’s patience stops him from voicing this question and assures him instead that the best way to serve God is to accept whatever he places in our path with courage and dignity.

Milton believes that God endows every man with some talent or the other. It is man’s duty to put that talent to use. Milton has been given the talent of poetic composition, and he takes his role as a poet very seriously. He feels he must go on producing great art throughout his life. However, his blindness may prevent him from doing so. If such a thing happens, and he cannot write anymore, he will feel that he is wasting his talent. That is why the feeling of guilt overtakes Milton when he considers the ill effects his blindness could have on his life.

God has a master plan for every man on earth. Whatever joys and sorrows a man faces are all planned in advance for him by God. Therefore, one must not cry against one's misfortune. One must bear every storm with a smile on his face and with courage in his heart. Milton had previously believed that putting his God-given talent to use is the only way in which he can serve God. But his blindness has taught him that there are other ways to serve God as well. One of those ways and the best one is "never to question God about his master plan". We must put our lives into His hand, and relinquish all control over it. If we have faith in God, then he will be by our side in our good times as well as our bad times.

The tone of this poem undergoes a remarkable change from the beginning of the poem to its end. At the start of the poem, Milton is very depressed and anxious. He feels that his blindness will get in the way of his poetic composition. However, as the poem progresses, he finds consolation within himself. He learns to have faith in God. He learns to accept whatever obstacles God puts in his path with courage and dignity. He learns to fight against all odds without ever losing hope. Finally, at the end of the poem, he emerges as a stronger and surer person.

Rhyme scheme: "On His Blindness" is a Petrarchan sonnet as it follows ABBA ABBA CDE CDE rhyme scheme without any deviation of any sort from its fixed structure.

Allusion: This rhetorical device is designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly. It is thus an indirect or passing reference. In this poem, the poet uses the device of allusion in the 3rd line. He alludes to the Parable of the Talents.

Personification: This rhetorical device is used to give human qualities on something that is not human. In this poem, the poet uses the device of personification in the 8th line with respect to Patience. He capitalizes the 'P' in 'Patience' and also gives Patience the human ability to speak.

Conclusion:

"On his Blindness" is thus a poem of half religious half philosophical nature. During Milton's era, man began to explore his religious doubt. For Milton, he could he make his faith stronger only by confronting the doubt rather than running away from it. Therefore, Milton put it to good use in this poem by accepting the Fate of God about his blindness.

Q.2. Ballad of East & West

The Ballad of East and West' is a poem by Rudyard Kipling. It was first published in 1889, and has been much collected and anthologised since.

The story of the ballad is simple, to do with theft, honour and strength - like many of the border ballads. It tells the story of Kamal, an Afghan warrior and raider, and a raid he made on a horse that belonged to an English colonel.

The introduction to the poem says that East is East and West is West and the two shall never meet until Judgment Day, but that when two strong men stand face to face, it does not matter where they come from because geography and breed and birth no longer matter.

Kamal and his twenty men are trying to raise the border-side. Kamal has taken the Colonel's horse right out of the stable and rode her away. The Colonel's son asked if any of his men knew where Kamal hides, and Mohammed Khan replied that if one knew where the morning mist was, they would find Kamal. He might be near Fort Bukloh because he has to pass it on the way to his residence, so it is possible to cut him off before he gets to the Tongue of Jagai. If he is past the Tongue, then avoid that grisly plain full of Kamal's men. After Mohammad finished speaking, the Colonel's son mounted his horse; the son's horse is fearsome with "the heart of Hell and the head of a / gallows-tree". He made it to the Fort and stayed there briefly to dine. He

left quickly and rode until he saw his father's missing mare at the Tongue of Jagai. Kamal was on her back, and the Colonel's son fired twice but missed.

Kamal replied that the man shot like a soldier and summoned him to show how he could ride. The Colonel's son's horse let up like "a stag of ten" but Kamal's stolen mare was like a "barren doe". There was a rock on both the right and the left and a thorn in between.

The men rode past the moon into the dawn. The dun – the Colonel's son's horse – rode like a wounded bull but the mare was like fawn. The dun finally fell, and Kamal turned his horse back and pulled the Colonel's son free. He kicked the pistol out of his enemy's hand and told him that he was only allowed to run so far because he let him. He explained that his own men lined the whole course and if he had raised his hand they would have killed the Colonel's son instantly.

The Colonel's son answers Kamal scornfully, but Kamal disregards this and helps him to his feet. He tells the young man not to talk of dogs when "wolf and grey wolf / meet". The Colonel's son, impressed by Kamal, spontaneously offers him his father's mare. The mare runs to the Colonel's son and Kamal notes that she loves the younger man best, and decides to let the mare return to him, as well as giving him his saddle, his saddle-cloth, and his silver stirrups. Kamal also calls his own son and gives him to the Colonel's son. He introduces his son, who looks like a "lance / in rest", and tells the boy that the Colonel's son is his master and that he must ride at his left side until Death or Kamal cuts the ties. The boy must defend his new master and it is his fate to protect him. He should be a tough trooper and ascend to Ressaldar, even though he himself will probably be hanged as a traitor.

Kamal and the Colonel's son look at each other and find no fault. They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood. The Colonel's son rides the mare and Kamal's son takes the dun. They return to Fort Bukloh, and as they draw closer twenty swords flash in warning. The Colonel's son calls for them to lower their steel because while last night they had struck at a "Border thief – to-night 'tis a man / of the Guides!"

One of Kipling's most famous and complex poems, "*The Ballad of East and West*", was published in three magazines in December 1889 and is usually collected in *Barrack-Room Ballads, and Other Verses*. It was first called "Kamal" after the Afghan warrior, but Kipling changed it to the more epic title it now possesses. The poem has attained fame for the opening line of "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall / meet" as well as, critic William Flesch writes, "its attitude (a complexity that has room for a great deal of sentimentality), the extremely high technical sheen, the light touch of its versification, and the absorbing interest of the story it tells."

The poem is in the style of a border ballad, an Anglo-Scottish poetic form that featured recurring motifs but usually lacked a chorus, and oftentimes took up the subject of raids or battles. "Ballad" is organized in rhyming heptameters.

That story concerns two equally-matched warriors, one an Afghan raider and the other a British officer, a Colonel's son, and their rivalry turns into great mutual respect and admiration. **The plot** of the poem is relatively simple, with Kamal stealing the Colonel's horse and riding it into enemy territory; the Colonel's son courageously follows him, firing on Kamal when he glimpses him ahead. He misses, and Kamal taunts him. The Colonel's son rides until his own horse collapses, and Kamal approaches him and tells him that he is only alive because Kamal has allowed him to live. Exhausted and apparently bested, the Colonel's son demands the stolen mare back. Kamal is impressed and helps the British officer to his feet. The Colonel's son decides to bequeath the mare to Kamal in honor of his fighting prowess, but Kamal sees that the mare prefers the other man and gently returns the horse. Kamal then gives the Colonel's son his own son as an assistant, and the men pledge their honor and fealty to one another, recognizing their similarities within their differences.

The theme of the poem is that even though the two ends of the earth cannot meet, men of each territory can put aside their differences of nationality, race, background, and religion and appreciate each other's universal qualities of bravery, nobility, and rectitude.

Q.3. Critical Analysis of the poem – Remember

The sonnet *Remember* by Christina Rossetti was written in 1849 when Rossetti was just 19 years old. She is touted to be one of the foremost women poets of the 19th century Victorian era. In this famous sonnet, *Remember*, the poet introduces the themes of love, death, and reaction to death.

The very pattern of the poem makes it easy to remember. Rossetti chose to repeat the word ‘remember’ throughout the poem, thus allowing the reader’s mind to grow used to this pattern of repetition; as one ‘remember’ fades, the other comes into play, segueing from image to image and allowing the reader to understand the full experience of what Rossetti is asking. It can therefore be easily split into four stanzas, each categorized by a single verse wherein the word ‘remember’ appears. However, it is not just the theme of memory that is in play here; by ‘remembering’, the narrator hopes to overcome death. As has been mentioned in many poems of the Romantic era, the true glory of poetry was that one was made immortal through the lines written.

The Speaker of the poem is scared, not of death, but of her lover forgetting her. It is to her the most brutal thing that could happen to her – her tone wavers between conciliatory and contemplative, soft and weak, as she tries to implore her beloved to never forget her even when she has ‘gone far away into the silent land’. In the first few lines, she is adamant that she must be remembered at all costs, when she is no longer physically present to remind her lover to do so.

The poet has written the sonnet, *Remember*, to a lover. It talks about their love, her death, and how she wishes him to react when she has left this world or “Gone far away into the silent land.”

From the lines 1-3, the poet deals with the element of death, and tries to make her lover understand that he needs not remember her even after her death. She says that when she has died, she will go into the silent land from where it will be impossible for him to hold her by the hand. Nor can she come back from the half way.

The poet further says that it is of no use to counsel or pray later, i.e. when she is gone. She says what if you will forget her for a while, and then pretend to remember her by grieving over her death.

From lines 9 to 14, the poet gives instructions to her lover by saying that he must go on with his life and should not keep thinking about her death as she would rather he “...forget and smile...than remember and be sad”. The poet here makes use of a euphemism in the very first line of this sonnet when she says, “Remember me when I am gone away.”

The euphemism here refers to the poet’s death. It may also be viewed as a metaphor when compare death with the notion of undertaking a journey. This is the journey which starts from one world to next, which, of course relates to the main theme of the poem.

She, in line 2 of this sonnet, makes use of another metaphor when she says, “Gone far away into the silent land”. It is to be noted here that the notion of eternal life is depicted as a ‘silent land’ which hints at the lost connection between the dead and living, kept only in the memory that’s fluid, transient, and insubstantial.

The third euphemism can be seen in the eleventh line of this sonnet, when the poet says: “For if the darkness and corruption leave”. In this line, death is viewed as corruption and darkness. It is like body decaying. The poet here is very excited and says that he should not take her death and his subsequent memory as a burden to him. Therefore, she suggests that he should better ‘forget and smile.’

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This is an amazing poem with simple language and great theme. Both these features of it work in tandem with the rhyme scheme, such as *abba abba cdd ece*, thus making it sound pleasantly. The beauty of this sonnet lies not only its choice of languages, but also in retaining or maintaining a somewhat complex idea.

Rossetti had written this sonnet to her lover with the instruction and advice that he needs not be upset after her death. She advises him not to remember anything about her for she would rather know that he is happier than that he is, in a sense, dead while alive.

The message given by this poem must be applied by all of us to our lives, as well for it's really the ultimate solution to handle the death of our near and dear ones.

Q. The Ballad of Reading Gaol

The Ballad of Reading Gaol was among the last written works of Oscar Wilde and is his most popular poem. The poem was written after two years after Oscar Wilde was released from prison and the poem focuses on the execution of one of the prison inmate who was in the same prison as Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde was jailed from 1895 to 1897 because of his indecent relationship with the son of an influential man and the time spend in prison affected his life greatly.

After Oscar Wilde was released in 1897, he soon fled to Paris where he assumed a new name and started writing the poem almost immediately. The poem was revised a couple of times and enlarged before it was published in October.

After his time spent in prison, Oscar Wilde never returned to England again. He died in Paris in 1900, lonely and the shell of the man he once was, but still appreciated his writing.

About the Poem

“The Ballad of Reading Gaol” is a poetic description of Oscar Wilde's experiences in prison, specifically witnessing the sentence and execution of a fellow inmate at Reading Gaol.

The ballad consists of 109 stanzas and is divided into 6 untitled parts. The 109 stanzas are of 6 lines, of 8-6-8-6-8-6 syllables, and rhyming a-b-c-b-d-b. Some stanzas incorporate rhymes. A version with only 63 of the stanzas, divided into 4 sections of 15, 7, 22 and 19 stanzas, and allegedly based on the original draft, was later included in the posthumous editions of Wilde's poetry edited by Robert Ross

The poem starts by focusing only on one man, a person convicted for murdering his wife and sentenced to death and then slowly starts to describe the living conditions of the prisoners. The contrast between the free people who live outside the prison and the inmates is highlighted by Oscar Wilde in his poem.

The first part of the poem consists of several verses describing the prisoner: his appearance, emotions, and situation. Within this part of the poem, Wilde also compares the condemned inmate's situation to the situations faced by other men, saying repeatedly that "each man kills the thing he loves" as the inmate killed the woman he loved.

The second part of the poem describes the condemned inmate's emotional reactions to his approaching death. Although the other prisoners expect him to be depressed and self-pitying, they are surprised to find that he is not upset and seems to be trying to enjoy his time left.

The third part describes the inmate's continuing indifference, and even contentedness, in the days leading up to his execution. Wilde describes seeing an open grave that had been dug for the man's corpse. He discusses how although he and the other inmates could not sleep the night before the execution, the man who was to die slept soundly throughout the night. Wilde and the other prisoners anxiously await the morning, and when morning comes, they anxiously await the execution. Finally, the execution is performed, and Wilde describes the man's strangled cry as he is hanged.

In the fourth part, the prisoners are let out from their cells and walk, saddened and fearful, to the man's grave. The man's corpse is mocked and disrespected by prison officials, but at last he is cremated and buried, and Wilde says that he is "at peace, or will be soon."

The fifth part of the poem is a reflection on the darkness, discomfort, and other horrors of prison life. In comparison to previous parts of the poem, the fifth part contains several references to God and Christ, used to emphasize the religious implications of the suffering the prisoners are forced to endure as punishment for their crimes.

The sixth and final part, also the shortest part, is a summary of the poem. It mentions several important points brought up in other parts of the poem: the disrespect of the man's grave, the inevitability of his death, and his indifference toward his death in the time leading up to his execution. The final stanza is a repetition of the most famous stanza in the poem, found in the first part: "And all men kill the thing they love,/By all let this be heard,/Some do it with a bitter look,/Some with a flattering word,/The coward does it with a kiss,/The brave man with a sword!"

The poem begins with a discussion of Charles Thomas Wooldridge who was condemned to die in 1896 for murdering his wife in a jealous rage. During an argument they tumbled onto the street, and he slit her throat with a knife. After the murder he begged the officers to arrest him and mourned his action until his death.

While the title says Ballad, the poem almost seems to be an elegy to lament and question the death of his inmate. The poem consists of 109 stanzas that are categorized into 6 parts.

The first stanza begins with the description of the "blood and wine" incident, or the murder by the inmate of the thing he loved. One of the most interesting things about this poem is the way there is a reiteration of the fact that the man killed "the thing he loved". It clearly seems to be because the speaker yearns to humanize the act of the inmate. In this stanza, the essence of the actual murder is captured. It speaks of the man who killed the thing he loved, and how his hands were tainted with "blood and wine". The blood part is obvious, but perhaps "wine" indicates that the inmate was intoxicated when he committed the crime. This might have pushed him to do

something he wouldn't have done if he were in his senses. In the second stanza, the speaker speaks of the hardships faced by the man, which are juxtaposed by the poet with his regretful attitude towards the crime he committed.

By this time, it is abundantly clear that the crime was one of passion and not committed in cold blood. In the next few lines, the poet delineates the psychological condition of the prisoner. Soon, the speaker gets to know that the inmate has been sentenced to death and he is shocked.

This leads him to diverge from the point of the actual events that are happening into a world of his own introspection over whether the inmate's crime was really a great crime. The speaker lists out all the different ways in which men have killed the thing they loved. In the end of this particular section of the poem, he says that

*The kindest use a knife, because
The dead so soon grow so cold.*

This can be taken as a justification, but it seems to be a product of his frustration at the hypocrisy of the sentencing. He means that men have always killed the thing they loved, and in many cruel ways, but they have never really been executed for it. In his anguish over the execution of his inmate, he says that while all men kill what they love, "yet each man does not die."

In the following stanzas he describes the kind of shame and disgrace that the inmate was doomed to live with. He is essentially trying to show how we so often demonize the men who do terrible things without seeing them as human beings. He then talks about the actual execution, reiterating that he has really never seen a man who watched "with such a wistful eye".

This phrase is an extremely important part of the poem as it shows the other side of the crime, the side that people never think about. This side is the aftermath. He says that the man didn't try to resist what was happening to him, perhaps implying that he regretted his crime so much that he felt that he deserved his punishment. The speaker describes the everyday things that happen around him, apathetic to the loss of life that will happen and shake the prisoners. This part of the poem is essentially written in order to show the cruelty that the prisoners are doomed to live with.

The most extensive portion of the poem covers the last days before the execution. It is interesting that he seems to do fine while the other prisoners are tormented. It might again bring up the idea that the inmate might not actually want to live with the pain of knowing that he killed the woman he loved and might believe that he deserves his impending death.

After the execution, the body and essence of the man is mocked by the prison staff while the speaker believes that the man is resting in peace. This poem shows the tragedy of imprisonment and the importance of humanizing those who commit crimes. It shows the cruelty that men in prison have to survive, and very often don't.

Q. Ode to Duty by W. Wordsworth.

In order to follow Duty, one must be humble. Pride leads to destruction. Self-aggrandizement results from leaving the path of Duty and following haphazardly every desire that strikes the mind and heart. The speaker beseeches Duty to guide him so he will become strong: "let my weakness have an end!" Slavery to the senses leads to ruin, but becoming a "Bondman" to Duty frees the heart, mind, and allows one to follow one's true self, the Soul.

The speaker wants to live in the "spirit of self-sacrifice," and he wants the "confidence of reason," and he wants above all to live "in the light of truth." None this would be possible if he continued to lurch forward down his path of life like an adolescent who awkwardly abuses free will in order to achieve momentary gratification of the senses. This speaker wants to make of his life a beautiful humble palace of ever-new joy. And he knows he can do that by listening to and following Duty, that Daughter of God's Voice.

The popular poem 'Ode To Duty' was composed by **William Wordsworth** in 1805. It was published in his '**Poems in Two Volumes**' in 1807. In this poem, the poet personifies duty as a goddess. According to the poet, duty is the most important part of the life of human beings. He personifies duty as the strict daughter of God. This poem is in the form of the ode. An ode in which somebody is addressed. Like this, the duty is addressed in the poem 'Ode To Duty'.

The main theme of this poem reflects the importance of always staying on the path of responsible behavior. Wordsworth instructs us in this poem about the value of duty or work. He wants to make the reader understand that even though one may think that they do not want to follow the rules of life, by going to school, or work or behaving in a responsible fashion, in fact, that is exactly what we need to do.

The poet compares duty to the light that shows the right path to human beings. It guides human beings to do the right things in life. It helps a man in removing mental conflicts and also help to overcome fears in his life. The poet says that there are also some persons who do not require the help of duty to do the right things in their life. They do them naturally as their inner voice guide them to do it. They are happy persons. They are men of noble characters. If sometimes they fail to perform their duty well then duty helps them to choose the right path.

The poet says that it will be very nice when people will perform their duty according to their inner voice and will feel satisfied to do them. As inner voice never can be wrong. They will be happy to do so. But when they feel any confusion in their life then they want the help of duty. The poet expresses his feelings that when he was young he liked the freedom and did their works according to his comfort. He was a lover of his freedom. He always selected the easy path to go. Because the way of duty is not so easy. But now he decides to follow the right path of duty.

The poet chooses the right path to follow not because of his mental conflicts but he knows the importance of the right of duty. The poet now wants to live a happy and peaceful life. Duty is a strict daughter of God's voice. According to the poet, duty is always hard to perform but she has very kind expressions. She has always a divine smile on her face. Like human beings, the objects of nature also perform their duty. As flowers bloom in the garden and spread their fragrance all around because it is their duty to spread fragrance all around. As all the planets move in their direction always performing their duty to the universe.

Here Wordsworth invokes the duty to help him to perform his works well as she is powerful. The poet says that his works are not very sublime in nature. He requests duty to guide him always to follow the right path. He further says that he wants to be under the guidance of duty. He prays again Duty to give enough mental power to sacrifice himself for the good of others. He says that he needs enough courage for it. After being kind he has become now more and more intelligent to perform his duties well for the sake of others. The poet prays her to give him the power of self-confidence to pass his life truthfully.

Thus, the poem 'Ode To Duty' has a universal appeal. It teaches the importance of duty in the development of human personality. It contains the poet's personal and confessional elements. Thus the poem reflects the development of the poet's mind. It has both novelty and sublimity in its theme. Its conception of duty makes it more splendor forever. The ode has seven stanzas of eight lines each. The meter is iambic tetrameter of first seven lines of each stanza but the eighth line is in iambic hexameter. The rhyming scheme of each stanza is different.

Q. Ode to Autumn by Keats.

'To Autumn' is a phenomenal ode that celebrates the beauty and grandeur of autumn season. The poem explores the phenomenon of the fall season appreciatively. Its popularity lies in the representation of many things related to life and nature.

"To Autumn" is one of the simplest of Keats's odes. The extraordinary achievement of this poem lies in its ability to suggest, explore, and develop a rich abundance of themes without ever ruffling its calm, gentle, and lovely description of autumn. It shows Keats's speaker paying homage to a particular goddess—in this case, the deified season of Autumn. The selection of this season implicitly takes up the other odes' themes of temporality, mortality, and change: Autumn in Keats's ode is a time of warmth and plenty, but it is perched on the brink of winter's desolation, as the bees enjoy "later flowers," the harvest is gathered from the fields, the lambs of spring are now "full-grown," and, in the final line of the poem, the swallows gather for their winter migration. The understated sense of inevitable loss in that final line makes it one of the most moving moments in all of poetry; it can be read as a simple, uncomplaining summation of the entire human condition.

Despite the coming chill of winter, the late warmth of autumn provides Keats's speaker with ample beauty to celebrate: the cottage and its surroundings in the first stanza, the agrarian haunts of the goddess in the second, and the locales of natural creatures in the third. Keats's speaker is able to experience these beauties in a sincere and meaningful way.

"To Autumn" as a Representative of Natural World: The poem also explores the beauty of autumn in three different stages. First, autumn is a friendly conspirator that collaborates with the sun to bring richness, ripeness, and fullness to the fruits. Secondly, it is a witness, who sees the end of ripening and the completion of the harvest. Thirdly, it is represented as a musician who plays sweet melodies. Thus, Keats glorifies autumn with all its bloom and shows no pain and miseries running in this season. However, what appeals the reader is the splendid description of autumn and the message that autumn is not always melancholic and also has its own pleasures.

Contentment, the natural world and the passing of time are the other themes grounded in the poem. Each stanza represents the different stage of autumn. The first stanza unfolds the start of autumn, the second describes the harvest time, and the final stanza gives us a clue about the departure of the season. It is through the powerful and rich description of all these stages the speaker shows his contentment in life. He knows that fleeting time is bringing him close to his end, but he remains hopeful and enjoys the beauty of life with true spirits.

"To Autumn" describes, in its three stanzas, three different aspects of the season: its fruitfulness, its labour and its ultimate decline. Through the stanzas there is a progression from early autumn to mid autumn and then to the heralding of winter. Parallel to this, the poem depicts the day turning from morning to afternoon and into dusk. These progressions are joined with a shift from the tactile sense to that of sight and then of sound, creating a three-part symmetry which is not present in Keats's other odes.^[10]

As the poem progresses, Autumn is represented metaphorically as one who conspires, who ripens fruit, who harvests, who makes music. The first stanza of the poem represents Autumn as involved with the promotion of natural processes, growth and ultimate maturation, two forces in opposition in nature, but together creating the impression that the season will not end. In this stanza the fruits are still ripening and the buds still opening in the warm weather. Stuart Sperry says that Keats emphasises the tactile sense here, suggested by the imagery of growth and gentle motion: swelling, bending and plumping.

In the second stanza Autumn is personified as a harvester, to be seen by the viewer in various guises performing labouring tasks essential to the provision of food for the coming year. Autumn is not depicted as actually harvesting but as seated, resting or watching. In lines 14–15 the personification of Autumn is as an exhausted

labourer. The progression through the day is revealed in actions that are all suggestive of the drowsiness of afternoon: the harvested grain is being winnowed, the harvester is asleep or returning home.

The last stanza contrasts Autumn's sounds with those of Spring. The sounds that are presented are not only those of Autumn but essentially the gentle sounds of the evening. Gnats wail and lambs bleat in the dusk. As night approaches within the final moments of the song, death is slowly approaching alongside the end of the year. The full-grown lambs, like the grapes, gourds and hazel nuts, will be harvested for the winter. The twittering swallows gather for departure, leaving the fields bare. The whistling red-breast and the chirping cricket are the common sounds of winter. The references to Spring, the growing lambs and the migrating swallows remind the reader that the seasons are a cycle, widening the scope of this stanza from a single season to life in general.

"To Autumn" closely describes a paradise as realized on earth while also focusing on archetypal symbols connected with the season. Within the poem, autumn represents growth, maturation and finally an approaching death. There is a fulfilling union between the ideal and the real.

Another major theme of "To Autumn" is the acceptance of the process of life. In process there is a harmony between the finality of death and hints of renewal of life in the cycle of the seasons, paralleled by the renewal of a single day.

Q. Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard by Thomas Gray

When Gray designated his work as an elegy, he placed it in a long tradition of meditative poems that focus on human mortality and sometimes reflect specifically on the death of a single person. By setting his meditation in a typical English churchyard with mounds, gravestones, and yew trees, Gray was also following a tradition. Some of the most popular poems in the middle of Gray's century were set in graveyards and meditated on death.

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is cast in four-line stanzas, or quatrains, in which the first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fourth in *abab* pattern associated with elegiac poetry. The last three stanzas are printed in italic type and given the title "The Epitaph."

About the Poem

In "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," the speaker (poet) strides the countryside at dusk, lamenting the deaths of all men, particularly the poor. He evokes the cycles of the natural world to meditate on the inevitability of death for all, including himself.

- The speaker observes the landscape, watching the plowman and his cattle heading home and noting the descending gloom and "moping owl."
- Seeing the grave sites in the shade of a yew tree, the speaker considers the deaths of poor men and rich men alike, lamenting that the poor die before they can make a mark on the world.
- He praises the modesty of the graves in this churchyard and realizes that death consigns all men, poor and rich, obscure and renowned, to a fate of oblivion. He then imagines how a humble old farmer will see him after his own death.

The "Elegy" asks us to honor the lives of common, everyday people—not just rich, famous folks. This idea of glorifying mundane, everyday things becomes central to the philosophies of British Romantics. That's part of why Gray's "Elegy" often gets interpreted as a kind of turning point from the more formal poetry of the 18th century, with its emphasis on rich and famous people, to the more loose, free-form poetry of the Romantics, which focused more on everyday folks.

The "Elegy" was probably inspired in part by Gray's sadness at the death of his friend Richard West. It's not just about death, but how people are remembered after they're dead. Gray muses about what happens after people die, and in the final stanzas of the poem, he admits his own fear of dying. It's a powerful and evocative poem. Even if the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" were the only poem Gray ever wrote, Gray would deserve a place of pride in the literary history books, even alongside heavy hitters like Alexander Pope. He was offered the prestigious post of British Poet Laureate in 1757, but he turned it down. It seems as though he might have lacked confidence in himself as a poet.

Summary

The speaker is hanging out in a churchyard just after the sun goes down. It's dark and a bit spooky. He looks at the dimly lit gravestones, but none of the grave markers are all that impressive—most of the people buried here are poor folks from the village, so their tombstones are just simple, roughly carved stones.

The speaker starts to imagine the kinds of lives these dead guys probably led. Then he shakes his finger at the reader, and tells us not to get all snobby about the rough monuments these dead guys have on their tombs, since, really, it doesn't matter what kind of a tomb you have when you're dead, anyway. And the speaker reminds us, we're all going to die someday.

But that gets the speaker thinking about his own inevitable death, and he gets a little frightened also. He imagines that someday in the future, someone might pass through this same graveyard, just as he was doing today. And that person might see the speaker's tombstone, and ask a local villager about it. And then he imagines what the villager might say about him.

At the end, he imagines that the villager points out the epitaph engraved on the tombstone, and invites the passerby to read it for himself. So basically, Thomas Gray writes his own epitaph at the end of this poem.

Themes of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"

Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is a meditation about death as the final estate of the human condition, regardless of wealth, position, or power.

The first four stanzas present images of twilight settling over a solitary figure in a small country churchyard. The first line, "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day," expresses the inevitable presence of death in three words: tolls, knell, and parting. Stanza 4 concludes the opening picture and leaves no doubt about the subject of the meditation: "Each in his narrow cell forever laid,/ The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

The next four stanzas continue the theme of death as the end of all individuals by listing the activities the dead used to do but do "no more." The repetition of "no more" (line 20) and "For them no more" (line 21) emphasizes the fact that all human activity leads to the grave.

The poet has established a dramatic point of view in this poem. The reader sees the world through the eyes of a single figure who is humankind, who sees the truth and sees the destiny of all. Yet each of the “rude forefathers” (the dead villagers) represents humankind as well: Their fate is our own. Thus, one has both the living, contemplating human destiny and death, and the dead, whose destiny is all too clear.

These two merge later in the poem, beginning in stanza 24, where, suddenly, the speaker imagines himself dead and buried, and the reader is invited to read his epitaph (line 115). In the face of inevitable doom, the speaker holds out the hope for immortality by making a friend of Heaven and by believing that, dead, he rests in “The bosom of his Father and his God” (line 128).

Thus, Thomas Gray’s poem is a reflection on various aspects of death.

Death

Gray's "Elegy" is one of the best-known poems about death in all of European literature. The poem presents the reflections of an observer who, passing by a churchyard that is out in the country, stops for a moment to think about the significance of the strangers buried there. The speaker of the poem is surrounded by the idea of death, and throughout the first seven stanzas there are numerous images pointing out the contrast between death and life.

After mentioning the churchyard in the title, which establishes the theme of mortality, the poem itself begins with images of gloom and finality. The darkness at the end of the day, the forlorn moan of lowing cattle, the stillness of the air and the owl's nocturnal hooting all serve to set a background for this serious meditation. However, it is not until the fourth stanza that the poem actually begins to deal with the cemetery, mentioned as the place where the village forefathers "sleep."

In the following stanzas, the speaker tries to imagine what the lives of these simple men might have been like, touching upon their relations with their wives, children, and the soil that they worked. They are not defined by their possessions, because they had few, and instead are defined by their actions, which serves to contrast their lives with their quiet existence in the graveyard. This "Elegy" then presents the dead in the best light: their families adored them and they were cheerful in their work, as they "hummed the woods beneath their steady stroke." The speaker openly admits that they are spoken of so well precisely because they are dead.

The poem ends with the narrator turning towards his own fate, accepting his life and accomplishments. The poem, like many of Gray's, incorporates a narrator who is contemplating his position in a transient world that is mysterious and tragic.

Q. Background to the Study of Elegy, Odes and Ballads

Poetry is a special kind of writing that uses the sound and **rhythm** of words to tell a story and to make the reader feel a certain way. These feelings are created through **setting**, **mood**, and **tone**. Setting is the time and place a story or poem takes place in. Mood and tone have to do with how the poem makes you feel. It could be a funny, silly poem or a dark, sad one.

Sometimes, poems **rhyme**, but sometimes they don't. Sometimes, poems follow specific rules, like how many words are in each line, but not always. Some poems have several **stanzas** or sections, and other don't. Some poems have a specific number of syllables in each line, but some poems have no rules at all.

Poems are of different kinds such as lyric, sonnet, epic, ode, ballad, etc.

Elegy:

The form of poetry that we term as elegy is an ancient Greek metrical form and is traditionally written in response to the death of a person or group. Though similar in function, the elegy is distinct from the epitaph, ode, and eulogy: the epitaph is very brief; the ode solely exalts; and the eulogy is most often written in formal prose.

The elements of a traditional elegy mirror three stages of loss. First, there is a lament, where the speaker expresses grief and sorrow, then praise and admiration of the idealized dead, and finally consolation and solace. These three stages can be seen in W. H. Auden's classic "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," and "In Memoriam" by A.L. Tennyson. Other well-known elegies in the English language include "Fugue of Death" by Paul Celan, written for victims of the Holocaust, "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman, written for President Abraham Lincoln, and "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray.

Many modern elegies have been written not out of a sense of personal grief, but rather a broad feeling of loss and metaphysical sadness. Thomas Gray's "*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*" is such a poem.

Ballads

A **ballad** is a type of poem that is sometimes set to music. Ballads have a long history and are found in many cultures. The ballad actually began as a folk song and continues today in popular music. Many love songs today can be considered ballads.

A typical ballad consists of stanzas that contain a **quatrain**, or four poetic lines. The **meter** or rhythm of each line is usually **iambic**, which means it has one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. In ballads, there are usually eight or six syllables in a line. Like any poem, some ballads follow this form and some don't, but almost all ballads are **narrative**, which means they tell a story. A **ballad** therefore is a narrative poem written in a rhythmic verse that may be sung. Ballads tell a story, often one that is dramatic or emotional.

Ballads are often written in **quatrains** that have alternating rhymes and patterns of stressed syllables.

There are many examples of famous ballads in English literature such as the *Ballad of Jesse James* and *Ballad of Father Gilligan*. Jesse James is about the English criminal outlaw named Jesse James. No one knows who originally wrote this, because it was passed down as a song for many years before being written down.

Because the ballad was originally set to music, some ballads have a **refrain**, or a repeated chorus, just like a song does. Similarly, the rhyme scheme is often ABAB because of the musical quality of this rhyme pattern.

While ballads have always been popular, it was during the **Romantic movement** of poetry in the late 18th century that the ballad had a resurgence and became a popular form. Many famous romantic poets, like William Wordsworth, wrote in the ballad form.

Ode

An **ode** is a lyric poem with a complicated structure that praises a person or marks an important event. Odes are generally meant to be performed with music.

An **ode** is a type of lyrical stanza. It is an elaborately structured poem praising or glorifying an event or individual, describing nature intellectually as well as emotionally. A classic ode is structured in three major parts: the strophe, the antistrophe, and the epode.

Greek odes were originally poetic pieces performed with musical accompaniment. As time passed on, they gradually became known as personal lyrical compositions whether sung (with or without musical instruments)

or merely recited (always with accompaniment). The primary instruments used were the aulos and the lyre (the latter was the most revered instrument to the ancient Greeks).

There are three typical forms of odes: the ***Pindaric, Horatian, and irregular***. Pindaric odes follow the form and style of Pindar. Horatian odes follow conventions of Horace; the odes of Horace deliberately imitated the Greek lyricists such as Alcaeus and Anacreon. Irregular odes use rhyme, but not the three-part form of the Pindaric ode, nor the two- or four-line stanza of the Horatian ode. The ode is a lyric poem. It conveys exalted and inspired emotions. It is a lyric in an elaborate form, expressed in a language that is imaginative, dignified and sincere. Like the lyric, an ode is of Greek origin.

Pindar was an ancient Greek who wrote great odes. Some of them were about the Olympic games. In the Romantic Age, odes of John Keats, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, Thomas Gray, etc poets made this form extremely popular. More recently Chilean poet Pablo Neruda wrote odes to a variety of topics.