 **Annai Women’s College **

**(ARTS & SCIENCE)**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **S NO** | **UNIT** | **PAGE NO** |
| **1** | **I** | **3-6** |
| **2** | **II** | **7-37** |
| **3** | **IV** | **38-46** |
| **4** | **V** | **47-73** |

**MODERN LITERATURE III**

**UNIT –I [POETRY]**

**KUBLA KHAN**

In that tumult Kubla Khan heard the voices of his ancestors. They warned him of approaching war and danger. In the second part of the poem Coleridge describes the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan. Its shadow floated midway on the waves.

Introduction

The speaker describes the “stately pleasure-dome” built in Xanadu according to the decree of Kubla Khan, in the place where Alph, the sacred river, ran “through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea.” Walls and towers were raised around “twice five miles of fertile ground,” filled with beautiful gardens and forests. A “deep romantic chasm” slanted down a green hill, occasionally spewing forth a violent and powerful burst of water, so great that it flung boulders up with it “like rebounding hail.”

The river

The river ran five miles through the woods, finally sinking “in tumult to a lifeless ocean.” Amid that tumult, in the place “as holy and enchanted / As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing to her demon-lover,” Kubla heard “ancestral voices” bringing prophesies of war. The pleasure-dome’s shadow floated on the waves, where the mingled sounds of the fountain and the caves could be heard. “It was a miracle of rare device,” the speaker says, “A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!”

Damsel with a Dulcimer

The speaker says that he once saw a “damsel with a dulcimer,” an Abyssinian maid who played her dulcimer and sang “of Mount Abora.” He says that if he could revive “her symphony and song” within him, he would rebuild the pleasure-dome out of music, and all who heard him would cry “Beware!” of “His flashing eyes, his floating hair!” The hearers would circle him thrice and close their eyes with “holy dread,” knowing that he had tasted honeydew, “and drunk the milk of Paradise.”

Form

The chant-like, musical incantations of “Kubla Khan” result from Coleridge’s masterful use of iambic tetrameter and alternating rhyme schemes. The first stanza is written in tetrameter with a rhyme scheme of ABAABCCDEDE, alternating between staggered rhymes and couplets. The second stanza expands into tetrameter and follows roughly the same rhyming pattern, also expanded— ABAABCCDDFFGGHIIHJJ. The third stanza tightens into tetrameter and rhymes ABABCC. The fourth stanza continues the tetrameter of the third and rhymes ABCCBDEDEFGFFFGHHG.

Commentary

Along with “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “Kubla Khan” is one of Coleridge’s most famous and enduring poems. The story of its composition is also one of the most famous in the history of English poetry. As the poet explains in the short preface to this poem, he had fallen asleep after taking “an anodyne” prescribed “in consequence of a slight disposition” (this is a euphemism for opium, to which Coleridge was known to be addicted). Before falling asleep, he had been reading a story in which Kubla Khan commanded the building of a new palace; Coleridge claims that while he slept, he had a fantastic vision and composed simultaneously—while sleeping—some two or three hundred lines of poetry, “if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or conscious effort.”

Conclusion

Waking after about three hours, the poet seized a pen and began writing furiously; however, after copying down the first three stanzas of his dreamt poem—the first three stanzas of the current poem as we know it—he was interrupted by a “person on business from Porlock,” who detained him for an hour. After this interruption, he was unable to recall the rest of the vision or the poetry he had composed in his opium dream. It is thought that the final stanza of the poem, thematizing the idea of the lost vision through the figure of the “damsel with a dulcimer” and the milk of Paradise, was written post-interruption. The mysterious person from Porlock is one of the most notorious and enigmatic figures in Coleridge’s biography; no one knows who he was or why he disturbed the poet or what he wanted or, indeed, whether any of Coleridge’s story is actually true. But the person from Porlock has become a metaphor for the malicious interruptions the world throws in the way of inspiration and genius, and “Kubla Khan,” strange and ambiguous as it is, has become what is perhaps the definitive statement on the obstruction and thwarting of the visionary genius.

Regrettably, the story of the poem’s composition, while thematically rich in and of itself, often overshadows the poem proper, which is one of Coleridge’s most haunting and beautiful. The first three stanzas are products of pure imagination: The pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan is not a useful metaphor for anything in particular (though in the context of the poem’s history, it becomes a metaphor for the unbuilt monument of imagination); however, it is a fantastically prodigious descriptive act. The poem becomes especially evocative when, after the second stanza, the meter suddenly tightens; the resulting lines are terse and solid, almost beating out the sound of the war drums (“The shadow of the dome of pleasure / Floated midway on the waves...”).

What is the theme of the Poem?

The fourth stanza states the theme of the poem as a whole (though “Kubla Khan” is almost impossible to consider as a unified whole, as its parts are so sharply divided). The speaker says that he once had a vision of the damsel singing of Mount Abora; this vision becomes a metaphor for Coleridge’s vision of the 300-hundred-line masterpiece he never completed. The speaker insists that if he could only “revive” within him “her symphony and song,” he would recreate the pleasure-dome out of music and words, and take on the persona of the magician or visionary. His hearers would recognize the dangerous power of the vision, which would manifest itself in his “flashing eyes” and “floating hair.” But, awestruck, they would nonetheless dutifully take part in the ritual, recognizing that “he on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise.”

**UNIT - II**

**ODE ON A GRECIAN URN**

In this lesson, learn about Romantic poet John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' which is considered one of the greatest odes ever written. In the poem, Keats has a surprisingly emotional reaction to staring at an old piece of pottery. We'll examine the story of the poem, its meaning and its form.

'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is one of John Keats' most famous poems. He's a Romantic poet, and he wrote it in 1819 along with a bunch of other odes - he was kind of going through a little bit of an 'ode period.' They're known as his 'Great Odes of 1819.' Some of the other ones are 'Ode to a Nightingale,' 'Ode on Melancholy' and 'Ode on Indolence.' An ode is really just a kind of poem that usually focuses on a single person or a thing or an event, and it's kind of a tribute to that thing. So if you were in love with someone you could write them an ode. You could write an ode to Chipotle if you love burritos as much as I do. You can really write an ode to anything; you just have to really be 'once more with feeling' about it.

Before we get to 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' we're going to talk about Grecian urns in general. When you hear 'urn,' you might think of those containers you put your dead relatives in after they've been cremated or something like that. That's kind of the modern connotation of it. If you've ever seen Meet the Parents, you might think about that urn getting knocked over and then the cat going and doing its business all over the grandma. Anyway, that's not the kind of urn that we're talking about. Greek urns were a type of pottery used for holding water, wine, olive oil - they really liked olive oil. What was interesting to Keats about all of this, and what's still kind of interesting today about Grecian urns, is that they were really heavily decorated. They had all kinds of drawings all around the outside of them. In the poem, Keats is basically looking at an urn that depicts a whole bunch of different scenes - you know, it was 1819; I guess he didn't have TV or the Internet or anything else to do, so he had to be entertained by sitting around and staring at old pottery.

The First Stanza

So, the poem - in total, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' has five stanzas. Each of these is ten lines. We're going to start by just talking about the dramatic situation of the poem, which is just a fancy way of saying what's happening in the poem. The first stanza begins:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,

Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time

He's talking to the urn in this opening. That's the 'foster-child of Silence and slow Time' and all that stuff. He's fascinated by how the images on the urn are captured in a single moment. They're silent and they're not moving forward in time - that's the 'foster-child of Silence and slow Time' - they kind of evoke this stillness or frozenness of the images on the urn. Then he starts to describe the first image. He says:

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

So some dudes are chasing women, and since this is Greek art, they are likely naked. So Keats kind of naturally presumes that all these scenes might be kind of about sex, which sounds reasonable given that there's a bunch of naked people chasing each other around.

The Second Stanza

Second stanza - Keats is looking at a different part of the urn that has a different picture on it. This one basically has a man and a woman lying under a tree and the man is piping on a pipe. He describes:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard

Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;

Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,

Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

So he's kind of saying that, alright, the songs that you hear are great - songs you can hear with your ears - but the songs that you don't hear with your ears are better, so keep playing, soft pipes. What does this mean? What are songs you don't hear with your ears? Maybe Keats has been staring at one too many urns! Really he's just saying that, you know, as good as music is that you play and you hear - literal music - the music that the man is playing on the urn (that's kind of frozen in time and you obviously can't hear because it's just a painting) is better because it's kind of there and it never ends. He's always playing this piping tune.

Keats goes on, and he says:

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve;

She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

So, dude, don't worry that you can't ever kiss your woman or 'have thy bliss,' if you all know what that means - the whole 'frozen in time' thing kind of gets in the way of that - but it's okay because she's never going to get old. That's a benefit of being frozen on an urn. You can't have sex with her, but she's never going to get old; you're kind of perpetually stuck in this wooing stage; you're gazing at her for all time and she's always going to be pretty. They're captured in their youth; they're never going to not be youthful and they're never going to not be in love.

The Third Stanza

Next stanza is just more of the same. There's happy, happy boughs; there's more happy love! more happy, happy love! It just sounds great, doesn't it? Keats gets pretty excited about the fact that the leaves on the trees are going to stay green forever and that this couple will always be in love. Those things kind of go along together. Then Keats reminds us what happens to young lovers. He says:

All breathing human passion far above,

That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,

A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

People have debated about what this line means, but what they're essentially saying is that when young love is consummated - or maybe even just when a couple spends more time together; it might not have to do with sex - bad things happen. Maybe you have sex and you're not quite as into each other, you find out he's got some weird fetish, you start fighting or whatever. Whatever he really means, he's kind of saying that it's better to be captured at that moment where you're just hanging out in the tree, playing your pipes. You're kind of perpetually frustrated but you're also perpetually in love. Nothing bad can happen. Not only can she not get old, which is what he said in the last stanza, but you're never going to start fighting or not liking each other so much, so that's good, I guess.

The Fourth Stanza

Fourth stanza - we're kind of getting in the home stretch now. We get those two stanzas about the young lovers, and now he moves on to another picture on the urn. I guess it's a big urn with lots of drawings. He says:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?

To what green alter, O mysterious priest,

Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

So some folks are taking a cow to a sacrifice, and it's not quite as fun as men chasing naked women around or lovers hanging out under a tree. So, Keats starts thinking about where these drawings on the urn might have come from - where they're coming from in the picture.

What little town by river or sea-shore,

Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,

Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?

And, little town, thy streets for evermore

Will silent be; and not a soul, to tell

Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

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Ode on a Grecian Urn

Summary

In the first stanza, the speaker stands before an ancient Grecian urn and addresses it. He is preoccupied with its depiction of pictures frozen in time. It is the “still unravish’d bride of quietness,” the “foster-child of silence and slow time.” He also describes the urn as a “historian” that can tell a story. He wonders about the figures on the side of the urn and asks what legend they depict and from where they come. He looks at a picture that seems to depict a group of men pursuing a group of women and wonders what their story could be: “What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?”

In the second stanza, the speaker looks at another picture on the urn, this time of a young man playing a pipe, lying with his lover beneath a glade of trees. The speaker says that the piper’s “unheard” melodies are sweeter than mortal melodies because they are unaffected by time. He tells the youth that, though he can never kiss his lover because he is frozen in time, he should not grieve, because her beauty will never fade. In the third stanza, he looks at the trees surrounding the lovers and feels happy that they will never shed their leaves. He is happy for the piper because his songs will be “for ever new,” and happy that the love of the boy and the girl will last forever, unlike mortal love, which lapses into “breathing human passion” and eventually vanishes, leaving behind only a “burning forehead, and a parching tongue.”

In the fourth stanza, the speaker examines another picture on the urn, this one of a group of villagers leading a heifer to be sacrificed. He wonders where they are going (“To what green altar, O mysterious priest...”) and from where they have come. He imagines their little town, empty of all its citizens, and tells it that its streets will “for evermore” be silent, for those who have left it, frozen on the urn, will never return. In the final stanza, the speaker again addresses the urn itself, saying that it, like Eternity, “doth tease us out of thought.” He thinks that when his generation is long dead, the urn will remain, telling future generations its enigmatic lesson: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” The speaker says that that is the only thing the urn knows and the only thing it needs to know.

Form

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” follows the same ode-stanza structure as the “Ode on Melancholy,” though it varies more the rhyme scheme of the last three lines of each stanza. Each of the five stanzas in “Grecian Urn” is ten lines long, metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter, and divided into a two part rhyme scheme, the last three lines of which are variable. The first seven lines of each stanza follow an ABABCDE rhyme scheme, but the second occurrences of the CDE sounds do not follow the same order. In stanza one, lines seven through ten are rhymed DCE; in stanza two, CED; in stanzas three and four, CDE; and in stanza five, DCE, just as in stanza one. As in other odes (especially “Autumn” and “Melancholy”), the two-part rhyme scheme (the first part made of AB rhymes, the second of CDE rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well. The first four lines of each stanza roughly define the subject of the stanza, and the last six roughly explicate or develop it. (As in other odes, this is only a general rule, true of some stanzas more than others; stanzas such as the fifth do not connect rhyme scheme and thematic structure closely at all.)

Themes

If the “Ode to a Nightingale” portrays Keats’s speaker’s engagement with the fluid expressiveness of music, the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” portrays his attempt to engage with the static immobility of sculpture. The Grecian urn, passed down through countless centuries to the time of the speaker’s viewing, exists outside of time in the human sense—it does not age, it does not die, and indeed it is alien to all such concepts. In the speaker’s meditation, this creates an intriguing paradox for the human figures carved into the side of the urn: They are free from time, but they are simultaneously frozen in time. They do not have to confront aging and death (their love is “for ever young”), but neither can they have experience (the youth can never kiss the maiden; the figures in the procession can never return to their homes).

The speaker attempts three times to engage with scenes carved into the urn; each time he asks different questions of it. In the first stanza, he examines the picture of the “mad pursuit” and wonders what actual story lies behind the picture: “What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?” Of course, the urn can never tell him the whos, whats, whens, and wheres of the stories it depicts, and the speaker is forced to abandon this line of questioning.

In the second and third stanzas, he examines the picture of the piper playing to his lover beneath the trees. Here, the speaker tries to imagine what the experience of the figures on the urn must be like; he tries to identify with them. He is tempted by their escape from temporality and attracted to the eternal newness of the piper’s unheard song and the eternally unchanging beauty of his lover. He thinks that their love is “far above” all transient human passion, which, in its sexual expression, inevitably leads to an abatement of intensity—when passion is satisfied, all that remains is a wearied physicality: a sorrowful heart, a “burning forehead,” and a “parching tongue.” His recollection of these conditions seems to remind the speaker that he is inescapably subject to them, and he abandons his attempt to identify with the figures on the urn.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker attempts to think about the figures on the urn as though they wereexperiencing human time, imagining that their procession has an origin (the “little town”) and a destination (the “green altar”). But all he can think is that the town will forever be deserted: If these people have left their origin, they will never return to it. In this sense he confronts head-on the limits of static art; if it is impossible to learn from the urn the whos and wheres of the “real story” in the first stanza, it is impossible everto know the origin and the destination of the figures on the urn in the fourth.

It is true that the speaker shows a certain kind of progress in his successive attempts to engage with the urn. His idle curiosity in the first attempt gives way to a more deeply felt identification in the second, and in the third, the speaker leaves his own concerns behind and thinks of the processional purely on its own terms, thinking of the “little town” with a real and generous feeling. But each attempt ultimately ends in failure. The third attempt fails simply because there is nothing more to say—once the speaker confronts the silence and eternal emptiness of the little town, he has reached the limit of static art; on this subject, at least, there is nothing more the urn can tell him.

In the final stanza, the speaker presents the conclusions drawn from his three attempts to engage with the urn. He is overwhelmed by its existence outside of temporal change, with its ability to “tease” him “out of thought / As doth eternity.” If human life is a succession of “hungry generations,” as the speaker suggests in “Nightingale,” the urn is a separate and self-contained world. It can be a “friend to man,” as the speaker says, but it cannot be mortal; the kind of aesthetic connection the speaker experiences with the urn is ultimately insufficient to human life.

The final two lines, in which the speaker imagines the urn speaking its message to mankind—”Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” have proved among the most difficult to interpret in the Keats canon. After the urn utters the enigmatic phrase “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” no one can say for sure who “speaks” the conclusion, “that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” It could be the speaker addressing the urn, and it could be the urn addressing mankind. If it is the speaker addressing the urn, then it would seem to indicate his awareness of its limitations: The urn may not need to know anything beyond the equation of beauty and truth, but the complications of human life make it impossible for such a simple and self-contained phrase to express sufficiently anything about necessary human knowledge. If it is the urn addressing mankind, then the phrase has rather the weight of an important lesson, as though beyond all the complications of human life, all human beings need to know on earth is that beauty and truth are one and the same. It is largely a matter of personal interpretation which reading to accept.

Summary

The three stanzas of the “Ode on Melancholy” address the subject of how to cope with sadness. The first stanza tells what not to do: The sufferer should not “go to Lethe,” or forget their sadness (Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology); should not commit suicide (nightshade, “the ruby grape of Prosperpine,” is a poison; Prosperpine is the mythological queen of the underworld); and should not become obsessed with objects of death and misery (the beetle, the death-moth, and the owl). For, the speaker says, that will make the anguish of the soul drowsy, and the sufferer should do everything he can to remain aware of and alert to the depths of his suffering.

In the second stanza, the speaker tells the sufferer what to do in place of the things he forbade in the first stanza. When afflicted with “the melancholy fit,” the sufferer should instead overwhelm his sorrow with natural beauty, glutting it on the morning rose, “on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,” or in the eyes of his beloved. In the third stanza, the speaker explains these injunctions, saying that pleasure and pain are inextricably linked: Beauty must die, joy is fleeting, and the flower of pleasure is forever “turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.” The speaker says that the shrine of melancholy is inside the “temple of Delight,” but that it is only visible if one can overwhelm oneself with joy until it reveals its center of sadness, by “burst[ing] Joy’s grape against his palate fine.” The man who can do this shall “taste the sadness” of melancholy’s might and “be among her cloudy trophies hung.”

Form

“Ode on Melancholy,” the shortest of Keats’s odes, is written in a very regular form that matches its logical, argumentative thematic structure. Each stanza is ten lines long and metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter. The first two stanzas, offering advice to the sufferer, follow the same rhyme scheme, ABABCDECDE; the third, which explains the advice, varies the ending slightly, following a scheme of ABABCDEDCE, so that the rhymes of the eighth and ninth lines are reversed in order from the previous two stanzas. As in some other odes (especially “Autumn” and “Grecian Urn”), the two-part rhyme scheme of each stanza (one group of AB rhymes, one of CDE rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well, in which the first four lines of each stanza define the stanza’s subject, and the latter six develop it. (This is true especially of the second two stanzas.)

Themes

If the “Ode to Psyche” is different from the other odes primarily because of its form, the “Ode on Melancholy” is different primarily because of its style. The only ode not to be written in the first person, “Melancholy” finds the speaker admonishing or advising sufferers of melancholy in the imperative mode; presumably his advice is the result of his own hard-won experience. In many ways, “Melancholy” seeks to synthesize the language of all the previous odes—the Greek mythology of “Indolence” and “Urn,” the beautiful descriptions of nature in “Psyche” and “Nightingale,” the passion of “Nightingale,” and the philosophy of “Urn,” all find expression in its three stanzas—but “Melancholy” is more than simply an amalgam of the previous poems. In it, the speaker at last explores the nature of transience and the connection of pleasure and pain in a way that lets him move beyond the insufficient aesthetic understanding of “Urn” and achieve the deeper understanding of “To Autumn.”

Summary

Keats’s speaker opens his first stanza by addressing Autumn, describing its abundance and its intimacy with the sun, with whom Autumn ripens fruits and causes the late flowers to bloom. In the second stanza, the speaker describes the figure of Autumn as a female goddess, often seen sitting on the granary floor, her hair “soft-lifted” by the wind, and often seen sleeping in the fields or watching a cider-press squeezing the juice from apples. In the third stanza, the speaker tells Autumn not to wonder where the songs of spring have gone, but instead to listen to her own music. At twilight, the “small gnats” hum among the "the river sallows," or willow trees, lifted and dropped by the wind, and “full-grown lambs” bleat from the hills, crickets sing, robins whistle from the garden, and swallows, gathering for their coming migration, sing from the skies.

Form

Like the “Ode on Melancholy,” “To Autumn” is written in a three-stanza structure with a variable rhyme scheme. Each stanza is eleven lines long (as opposed to ten in “Melancholy”, and each is metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter. In terms of both thematic organization and rhyme scheme, each stanza is divided roughly into two parts. In each stanza, the first part is made up of the first four lines of the stanza, and the second part is made up of the last seven lines. The first part of each stanza follows an ABAB rhyme scheme, the first line rhyming with the third, and the second line rhyming with the fourth. The second part of each stanza is longer and varies in rhyme scheme: The first stanza is arranged CDEDCCE, and the second and third stanzas are arranged CDECDDE. (Thematically, the first part of each stanza serves to define the subject of the stanza, and the second part offers room for musing, development, and speculation on that subject; however, this thematic division is only very general.)

Themes

In both its form and descriptive surface, “To Autumn” is one of the simplest of Keats’s odes. There is nothing confusing or complex in Keats’s paean to the season of autumn, with its fruitfulness, its flowers, and the song of its swallows gathering for migration. 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. Where “Ode on Melancholy” presents itself as a strenuous heroic quest, “To Autumn” is concerned with the much quieter activity of daily observation and appreciation. In this quietude, the gathered themes of the preceding odes find their fullest and most beautiful expression.

“To Autumn” takes up where the other odes leave off. Like the others, 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 because of the lessons he has learned in the previous odes: He is no longer indolent, no longer committed to the isolated imagination (as in “Psyche”), no longer attempting to escape the pain of the world through ecstatic rapture (as in “Nightingale”), no longer frustrated by the attempt to eternalize mortal beauty or subject eternal beauty to time (as in “Urn”), and no longer able to frame the connection of pleasure and the sorrow of loss only as an imaginary heroic quest (as in “Melancholy”).

In “To Autumn,” the speaker’s experience of beauty refers back to earlier odes (the swallows recall the nightingale; the fruit recalls joy’s grape; the goddess drowsing among the poppies recalls Psyche and Cupid lying in the grass), but it also recalls a wealth of earlier poems. Most importantly, the image of Autumn winnowing and harvesting (in a sequence of odes often explicitly about creativity) recalls an earlier Keats poem in which the activity of harvesting is an explicit metaphor for artistic creation. In his sonnet “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” Keats makes this connection directly:

Study Questions

1. What are some of the recurring motifs that appear throughout the six odes? Given the chronological problems with the usual ordering of the odes (“Indolence,” often placed first in the sequence, was one of the last odes to be written), to what extent do you think the odes should be grouped as a unified sequence?

2. Taken together, do the odes tell a “story,” or do they simply develop a theme? Do you think the speaker is the same in each ode?

3. How does the “Ode on Indolence” anticipate the themes and images of the other five poems? Given the speaker’s later confrontations with Love, Ambition, and Beauty—as well as with such themes as mortality and the creative imagination—does the conclusion of the Indolence ode seem ironic?

4. In what ways is “Ode to Psyche” different from the other odes? How do these differences affect the poem’s attempt to describe the creative imagination? Why might the speaker want to use his imagination for Psyche’s worship?

5. From Psyche’s bower to the nightingale’s glade to the warm luxury of Autumn, the odes contain some of the most beautiful sensory language in English poetry. But many of the odes intentionally limit the senses they inhabit. With particular reference to “Nightingale” (which suppresses sight) and “Grecian Urn” (which suppresses every sense but sight), how do the odes create an abundance of believable sensation even as they limit it?

6. The odes are full of paradoxical and self-contradictory ideas—the attribution of human experience to the frozen figures on the urn, for instance. But the “Ode on Melancholy” builds its entire theme on an apparent paradox—that pleasure and pain are intimately connected and that sadness rests at the core of joy. How does the language of “Melancholy” strengthen that sense of paradox? What does it mean for trophies to be cloudy, pleasure to be aching, a lover’s anger to be soothing, and “wakeful anguish” a thing to be desired?

7. On its surface, the ode “To Autumn” seems to be little more than description, an illustration of a season. But underneath its descriptive surface, “To Autumn” is one of the most thematically rich of all the odes. How does Keats manage to embody complex themes in such an apparently simple poem?

ODE ON A GRECIAN URN SUMMARY

A man is whispering sweet nothings to a Grecian urn, an ancient Greek pot that is covered in illustrations. He thinks the pot is married to a guy named "Quietness," but they haven’t had sex yet, so the marriage isn’t official. He also thinks that the urn is the adopted child of "Silence" and "Slow Time."

Then the speaker gives us the urn’s profession: it’s a "historian," and it does a much better job of telling stories than the speaker possibly could. The speaker looks closer at the urn and tries to figure out what’s going on in the pictures that are painted on it. Illustrated on the urn is some kind of story that might involve gods, men, or both. It looks like a bunch of guys are chasing beautiful women through the forest. People are playing pipes and beating on drums. Everyone looks happy. The scene is chaotic and the speaker doesn’t know quite what’s happening.

Not only is the urn a better storyteller than the poet, but the musicians in the illustration have sweeter melodies than the poet. The poet then tries to listen to the music played by the people in the image. That’s right: even though he can’t hear the music with his ears, he’s trying to listen to it with his "spirit." He looks at the illustration of a young guy who is playing a song under a tree. Because pictures don’t change, the man will be playing his song as long as the urn survives, and the tree will always be full and green.

Then the speaker addresses one of the guys who is chasing a maiden, and he offers some advice: "You’re never going to make out with that girl, because you’re in a picture, and pictures don’t change, but don’t worry – at least you’ll always be in love with her, because you’re in a picture, and pictures don’t change."

The speaker thinks about how happy the trees must be to keep all their leaves forever. It’s always springtime in the world of the urn, and every song sounds fresh and new. Then he starts talking about love and repeats the word "happy" a bunch of times. He is jealous of the lovers on the urn, because they will always be lusting after each other. Seriously. He thinks the best part of being in love is trying to get your lover to hook up with you, and not the part that follows. We’re starting to think that the speaker needs a cold shower. The word "panting" threatens to send the poem careening into X-rated territory.

Things were getting a bit steamy, but now the speaker has moved to a different section of the urn. He’s looking at an illustration of an animal sacrifice. This is pretty much the cold shower he needed. A priest is leading a cow to be sacrificed. People have come from a nearby town to watch. The speaker imagines that it’s a holy day, so the town has been emptied out for the sacrifice. The town will always be empty, because it’s a picture, and pictures don’t change.

The speaker starts freaking out a bit. He’s basically yelling at the urn now. Whereas before he was really excited about the idea of living in the eternal world of the illustrations, now he’s not so sure. Something about it seems "cold" to him. He thinks about how, when everyone he knows is dead, the urn will still be around, telling its story to future generations. The urn is a teacher and friend to mankind. It repeats the same lesson to every generation: that truth and beauty are the same thing, and this knowledge is all we need to make it through life.

Line 1

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,

• Imagine walking into a room of a museum and seeing a young man talking to an ancient pot. That’s what entering this poem is like. We’re all, "Did we interrupt something? Maybe we should leave you alone with this urn . . ."

• (If you haven’t already, find a picture of a Grecian urn online. The poem won’t make much sense if you don’t have some idea of the urn itself.)

• He talks to the urn as if it were a beautiful woman, like many people do nowadays with their cars. (My, my, Doris: your chrome rims are looking mighty shiny today!) He calls her the "unravish’d bride of quietness," which, if taken literally, would mean that the urn is married to a guy named Quietness. But wait – urns can’t get married, so he probably just means a really old pot and quietness go hand in hand. Imagine the speaker standing in some big, empty room of a museum, and it’s easy to see where the quietness thing comes from.

• What about "still unravish’d"? It might not seem like it on the surface, but this is a sexy poem. The word "ravish" means to take or carry away something by force, and, more directly, it means to have violent, passionate sex with someone. The writers of bodice-ripper romance novels love the word "ravish."

• But this urn hasn’t been ravished – yet. Even though "she" is married to quietness, they haven’t consummated the marriage by having sex. It looks youthful and pure, even though it’s really old.

• Don’t worry, if you think the whole sex-and-marriage metaphor for a pot doesn’t make much sense, you’re not alone. But you have to admit that it sounds cool.

• If you want to boil the first line down to something very simple, he’s saying that the urn has lived its life in "quietness," in a museum or buried in some Greek ruins, but it’s still in great condition and hasn’t suffered any major damage.

Line 2

Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,

• The urn is called the "foster-child" of Silence and slow Time. A "foster-child" is a kid who is adopted and raised by people other than his or her own parents.

• In this case, the urn has been adopted by "Silence" and "slow Time," which, if anything, sounds like an even more boring couple than Mrs. Urn and Mr. Quietness.

• The point is that the pot is thousands of years old, and it has spent most of its time buried in ruble or tucked away in the corner of some museum or some private collector’s house. But these were not its "original" circumstances.

• The true "parent" of the urn would have been the Greek artist who created it. Furthermore, the pot might have had a ceremonial use rather than just being a pretty thing to look at.

• But after the decline of Greek civilization, the pot lived on to age in silence, outside of the vibrant culture in which he was created.

Lines 3-4

Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:

• So far, the speaker has addressed the urn by a bunch of different names and titles. It’s like saying, "You, John Doe, husband of Jane Doe, son of Susie and Richard Doe, lawyer at the firm of . . ." Now this line gives us the urn’s job or profession, which is "Sylvan historian."

• Bet you’ve never seen that one on a business card, huh? "Sylvan" is a just a word derived from Latin that refers to woods or forests. This makes the urn a historian of people who live in forests. It’s a storyteller (the word "history" is derived from a Latin word for "story" or "tale"), and a darn good one.

• In fact, the urn is a better storyteller than the poet.

• The urn tells stories using pictures, while the poet uses "rhymes." (You’ll notice that Keats uses a lot of nature imagery to talk about art and poetry.) The tale told by the urn is "flowery" and "sweet," as if you could bury your nose in it like a bee inside a daffodil.

• This is appropriate, because this particular urn depicts scenes that are set in nature.

• Moreover, "flowery" works as a pun. A tale is "flowery" if it’s complicated and has a lot of ins and outs.

• But the story told on an urn is also "flowery" in a more literal sense: the illustrations on urns were often framed by a pattern of leaves or flowers.

Line 5-7

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape

Of deities or mortals, or of both,

In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?

• Having established that the urn is a storyteller, now it’s time to get to the story.

• This is the point when our speaker leans in to take a closer look at the urn. He’s trying to figure what’s going on in the carved pictures that encircle it.

• (We know this because every sentence for the rest of the stanza is a question that begins with "What," as in "What’s that?" Imagine him squinting at the urn and stroking his chin thoughtfully.)

• Remember how we told you that the illustrations on Greek urns were bordered with a pattern of leaves and/or flowers?

• Well, we got the flowers in line 4, and now we get the leaves. The story or "legend" on the pot is "leaf-fringed," which builds on the idea of the "Sylvan" or forest historian.

• But this "legend" suddenly sounds a lot like a ghost story: it "haunts." This is another pun, because "haunt" can just mean to exist in a certain place, but it has that obvious connection to the dead. Indeed, we would expect that all the characters of a story that was first told thousands of years ago would be dead by now.

• And who are these characters, the speaker is wondering. Are they gods ("deities") or just normal human beings ("mortals")?

• In Ancient Greece, all the gods were represented as looking like people, so you wouldn’t always be able to tell the difference between them and people in a picture. The gods also liked to hang out with humans.

• Needless to say, it’s hard to tell if these people are mere mortals or gods.

• The speaker is also wondering where the story takes place.

• With his knowledge of Ancient Greece, he throws out a couple of names as guesses: Tempe and "Arcady," or Arcadia. (A "dale" is just a valley.)

• (These places are stock names that refer to really beautiful, rural regions where farmers, shepherds, and other country folk live. Think of blue skies, babbling brooks, lush trees, and fluffy white sheep.)

Line 8-10

What men or gods are these? what maidens loth?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

• Keats is playing a clever trick here. Under the guise of having the speaker try to figure out what’s on the pictures, Keats is really telling us about the story.

• The speaker repeats the question about "deities or mortals" in more causal language: are they "men or gods"?

• Here it helps to have a little background into a very common Ancient Greek theme: a bunch of lustful guys chasing a bunch of nice girls around and trying to get some action. Very often the males would be half-man, half-goat-type creatures called "satyrs," but Keats doesn’t mention anything about satyrs so we can’t jump to that conclusion.

• If you want to have a more sinister interpretation, you can imagine that the women are being chased against their will.

• (Unfortunately, the line between rape and consensual sex was often extremely blurry in Greek myths.)

• We’re going to give these couples the benefit of the doubt, though, and imagine that the women are just being playful.

• They are "loth," or "loath," to have sex, which means they are reluctant, but it could just be a teasing reluctance.

• In the picture, the guys are chasing the women in "mad pursuit," which the women "struggle to escape."

• This cat-and-mouse scenario seems to be a game. It wouldn’t make much sense to depict a serious chase scene and then include people playing instruments like "pipes and timbrels" (a timbrel is like a tambourine).

• On the whole, everyone looks happy.. But not just happy as in simply content.

• We’re talking rowdy, crazy, best-party-of-my-life happiness. We’re talking "wild ecstasy." Everyone is running around and dancing.

**THE CLOUD**

**PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY**

The Cloud by Shelley is perhaps the most important one in Shelley's poetry in terms of imagery and symbols. It symbolizes the force and harbinger of revolution. It is the agent of change that inspires one to move from apathy to spiritual vitality. It is dynamic and creative. In this poem, it is even personified, angelic, immortal, and mythical. The Cloud is here treated as a kind of essential element which binds and sustains all other things. It supplies the soil with rain so that regenerate.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

It gives shade to the sapling and the ripeness of the fruit. It functions as the gardener, nurse and mother to the natural beings. But it also works like a thresher, and it has its aggressive nature too. By employing this form of personification, Shelley is able to endow the nature with the powers and attributes of the immortal gods; the cloud is made a minor divinity.

The cloud is not only capable of changing but also not capable of dying. It becomes the gardener that brings rain to the thirsty flowers, a nurse who shades the child as the child is having a nap in the midday sun, a bird that shakes its dew over the buds, and a thresher who beats the seeds off after harvesting the crops. It sleeps, laughs, floats, pursues a beloved, folds its wings like a bird, it broods, marches through the rainbow triumphantly. This is obviously the common symbol of the Shelleyan revolution.

The first stanza states the various activities and functions of the cloud. It brings fresh showers from the seas and rivers for thirsty flowers. It provides shade for the leaves when they sleep during the daytime. It showers down upon buds that open up after being fed in this manner. Sometimes, the cloud also brings the hail that covers the green plains with a white coat, but soon enough it dissolves this hail with rain.

In the second stanza the poet describes some more of the cloud’s activities. It disturbs the snow on mountaintops, and this makes the tall pine tree grown in surprise. At night, the snow forms its pillow while it sleeps in the arms of the storm. Lightning guides the cloud over water and land, because it is attracted by its love for the genii, the negatively charged counterpart of the positive charge in the lightning above, or the spirits that live below the purple sea. In search, of this love, lightning travels everywhere taking the cloud with it. During his journey, the cloud enjoys itself in the smile of the blue sky, while lightening dissolves itself in tears of rain. The details of the first stanza and the second stanza evoke both gentle and harsh qualities of the cloud; it is not only the agent of nursing baby plants, it also threatens and even destroys the old pine trees ( in Shelley, the old trees are rooted evil institutions and conventions of inhumanity).

The third stanza describes the cloud’s game with the sun. The cloud says the red colored sun, with its large eyes and its burning feathers, jumps onto the cloud’s sailing cradle when the morning star loses its shine. Its position is similar to an eagle sitting for a moment on the top of a mountain, which is moved hither and thither by the earthquake. When the sunset announces the end of the day, singing its song of rest and love from the sea beneath, when the red covering falls upon the whole world from the sky, the cloud rests like a dove, sitting in its nest with folded wings. This image evokes the Biblical image of the Holy Spirit, the one universal creative force, evoking the cloud significance as a universally creative force of the nature.

In the fourth stanza, we find the cloud talking about the moon. It says that the moon guides over the soft, silken floor of the cloud, the floor that has been prepared by the midnight breezes that scatter the cloud here and there. At some places, where the moon places its feet, the cloud’s thin roof is rent open, through which the stars peep and stare. When, after staring, the stars turn round and run away, the cloud laughs at them. Then, the cloud widens the hole in its tent-shaped roof and consequently moonlight floods all objects on the earth’s surface. The moon is then reflected by the calm surface of lakes, rivers and seas, till is seems that a part of the sky has fallen down. Here, the cloud is the type of altocumulus. The images of the playful moon and stars evoke the idea of the playfulness of the creative forces like the cloud and its allies.

In the fifth stanza, the cloud describes the manner in which it restricts the moon and the sun. It restricts the sun’s throne with a bright circle, while it creates a circle of pearls round the moon’s throne. When its banner is spread across the sky by the stormy wind, it makes the bright volcanoes dim and the stars spin and swim. It hangs like a roof over a torrential sea, and protects it from the heat of the sun. It is itself supported in its roof-like position of the mountains. The multi-colored rainbow forms a triumphal arch, through which it marches, attended by the hurricane, fire and snow, pushed by the stormy breeze. Here, the cloud changes from the form of cirrostratus to that of stratocumulus.

In the final stanza, the cloud describes its origin; it says that it is the daughter of earth and water, and an infant nursed by the sky. It passes through the holes in the oceans and the shores. It changes, but it does not die. The cloud is one thing and also many things; it changes its forms but it is the same essence of life, growth and change in the nature. It is the agent of the cycle of life, for it changes the seasons and sustains all living beings by bringing the rain, giving shade, letting the sun shine when needed, and bringing the dry autumn for plants to wither and give way to the next spring. It is not only gentle like a child, it is also terrible like a ghost; it supports the system of life ceaselessly and in numberless ways.

The poem “The Cloud” by Percy Bysshe Shelley is a lyric, written in anapestic meter, alternating in line lengths between tetrameter and trimeter. In “The Cloud,” Shelly invokes the idea of a cloud as an entity narrating her existence in various aspects.

**YOUTH AND AGE**

George Gordon, Lord Byron, began writing poetry in his youth. He published his first book of verse, Fugitive Pieces, at age 18, and he continued to write and publish poetry until his untimely death at 36. Although a lifelong poet, Byron did not consider poetry his primary vocation; he saw himself as a man destined to achieve greatness, primarily through helping end the oppression of various peoples, including the Spanish and especially the Greeks.

Byron's poetry is characterized by the experimentation and focus on emotion common among Romantic poets. He often tempers his avant-garde selection of subjects with poetic forms which hark back to older days, such as heroic verse, Spenserian stanzas, and a rigid rhyme scheme to invoke the classical world he loved.

Byron's poetry also is intensely personal, usually filled with autobiographical references. This self-portrait is often coupled with a sense of the larger world's political, moral, historical, or even natural situation. Thus, Byron makes his internal journey either a reflection of or a cause for the external world's circumstances.

Lord Byron's Poems Character List

Francois de Bonnivard

A sixteenth-century patriot imprisoned for his defense of the freedom of Geneva. Byron memorializes him and his sacrifice in "The Prisoner of Chillon," which describes his imprisonment in the Chateau de Chillon and his eventual--but much delayed--release.Childe Harold

A young nobleman (as indicated by the title "Childe") coming of age to receive his due honors in British society. Although Byron insisted that Harold was not a stand-in for himself, Harold's "pilgrimage" parallels Byron's own journeys through western Europe. By the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgirmage, Byron had given up claiming that Harold was merely an artistic device and admitted Harold's autobiographical connection.

Harold is mostly a figure devised to establish point of view for the reader. Although he begins the first canto as a proto-Byronic hero, complete with regret for some mysterious past folly and an exile to the European continent due to his errors, Harold often vanishes entirely from the narrative to be replaced by Byron's own narrative commentary on the situations described.

Don Juan

The comic hero of Byron's mock epic Don Juan, the young man is innocent without being completely naive and finds himself in a variety of compromising situations with women who pursue him for his good looks and vitality. Unlike the popular conception of "Don Juan," this character is not an aggressive, lascivious lover; instead, he is an accidental paramour to various women who seek his favors over those of their own husbands. By the end of the mock epic, Don Juan matures enough to care for an orphaned Muslim girl and establish her in the relative safety of England even as he flees his unintentional bad reputation.

Ali Pacha

A bandit lord infamous for his army of ruffians and their exploits throughout Albania. Byron commemorated him in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, wherein he descibes the man's charisma and positive leadership qualities along with his savagery and instability. Ali Pacha was in many ways a role model for Byron himself, who idealized his banditry as a form of struggle against oppressive forces.

Ianthe

Lady Charlotte Harley, daughter of Lady Oxford and a woman of amorous interest to Byron. Charlotte is made the muse who inspires Byron in the first canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage; although only eleven years old when Byron first met her, she became for him an ideal of unreachable love. Her youthful beauty inspired him to optimism concerning his more prevalent belief that beauty--along with so many other pleasures--fades over time.

John Edleston

A choirboy at Harrow during Byron's time as a student there. Edleston is the subject of much sorrow on Byron's part, particularly in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Edleston and Byron began an intimate relationship at school which lasted until Byron took the peerage upon achieving his majority. Although Byron seems to have ignored Eldeston for many years following, after he learned of the younger man's early death he devoted several stanzas of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage to bidding farewell to his beloved choirboy.

Athena

The Greek goddess of wisdom and architecture. Byron invokes Athena as his muse in the second canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Her invocation there is particularly poignant, as that section of the poem describes his sense of outrage at the desecration of Athenian ruins and--by extension--classical Greek culture.

Ada Byron

Byron's young daughter, whom his estranged wife Annabella took with her when separating from Byron in London. After their departure, Byron never saw his daughter again. She is his muse in the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and embodies his frustration at being denied his paternal rights even as he struggled with his role as an absentee father and poor role model for the girl.

Annabella Byron

Byron's short-term wife, who eventually separated from him, citing abusiveness and possible insanity. Once she left hiim and made the separation legal, Byron left England to undertake self-imposed exile in Geneva. She is the basis for the foolish and overbearing Donna Inez, mother of the title character in Don Juan.

John Hobhouse

Byron's long-time schoolmate, friend, and fellow traveler. Hobhouse accompanied Byron on the journeys that made up the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Piligrimage and is himself the object of the dedication in the fourth canto of that work. Hobhouse was a constant companion to Byron and corroborates much of Byron's poetic travelogue in his own prose account of the journey.

**UNIT IV**

**PROMETHEUS UNBOUND**

Prometheus (proh-MEE-thee-uhs), a Titan punished by Jupiter for having befriended humankind. He is chained to a rocky cliff for three thousand years while eagles tear at his heart, but he will not repudiate the curse he has pronounced on Jupiter. Aided by spirits and gods, Prometheus finally is unbound. His freedom heralds an age of sweetness and light for humankind.

Jupiter

Jupiter (JEW-pih-tur), the chief of the gods, who has had Prometheus bound to the cliff. As Prometheus is released, Jupiter loses his power and falls, impotent, into darkness.

Demogorgon

Demogorgon (dee-muh-GOHR-guhn), the supreme god and ruler of all gods, who finally reverses prevailing circumstances, thus causing Jupiter’s downfall and Prometheus’ release from torment.

Panthea

Panthea (PAN-thee-ah) and

Ione

Ione (i-OH-nee), two Oceanids. Panthea and Asia, Prometheus’ wife, learn from Demogorgon that Prometheus will be set free. They are Demogorgon’s interlocutors as he explains what will come to pass on Earth.

Herakles

Herakles (HEHR-uh-kleez), the hero famous for his strength. Herakles, before spirits friendly to Prometheus, releases the captive from his bonds and torment.

Mercury

Mercury (MUR-kyew-ree), the messenger of the gods, sent by Jupiter to Prometheus to learn from the captive how long Jupiter will reign.

Earth

Earth, Prometheus’ mother.

Asia

Asia, Prometheus’ wife.

Phantasma of Jupiter

Phantasma of Jupiter (fan-TAZ-mah), a wraith who appears to Prometheus to repeat for him the forgotten curse he had put on Jupiter.

The Furies

The Furies, agents of torment who go with Mercury to punish further the bound Titan.

The Spirit of the Hour

The Spirit of the Hour, one of a group of Hours, figures who move in Demogorgon’s realm to show the passing of time by Age, Manhood, Youth, Infancy, and Death. The Spirit of the Hour announces Prometheus’ release to all of humankind and describes the pleasant things that will occur on Earth now that the Titan is free.

Summary

Shelley’s reputation is based on the 1820 volume of verse containing Prometheus Unbound, a lyrical drama on a cosmic scale that presents more fully than any other poem Shelley’s philosophy of life.

In ancient mythology, Prometheus was the smartest of the Titans. He separated humanity from the gods and gave it fire, symbolizing imaginative powers of thought. Jupiter punished him by nailing him to a rock in the Caucasus mountain range. Shelley begins his sequel to Aeschylus’s play Prometheus desmts (date unknown; Prometheus Bound, 1777) with Prometheus still in that predicament after some time has elapsed. The Titan describes his ordeal and tells the hopeful Ione and the faithful Panthea that he has secret knowledge of the time when Jupiter will fall from power. Misery has made Prometheus wise. He has realized that hatred makes one like the object of hate, and thus his bondage is primarily internal, self-imposed, and even within his will to end. His hatred for Jupiter having cooled to mere pity, Prometheus wants to gather his sundered strength, reunite with his beloved Asia, and recall the curse that he had cast upon Jupiter. However, he cannot remember it and Nature is too fearful to utter it, so he summons the Phantasm of Jupiter to repeat it. Once divulged, the curse is repudiated by Prometheus, who declares, “I wish no living thing to suffer pain.” Earth mistakenly thinks Jupiter’s victory is now complete, and Mercury carries that message to Jupiter while Panthea goes in search of Asia. As the first act...

Prometheus Unbound glorifies the rebellious impulse toward freedom in the human spirit. The poem dramatizes and explains Percy Bysshe Shelley’s philosophical and religious understanding, which was individual. Prometheus Unbound is Shelley’s credo; the impulse to freedom and to rebel against authoritarian orthodoxy is one he valued highly. Shelley’s beliefs typify Romanticism. As did such Romantic poets as William Blake, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shelley wrote of the freedom of the individual and of the primacy of the imagination. Institutions, social structures, and established belief were, in these poets’ views, suspect. For them, evil lay in limitation imposed on the human spirit, which, when free, was good.

Shelley and other Romantic poets also at times did more than write about their beliefs. They were activists in the causes of liberty and reform of their times. Shelley, for example, favored vegetarianism, freedom for Ireland and for slaves, the abolition of monarchy and marriage, the overthrow of established religion, extension of voting rights, empowerment of the working class, and equality for women. He advocated these ideas in his writings, which in his time was a provocative and courageous act. While a student at Oxford he collaborated on a pamphlet titled The Necessity of Atheism (1811) and sent copies to all the college authorities and every bishop in the Church of England. He was expelled from the university as a result.

Prometheus Unbound is a play in verse in which the poetry takes precedence over the drama. This work could not...

Utilizing a greater variety of verse forms than appear together in any major English poem, Shelley celebrates the change of heart in Prometheus by demonstrating that his hero’s discovery of love triggers its affirmation throughout the entire universe. Not only is Asia, Prometheus’ wife, raised from her cave in the Caucasus and freed to rejoin her husband by the power released through his loving heart, but even the moon and earth dance in their orbits in heavenly sympathy and self-discovery.

Jupiter is overthrown by Necessity, embodied in the terrifying Nemesis of Demogorgon, who rises in the form of Jupiter’s own child to cast the tyrannical father from his throne. Demogorgon coincides his judgment on Jupiter with Prometheus’ declaration of universal love. Necessity is not the instrument of revolutionary destruction, determinism, or any rational critique; necessity is the unfolding force of love.

Shelley’s great song of liberty and love is his answer to 18th century rationalism as well as a rebuttal of Aeschylus’ intention in his unfinished trilogy on the story of Prometheus. The great Greek tragedian had planned to reconcile Prometheus and Zeus (Jupiter) through the Titan’s revealing of the secret that the head of the gods feared: that Zeus’s son, born of his marriage to Thetis, would overthrow him. Shelley could imagine no such understanding between love and evil. PROMETHEUS UNBOUND is one of Romanticism’s greatest...

\*Caucasus

\*Caucasus. Mountain range between the Black and Caspian Seas. The mountain to which Prometheus is chained may be seen as an image of permanence, similar to Mont Blanc in Shelley’s poem of the same name, externally symbolizing the Titan Prometheus’s unalterable refusal to give in to tyranny while he is being punished for having befriended humankind. Even as the mountains endure the extremes of wind and cold, so too does Prometheus endure extremes in torment that include Zeus’s eagle, the icy weather, thoughts of unending pain, and the Furies. Paradoxically, however, the mountains alter in appearance over the passage of time.

Prometheus also changes his attitude toward Jove. Suffering over a long period of time leads him from curses and hatred of Jove to wisdom and feelings of pity for the tyrant god. From this pity, hope and love are renewed, echoed in the landscape’s alteration from winter to spring and in his wife, Asia’s, alteration from passive sleep to active journey through a forest and up to a mountain pinnacle where she enters Demogorgon’s cave, the seat of the spirit of revolution. Asia’s passionate dialogue with the supreme god Demogorgon ends with the latter’s trip to Heaven, where he dethrones his father, Jove. Thus the play comes to the conclusion that Shelley came to after experimenting with other forms of revolution: changing the world through love.

Context: Bound by Jupiter to a rock in the mountains because he refuses to tell the tyrant when he would be overthrown, Prometheus has learned that love is superior to hate, but he still heroically refuses to aid the evil king of the gods. However, the time that Jupiter fears finally comes, and Demogorgon overthrows the monarch, leaving the throne vacant because if any deity seizes it, he might become a tyrant. This heavenly revolt is the sign of a new age of peaceful anarchy during which happiness will come to gods and men alike. Following the fall of Jupiter, Hercules releases Prometheus, who plans to discover how he can further help his beloved race of men, how he can help them escape misery and despair. After he concludes his speech of unlimited love, Asia, the spirit of love and universal brotherhood, and Earth, the great mother, talk of death, the major cause of man's unhappiness. Earth tells why men should not fear it by using the Platonic notion that what men call life is really death, because the body enslaves the soul:

ASIA

Oh, mother! wherefore speak the name of death?

Cease they to love, and move, and breathe, and speak,

Who die?

THE EARTH

It would avail not to reply:

Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known

But to the uncommunicating dead.

Death is the veil which those who live call life:

They sleep, and it is lifted: . . .

Context: In this drama, Shelley gives his own version of the story of the Titan Prometheus, whom the poet considered to be "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature." In Prometheus Bound, Aeschylus had shown the Titan as punished by Zeus for having given man the gift of fire contrary to the god's command. In the mind of a romantic revolutionary like Shelley, Zeus becomes the symbol of tyranny and Prometheus of the revolt of man against the tyrant. It is Prometheus alone who knows the secret of the eventual downfall of Zeus; this drama is the story of that downfall, of the release of Prometheus, and of a new age of love. Early in the work, Earth, the mother of Prometheus, explains that there are "two worlds of life and death," one of which we see; the other is "underneath the grave." All beings have two forms: the one that is seen on earth, the other that inhabits the world below the grave. Only one man has ever seen both his living form and his shade, or other self.

Context: The Titan Prometheus, chained to a precipice in the Indian Caucasus, is tortured by the evil Jupiter because he refused to tell who will overthrow the tyranny of heaven; however, he has suffered so long that he has lost his bitterness and no longer hates his tormenter. Panthea and Ione are seated at his feet when the Phantasm of Jupiter reminds the Titan of his awful curse, and they hear Prometheus repent of his rash anger, but when Mercury comes with the Furies and offers him a life of ignoble ease if he will reveal his dread secret, he refuses to coöperate with evil. As a result, the Furies unleash their worst, but Prometheus, who has learned the secret of suffering love, is able to withstand them until they show him a vision of "a youth/ With patient looks nailed to a crucifix." Such a vision tortures him more than any physical pain could, and as he writhes in agony, Earth calls up the spirits of human thought to comfort him. The quotation is from the First Spirit's song:

On a battle-trumpet's blast

I fled hither, fast, fast, fast,

'Mid the darkness upward cast.

From the dust of creeds outworn,

From the tyrant's banner torn,

Gathering 'round me, onward borne,

There was mingled many a cry–

Freedom! Hope! Death! Victory!

Till they faded through the sky;

And one sound, above, around,

One sound beneath, around, above,

Was moving; 'twas the soul of Love, . . .

**UNIT V**

**FICTION**

**EMMA BY JANE AUSTEN**

Plot Overview

Although convinced that she herself will never marry, Emma Woodhouse, a precocious twenty-year-old resident of the village of Highbury, imagines herself to be naturally gifted in conjuring love matches. After self-declared success at matchmaking between her governess and Mr. Weston, a village widower, Emma takes it upon herself to find an eligible match for her new friend, Harriet Smith. Though Harriet’s parentage is unknown, Emma is convinced that Harriet deserves to be a gentleman’s wife and sets her friend’s sights on Mr. Elton, the village vicar. Meanwhile, Emma persuades Harriet to reject the proposal of Robert Martin, a well-to-do farmer for whom Harriet clearly has feelings.

Harriet becomes infatuated with Mr. Elton under Emma’s encouragement, but Emma’s plans go awry when Elton makes it clear that his affection is for Emma, not Harriet. Emma realizes that her obsession with making a match for Harriet has blinded her to the true nature of the situation. Mr. Knightley, Emma’s brother-in-law and treasured friend, watches Emma’s matchmaking efforts with a critical eye. He believes that Mr. Martin is a worthy young man whom Harriet would be lucky to marry. He and Emma quarrel over Emma’s meddling, and, as usual, Mr. Knightley proves to be the wiser of the pair. Elton, spurned by Emma and offended by her insinuation that Harriet is his equal, leaves for the town of Bath and marries a girl there almost immediately.

Emma is left to comfort Harriet and to wonder about the character of a new visitor expected in Highbury—Mr. Weston’s son, Frank Churchill. Frank is set to visit his father in Highbury after having been raised by his aunt and uncle in London, who have taken him as their heir. Emma knows nothing about Frank, who has long been deterred from visiting his father by his aunt’s illnesses and complaints. Mr. Knightley is immediately suspicious of the young man, especially after Frank rushes back to London merely to have his hair cut. Emma, however, finds Frank delightful and notices that his charms are directed mainly toward her. Though she plans to discourage these charms, she finds herself flattered and engaged in a flirtation with the young man. Emma greets Jane Fairfax, another addition to the Highbury set, with less enthusiasm. Jane is beautiful and accomplished, but Emma dislikes her because of her reserve and, the narrator insinuates, because she is jealous of Jane.

Suspicion, intrigue, and misunderstandings ensue. Mr. Knightley defends Jane, saying that she deserves compassion because, unlike Emma, she has no independent fortune and must soon leave home to work as a governess. Mrs. Weston suspects that the warmth of Mr. Knightley’s defense comes from romantic feelings, an implication Emma resists. Everyone assumes that Frank and Emma are forming an attachment, though Emma soon dismisses Frank as a potential suitor and imagines him as a match for Harriet. At a village ball, Knightley earns Emma’s approval by offering to dance with Harriet, who has just been humiliated by Mr. Elton and his new wife. The next day, Frank saves Harriet from Gypsy beggars. When Harriet tells Emma that she has fallen in love with a man above her social station, Emma believes that she means Frank. Knightley begins to suspect that Frank and Jane have a secret understanding, and he attempts to warn Emma. Emma laughs at Knightley’s suggestion and loses Knightley’s approval when she flirts with Frank and insults Miss Bates, a kindhearted spinster and Jane’s aunt, at a picnic. When Knightley reprimands Emma, she weeps.

News comes that Frank’s aunt has died, and this event paves the way for an unexpected revelation that slowly solves the mysteries. Frank and Jane have been secretly engaged; his attentions to Emma have been a screen to hide his true preference. With his aunt’s death and his uncle’s approval, Frank can now marry Jane, the woman he loves. Emma worries that Harriet will be crushed, but she soon discovers that it is Knightley, not Frank, who is the object of Harriet’s affection. Harriet believes that Knightley shares her feelings. Emma finds herself upset by Harriet’s revelation, and her distress forces her to realize that she is in love with Knightley. Emma expects Knightley to tell her he loves Harriet, but, to her delight, Knightley declares his love for Emma. Harriet is soon comforted by a second proposal from Robert Martin, which she accepts. The novel ends with the marriage of Harriet and Mr. Martin and that of Emma and Mr. Knightley, resolving the question of who loves whom after all.

Take a quiz on

Character List

Emma Woodhouse - The protagonist of the novel. In the well-known first sentence of the novel, the narrator describes Emma as “handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition.” In some ways, the twenty-year-old Emma is mature for her age. Because her mother is dead and her older sister married, she is already the head of her father’s household. She cares for her father and oversees the social goings-on in the village of Highbury. Emma’s misplaced confidence in her abilities as a matchmaker and her prudish fear of love constitute the central focus of the novel, which traces Emma’s mistakes and growing self-understanding.

Read an in-depth analysis of Emma Woodhouse.

Mr. George Knightley - Emma’s brother-in-law and the Woodhouses’ trusted friend and advisor. Knightley is a respected landowner in his late thirties. He lives at Donwell Abbey and leases property to the Martins, a family of wealthy farmers whom he likes and counsels. Knightley is the only character who is openly critical of Emma, pointing out her flaws and foibles with frankness, out of genuine concern and care for her. In this respect, he acts as a stand-in for Austen’s and the reader’s judgments of Emma.

Mr. Woodhouse - Emma’s father and the patriarch of Hartfield, the Woodhouse estate. Though Mr. Woodhouse is nervous, frail, and prone to hypochondria, he is also known for his friendliness and his attachment to his daughter. He is very resistant to change, to the point that he is unhappy to see his daughters or Emma’s governess marry. In this sense, he impedes Emma’s growth and acceptance of her adult destiny. He is often foolish and clearly not Emma’s intellectual equal, but she comforts and entertains him with insight and affection.

Harriet Smith - A pretty but unremarkable seventeen-year-old woman of uncertain parentage, who lives at the local boarding school. Harriet becomes Emma’s protégé and the object of her matchmaking schemes.

Frank Churchill - Mr. Weston’s son and Mrs. Weston’s stepson. Frank Churchill lives at Enscombe with his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Churchill. He is considered a potential suitor for Emma, but she learns that though Frank is attractive, charming, and clever, he is also irresponsible, deceitful, rash, and ultimately unsuited to her.

Read an in-depth analysis of Frank Churchill.

Jane Fairfax - Miss Bates’s niece, whose arrival in Highbury irritates Emma. Jane rivals Emma in accomplishment and beauty; she possesses a kind heart and a reserved temperament. Because Jane lacks Emma’s fortune, she must consider employment as a governess, but her marriage to Frank Churchill saves her from that fate.

Read an in-depth analysis of Jane Fairfax.

Mrs. Weston - Formerly Miss Taylor, Emma’s beloved governess and companion. Known for her kind temperament and her devotion to Emma, Mrs. Weston lives at Randalls with her husband, Frank Churchill’s father.

Mr. Weston - The widower and proprietor of Randalls, who has just married Miss Taylor when the novel begins. Mr. Weston has a son, Frank, from his first marriage to Miss Churchill (Frank was raised by Miss Churchill’s sister and brother-in-law). Mr. Weston is warm, sociable, and perpetually optimistic.

Mr. Elton - The village vicar, a handsome and agreeable man considered a welcome addition to any social gathering. When he reveals his indifference to Harriet and his desire to marry Emma, only to take a bride at Bath shortly thereafter, he comes to seem proud, conceited, and superficial.

Mr. Robert Martin - A twenty-four-year-old farmer. Mr. Martin is industrious and good-hearted, though he lacks the refinements of a gentleman. He lives at Abbey-Mill Farm, a property owned by Knightley, with his mother and sisters.

Miss Bates - Friend of Mr. Woodhouse and aunt of Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates is a middle-aged spinster without beauty or cleverness but with universal goodwill and a gentle temperament. Emma’s impatient treatment of her reveals the less attractive parts of Emma’s character.

Isabella Knightley - Emma’s older sister, who lives in London with her husband, Mr. John Knightley, and their five children. Isabella is pretty, amiable, and completely devoted to her family, but slow and diffident compared to Emma. Her domesticity provides a contrast to the independent celibacy Emma imagines for herself.

Mr. John Knightley - Emma’s brother-in-law, and Mr. George Knightley’s brother. As a lawyer, John Knightley is clear-minded but somewhat sharp in temper, and Emma and her father are sometimes displeased with his severity.

Mrs. Elton - Formerly Augusta Hawkins, Mrs. Elton hails from Bristol and meets Mr. Elton in Bath. She is somewhat attractive and accomplished; she has some fortune and a well-married sister, but her vanity, superficiality, and vulgar overfamiliarity offset her admirable qualities.

Mrs. Churchill - Mr. Weston’s ailing former sister-in-law and Frank Churchill’s aunt and guardian. She is known to be capricious, ill-tempered, and extremely possessive of Frank. Frank is able to marry Jane Fairfax, as he desires, only after Mrs. Churchill’s death.

Colonel Campbell - A friend of Jane Fairfax’s father who lives in London and who takes charge of orphaned Jane when she is eight years old. Colonel Campbell feels great affection for Jane but is unable to provide her with an inheritance.

Mrs. Dixon - The Campbells’ daughter and Jane’s friend. Mrs. Dixon lacks beauty and lives with her husband in Ireland.

Mr. Dixon - Husband to the Campbells’ daughter. Emma suspects that Mr. Dixon had a romance with Jane Fairfax before his marriage.

Mrs. Goddard - Mistress of the local boarding school. Mrs. Goddard introduces Harriet Smith to the Woodhouses.

Mrs. Bates - Mother to Miss Bates and friend of Mr. Woodhouse. An elderly woman, Mrs. Bates is quiet, amiable, and somewhat deaf.

Mr. Perry - An apothecary and associate of Emma’s father. Mr. Perry is highly esteemed by Mr. Woodhouse for his medical advice even though he is not a proper physician, and Mr. Woodhouse argues with his daughter Isabella over Perry’s recommendations.

Elizabeth Martin - Mr. Martin’s kind sister, with whom Harriet was good friends before meeting Emma and turning down Mr. Martin’s marriage proposal. Harriet’s feelings of guilt and her desire to rekindle her relationship with Elizabeth pose a dilemma for Emma, who finds the Martins pleasant, worthy people, but worries that Harriet may be tempted to accept Mr. Martin’s offer if she again grows close with the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Cole - Tradespeople and longtime residents of Highbury whose good fortune of the past several years has led them to adopt a luxurious lifestyle that is only a notch below that of the Woodhouses. Offended by their attempt to transcend their “only moderately genteel” social status, Emma has long been preparing to turn down any dinner invitation from the Coles in order to teach them their folly in thinking they can interact socially with the likes of her family. Like the Martins, the Coles are the means through which Emma demonstrates her class-consciousness.

Take a quiz on

this section!

The narrator introduces Emma to us by emphasizing her good fortune: “handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition,” Emma “had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.” But, the narrator warns us, Emma possesses “the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.” Emma’s stubbornness and vanity produce many of the novel’s conflicts, as Emma struggles to develop emotionally.

Emma makes three major mistakes. First, she attempts to make Harriet into the wife of a gentleman, when Harriet’s social position dictates that she would be better suited to the farmer who loves her. Then, she flirts with Frank Churchill even though she does not care for him, making unfair comments about Jane Fairfax along the way. Most important, she does not realize that, rather than being committed to staying single (as she always claims), she is in love with and wants to marry Mr. Knightley. Though these mistakes seriously threaten Harriet’s happiness, cause Emma embarrassment, and create obstacles to Emma’s own achievement of true love, none of them has lasting consequences. Throughout the novel, Knightley corrects and guides Emma; in marrying Knightley, Emma signals that her judgment has aligned with his.

Austen predicted that Emma would be “a character whom no one but me will much like.” Though most of Austen’s readers have proven her wrong, her narration creates many ambiguities. The novel is narrated using free indirect discourse, which means that, although the all-knowing narrator speaks in the third person, she often relates things from Emma’s point of view and describes things in language we might imagine Emma using. This style of narration creates a complex mixture of sympathy with Emma and ironic judgment on her behavior. It is not always clear when we are to share Emma’s perceptions and when we are to see through them. Nor do we know how harshly Austen expects us to judge Emma’s behavior. Though this narrative strategy creates problems of interpretation for the reader, it makes Emma a richly multidimensional character.

Emma does not have one specific foil, but the implicit distinctions made between her and the other women in the novel offer us a context within which to evaluate her character. Jane is similar to Emma in most ways, but she does not have Emma’s financial independence, so her difficulties underscore Emma’s privileged nature. Mrs. Elton, like Emma, is independent and imposes her will upon her friends, but her crudeness and vanity reinforce our sense of Emma’s refinement and fundamentally good heart. Emma’s sister, Isabella, is stereo-typically feminine—soft-hearted, completely devoted to her family, dependent, and not terribly bright. The novel implicitly prefers Emma’s independence and cleverness to her sister’s more traditional deportment, although we are still faced with the paradox that though Emma is clever, she is almost always mistaken.

Mr. Knightley

Mr. Knightley serves as the novel’s model of good sense. From his very first conversation with Emma and her father in Chapter 1, his purpose—to correct the excesses and missteps of those around him—is clear. He is unfailingly honest but tempers his honesty with tact and kindheartedness. Almost always, we can depend upon him to provide the correct evaluation of the other characters’ behavior and personal worth. He intuitively understands and kindly makes allowances for Mr. Woodhouse’s whims; he is sympathetic and protective of the women in the community, including Jane, Harriet, and Miss Bates; and, most of all, even though he frequently disapproves of her behavior, he dotes on Emma.

Knightley’s love for Emma—the one emotion he cannot govern fully—leads to his only lapses of judgment and self-control. Before even meeting Frank, Knightley decides that he does not like him. It gradually becomes clear that Knightley feels jealous—he does not welcome a rival. When Knightley believes Emma has become too attached to Frank, he acts with uncharacteristic impulsiveness in running away to London. His declaration of love on his return bursts out uncontrollably, unlike most of his prudent, well-planned actions. Yet Knightley’s loss of control humanizes him rather than making him seem like a failure.

Like Emma, Knightley stands out in comparison to his peers. His brother, Mr. John Knightley, shares his clear-sightedness but lacks his unfailing kindness and tact. Both Frank and Knightley are perceptive, warm-hearted, and dynamic; but whereas Frank uses his intelligence to conceal his real feelings and invent clever compliments to please those around him, Knightley uses his intelligence to discern right moral conduct. Knightley has little use for cleverness for its own sake; he rates propriety and concern for others more highly.

Frank Churchill

Frank epitomizes attractiveness in speech, manner, and appearance. He goes out of his way to please everyone, and, while the more perceptive characters question his seriousness, everyone except Knightley is charmed enough to be willing to indulge him. Frank is the character who most resembles Emma, a connection she points out at the novel’s close when she states that “destiny … connect[s] us with two characters so much superior to our own.” Like Emma, Frank develops over the course of the novel by trading a somewhat vain and superficial perspective on the world for the seriousness brought on by the experience of genuine suffering and love. He is a complex character because though we know we should judge him harshly in moral terms, we cannot help but like him more than he deserves to be liked.

Jane Fairfax

Jane’s beauty and accomplishment immediately make her stand out, but we are likely to follow Emma’s lead at first and judge Jane uninteresting on account of her reserve. As Jane gradually betrays more personality and emotion, she indicates that she harbors some secret sorrow. Eventually, she and Emma push the cloudy confusion behind and become friends. The contrast between Jane’s delicate sense of propriety and morality and the passionate nature of her feelings is much more dramatic than any of the conflicts that Emma experiences. Jane’s situation too is much more dire than Emma’s: if Jane does not wed, she must become a governess, because she lacks any money of her own. The revelation of Jane’s secret engagement to Frank makes Jane seem more human, just as Knightley’s humanity is brought out by his love for Emma.

MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL STATUS

Emma is structured around a number of marriages recently consummated or anticipated, and, in each case, the match solidifies the participant’s social status. In Austen’s time, social status was determined by a combination of family background, reputation, and wealth—marriage was one of the main ways in which one could raise one’s social status. This method of social advancement was especially crucial to women, who were denied the possibility of improving their status through hard work or personal achievement.

Yet, the novel suggests, marrying too far above oneself leads to strife. Mr. Weston’s first marriage to Miss Churchill had ostensibly been a good move for him, because she came from a wealthy and well-connected family (Mr. Weston is a tradesman), but the inequality of the relationship caused hardship to both. He marries Mrs. Weston just prior to the novel’s opening, and this second marriage is happier because their social statuses are more equal—Mrs. Weston is a governess, and thus very fortunate to be rescued from her need to work by her marriage. Emma’s attempt to match Harriet with Mr. Elton is also shunned by the other characters as inappropriate. Since Harriet’s parentage is unknown, Emma believes that Harriet may have noble blood and encourages her to reject what turns out to be a more appropriate match with Robert Martin. By the time it is revealed that Harriet is the daughter of a tradesman, Emma admits that Mr. Martin is more suitable for her friend.

The relationship between marriage and social status creates hardship for other characters. Frank Churchill must keep his engagement to the orphan Jane Fairfax secret because his wealthy aunt would disapprove. Jane, in the absence of a good match, is forced to consider taking the position of a governess. The unmarried Miss Bates is threatened with increasing poverty without a husband to take care of her and her mother. Finally, the match between Emma and Mr. Knightley is considered a good one not only because they are well matched in temperament but also because they are well matched in social class.

THE CONFINED NATURE OF WOMEN’S EXISTENCE

The novel’s limited, almost claustrophobic scope of action gives us a strong sense of the confined nature of a woman’s existence in early-nineteenth-century rural England. Emma possesses a great deal of intelligence and energy, but the best use she can make of these is to attempt to guide the marital destinies of her friends, a project that gets her into trouble. The alternative pastimes depicted in the book—social visits, charity visits, music, artistic endeavors—seem relatively trivial, at times even monotonous. Isabella is the only mother focused on in the story, and her portrayal suggests that a mother’s life offers a woman little use of her intellect. Yet, when Jane compares the governess profession to the slave trade, she makes it clear that the life of a working woman is in no way preferable to the idleness of a woman of fortune. The novel focuses on marriage because marriage offers women a chance to exert their power, if only for a brief time, and to affect their own destinies without adopting the labors or efforts of the working class. Participating in the rituals of courtship and accepting or rejecting proposals is perhaps the most active role that women are permitted to play in Emma’s world.

THE BLINDING POWER OF IMAGINATION

The novel offers sharply critical illustrations of the ways in which personal biases or desires blind objective judgment. Emma cannot understand the motives that guide Mr. Elton’s behavior because she imagines that he is in love with Harriet. She later admits to herself that “[s]he had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made everything bend to it.” Meanwhile, Mr. Elton’s feelings for Emma cause him to mistake her behavior for encouragement. The generally infallible Mr. Knightley cannot form an unbiased judgment of Frank Churchill because he is jealous of Frank’s claim on Emma, and Emma speaks cruelly of Jane because her vanity makes her jealous of Jane’s accomplishments. Emma’s biases cause her to invent an attachment between Harriet and Frank and blind her to the fact that Harriet actually has feelings for Knightley. At the same time, Frank’s desire to use Emma as a screen for his real preference causes him to believe mistakenly that she is aware of the situation between him and Jane. The admirable, frequently ironic detachment of the narrator allows us to see many of these misunderstandings before the characters do, along with the humorous aspects of their behavior. And the plot is powered by a series of realizations that permit each character to make fuller, more objective judgments.

THE OBSTACLES TO OPEN EXPRESSION

The misunderstandings that permeate the novel are created, in part, by the conventions of social propriety. To differing degrees, characters are unable to express their feelings directly and openly, and their feelings are therefore mistaken. While the novel by no means suggests that the manners and rituals of social interaction should be eliminated, Austen implies that the overly clever, complex speech of Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, and Emma deserves censure. She presents Mr. Martin’s natural, warm, and direct manner of expressing himself as preferable to Mr. Elton’s ostentatious and insincere style of complimenting people. Frank too possesses a talent for telling people exactly what they want to hear, and Knightley’s suspicions of Frank’s integrity are proven valid when it turns out that Frank has been misleading Highbury and hiding his true feelings for Jane. The cleverness of Frank’s and Emma’s banter gets them both into trouble by upsetting Jane, about whom Emma says indiscreet and unfair things. Emma and Frank’s flirting at the Box Hill party hurts both Knightley and Jane. Moreover, Emma forgets herself to the extent that she cruelly insults Miss Bates. Austen seems to prefer Knightley and Martin’s tactful tacitness to the sometimes overly gregarious commentary of Emma, Mr. Elton, and Frank, and, as a result, the author gives the latter characters’ contrived speech a misleading influence on the story as a whole.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.

VISITS

The main events of the novel take place during visits that the characters pay to each other. The frequency and length of visits between characters indicates the level of intimacy and attachment between them. Frank’s frequent visits to Hartfield show his relationship with Emma to be close, though in hindsight we recognize that Frank also continually finds excuses to visit Jane. Mr. Knightley’s constant presence at Hartfield indicates his affection and regard for Emma. Emma encourages Harriet to limit a visit with the Martin family to fifteen minutes, because such a short visit clearly indicates that any former interest has been lost. Emma is chastised for her failure to visit Miss Bates and Jane more often; when she takes steps to rectify this situation, she indicates a new concern for Miss Bates and a new regard for Jane.

PARTIES

More formal than visits, parties are organized around social conventions more than around individual attachments—Emma’s hosting a dinner party for Mrs. Elton, a woman she dislikes, exemplifies this characteristic. There are six important parties in the novel: the Christmas Eve party at Randalls, the dinner party at the Coles’, the dinner party given for Mrs. Elton, the dance at the Crown Inn, the morning party at Donwell Abbey, and the picnic at Box Hill. Each occasion provides the opportunity for social intrigue and misunderstandings, and for vanities to be satisfied and connections formed. Parties also give characters the chance to observe other people’s interactions. Knightley observes Emma’s behavior toward Frank and Frank’s behavior toward Jane. Parties are microcosms of the social interactions that make up the novel as a whole.

CONVERSATIONAL SUBTEXTS

Much of the dialogue in Emma has double or even triple meanings, with different characters interpreting a single comment in different ways. Sometimes these double meanings are apparent to individual characters, and sometimes they are apparent only to the alert reader. For example, when Mr. Elton says of Emma’s portrait of Harriet, “I cannot keep my eyes from it,” he means to compliment Emma, but she thinks he is complimenting Harriet. When, during the scene in which Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma, Emma says, “I seem to have been doomed to blindness,” Knightley believes she speaks of her blindness to Frank’s love of Jane, but she actually refers to her blindness about her own feelings. One of our main tasks in reading the novel is to decode all of the subtexts underlying seemingly casual interactions, just as the main characters must. The novel concludes by unraveling the mystery behind who loves whom, which allows us to understand Austen’s subtext more fully.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

THE RIDDLE

Also known as charades, riddles in the novel take the form of elaborate wordplay. They symbolize the pervasive subtexts that wait to be decoded in characters’ larger social interactions. In Chapter 9, Mr. Elton presents a riddle to Emma and Harriet. Emma decodes it immediately, as “courtship,” but she decodes it wrongly in the sense that she believes it is meant for Harriet rather than herself. This wordplay also makes an appearance during the Box Hill party, when Mr. Weston makes an acrostic for Emma.

THE WORD GAME

Similar to the riddle, a word game is played in Chapter 41between Emma, Frank, and Jane. It functions as a metaphor for the partial understandings and misunderstandings that exist among Emma, Frank, Jane, and Mr. Knightley. As Mr. Knightley looks on, Frank uses child’s blocks to create words for the ladies to decode, though these words mean different things to each of them. Frank makes the word “blunder,” which Jane understands as referring to a mistake he has just made, but whose meaning is opaque to Emma and Knightley. He then makes the word “Dixon,” which Emma understands as a joke on Jane, and which baffles Knightley. In truth, everyone “blunders” in different ways that evening, because no one possesses complete enough information to interpret correctly everything that is going on.

TOKENS OF AFFECTION

A number of objects in the novel take on symbolic significance as tokens of affection. Mr. Elton frames Emma’s portrait of Harriet as a symbol of affection for her, though Emma misunderstands it as a symbol of affection for Harriet. Harriet keeps court plaster and a pencil stub as souvenirs of Mr. Elton. When the engagement between Jane and Frank is briefly called off, she returns his letters to symbolize her relinquishment of his affection.

Study Questions & Essay Topics

Emma experiences several major revelations in the novel that fundamentally change her understanding of herself and those around her. Which revelation do you think is most important to Emma’s development, and why?

One way to answer this question would be to recognize that Emma undergoes her most decisive transformation when Mr. Elton proposes to her. At this point, she realizes that she has been completely misguided in her interpretation of Elton’s behavior, and she also realizes that she herself is implicated in the courtship games that she believed she was manipulating from the sidelines. Another possible answer would focus on Emma’s revelation when Mr. Knightley reprimands her after she has insulted Miss Bates. At this moment, Emma understands that her vain pleasure in Frank’s flirtations and her sense of superiority to others in the community have been wrong. She also realizes how much Knightley’s opinion means to her. One might also argue that Emma’s decisive transformation takes place when she realizes that she loves Knightley, or when she agrees to marry him. A successful answer would consider the intensity of Austen’s language together with plot developments. For example, the episode in which Knightley reprimands Emma for insulting Miss Bates seems relatively unimportant in terms of the plot, but this scene includes some of the most emotional and dramatic language in the book.

2. In what ways, if at all, might Emma be considered a feminist novel?

Emma may be considered a feminist novel because it focuses upon the struggles and development of a strong, intelligent woman. Though Emma’s activities—visits, parties, courtship, and marriage—are limited to the traditional sphere, the novel implicitly -critiques these limitations, and implies that Emma deserves a wider stage on which to exercise her powers. Furthermore, the novel -criticizes the fact that women must be financially dependent by sympathetically depicting the vulnerability of Jane and Miss Bates.

Alternatively, the novel could be considered antifeminist because it seems to suggest that Emma reaches the pinnacle of her development when she accepts the corrections of a man, Mr. Knightley. Not only does Emma give up her former vow of celibate independence, but she marries an older man who is a father figure.

3. Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley represent two different sets of values and two different understandings of manhood. Describe the values that each character represents, and explain how the novel judges these values.

Frank Churchill is seen by many of the characters as an ideal man because of his good looks, warmth, and charm. He focuses most of his attention on determining what will please each person, and he makes his compliments with wit and style. However, the novel demonstrates that Frank is also flighty, unstable, and able to put his own wishes above social and moral propriety. Mr. Knightley, conversely, is Frank’s opposite in many ways. Though also polite and affectionate with those he cares for, Knightley is dignified and reserved. When he expresses an opinion, it is always the correct one and is stated with simplicity and firmness. The novel clearly values Knightley’s qualities above Frank’s. But the fact that Frank is forgiven at the end and rewarded with the love of a superior woman suggests that the book cannot entirely renounce its infatuation with Frank’s charms.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. To what extent does the narrator express approval of Emma, and to what extent does the narrator criticize her? Choose a passage from the novel and analyze the sympathy and/or ironic judgment the narrator expresses in relation to the protagonist.

2. Emma is filled with dialogue in which characters misunderstand each other. Choose a scene from the novel and describe the mixture of knowledge and ignorance that each character possesses, and how their situations influence the way they interpret each other’s statements. To what extent are we positioned to correct the misunderstanding, and to what extent do we share the misunderstanding until we have more information?

3. How does humor work in the novel? Select a speech made by Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Bates, or Mrs. Elton and describe the techniques Austen uses to make these characters look foolish. What contradictions, hypocrisies, or absurdities are put in their mouths? To what extent do we judge these characters negatively when we see that they are laughable?

4. Emma both questions and upholds traditional class distinctions. What message do you think the novel ultimately conveys about class?

5. Emma is clever but continually mistaken, kindhearted but capable of callous behavior. Austen commented that Emma is a heroine “no one but myself will much like.” Do you find Emma likable? Why or why not?

**IVANHOE BY WALTER SCOTT**

Walter Scott was born in 1771 in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father was a lawyer, and as a young man Walter was expected to follow in his footsteps. In 1786 he was apprenticed to his father, but he preferred reading to studying. After a childhood spent often in a sickbed, Scott married in 1797. Around the same time, he began publishing poems and slowly made a name for himself as a narrative poet. His long, novelistic poems, The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) and The Lady of the Lake (1810), were extremely popular throughout England. However, by around 1813 Lord Byron had overtaken him in popularity and literary success as a narrative poet, and Scott turned to novels to revitalize his career. His Waverly (1814), a historical novel set during the Scottish Jacobite rebellion of 1745, became a huge success, and Scott began a long career as a historical novelist. Many of his works were about the history of Scotland, but his best and most famous novel, 1819's Ivanhoe, had nothing to do with Scotland at all. Set in England in the last years of the twelfth century, Ivanhoe tells the story of a noble knight involved with King Richard I--known to history as "Richard the Lion-Hearted"--and his return to England from the Crusades the long wars during which the forces of Christian Europe sought to conquer the Holy Land of Jerusalem from its Muslim occupants.

Richard mounted the Third Crusade in 1190, shortly after attaining the English crown. Richard had far less interest in ruling his nation wisely than in winning the city of Jerusalem and finding honor and glory on the battlefield. He left England precipitously, and it quickly fell into a dismal state in the hands of his brother, Prince John, the legendarily greedy ruler from the Robin Hood stories. In John's hands, England languished. The two peoples who occupied the nation--the Saxons, who ruled England until the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and the French-speaking Normans, who conquered the Saxons--were increasingly at odds, as powerful Norman nobles began gobbling up Saxon lands. Matters became worse in 1092, when Richard was captured in Vienna by Leopold V, the Duke of Austria. (Richard had angered both Austria and Germany by signing the Treaty of Messina, which failed to acknowledge Henry VI, the Emperor of Germany, as the proper ruler of Sicily; Leopold captured Richard primarily to sell him to the Germans.) The Germans demanded a colossal ransom for the king, which John was in no hurry to supply; in 1194, Richard's allies in England succeeded in raising enough money to secure their lord's release. Richard returned to England immediately and was re-crowned in 1194.

Ivanhoe takes place during the crucial historical moment just after Richard's landing in England, before the king has revealed himself to the nation. Throughout the novel, Richard travels in disguise, waiting for his allies to raise a sufficient force to protect him against Prince John and his allies. The emphasis of the book is on the conflict between the Saxons and the Normans; Ivanhoe--a Saxon knight loyal to a Norman king--emerges as a model of how the Saxons can adapt to life in Norman England. But more outstanding than any metaphor in Ivanhoe is the book's role as an adventure story, which is by far its most important aspect. With its scenes of jousting knights, burning castles, and damsels in distress, Ivanhoe is one of the most popular historical romances of all time. Walter Scott was first and foremost a storyteller, and Ivanhoe is his greatest tale.

Summary

It is a dark time for England. Four generations after the Norman conquest of the island, the tensions between Saxons and Normans are at a peak; the two peoples even refuse to speak one another's languages. King Richard is in an Austrian prison after having been captured on his way home from the Crusades; his avaricious brother, Prince John, sits on the throne, and under his reign the Norman nobles have begun routinely abusing their power. Saxon lands are capriciously repossessed, and many Saxon landowners are made into serfs. These practices have enraged the Saxon nobility, particularly the fiery Cedric of Rotherwood. Cedric is so loyal to the Saxon cause that he has disinherited his son Ivanhoe for following King Richard to war. Additionally, Ivanhoe fell in love with Cedric's high-born ward Rowena, whom Cedric intends to marry to Athelstane, a descendent of a long-dead Saxon king. Cedric hopes that the union will reawaken the Saxon royal line.

Unbeknownst to his father, Ivanhoe has recently returned to England disguised as a religious pilgrim. Assuming a new disguise as the Disinherited Knight, he fights in the great tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche. Here, with the help of a mysterious Black Knight, he vanquishes his great enemy, the Templar Brian de Bois-Guilbert, and wins the tournament. He names Rowena the Queen of Love and Beauty, and reveals his identity to the crowd. But he is badly wounded and collapses on the field. In the meantime, the wicked Prince John has heard a rumor that Richard is free from his Austrian prison. He and his advisors, Waldemar Fitzurse, Maurice de Bracy, and Reginald Front-de-Boeuf, begin plotting how to stop Richard from returning to power in England.

John has a scheme to marry Rowena to de Bracy; unable to wait, de Bracy kidnaps Cedric's party on its way home from the tournament, imprisoning the Saxons in Front-de-Boeuf's castle of Torquilstone. With the party are Cedric, Rowena, and Athelstane, as well as Isaac and Rebecca, a Jewish father and daughter who have been tending to Ivanhoe after his injury, and Ivanhoe himself. De Bracy attempts to convince Rowena to marry him, while de Bois-Guilbert attempts to seduce Rebecca, who has fallen in love with Ivanhoe. Both men fail, and the castle is attacked by a force led by the Black Knight who helped Ivanhoe at the tournament. Fighting with the Black Knight are the legendary outlaws of the forest, Robin Hood and his merry men. The villains are defeated and the prisoners are freed, but de Bois-Guilbert succeeds in kidnapping Rebecca. As the battle winds down, Ulrica, a Saxon crone, lights the castle on fire, and it burns to the ground, engulfing both Ulrica and Front-de-Boeuf.

At Templestowe, the stronghold of the Knights-Templars, de Bois-Guilbert comes under fire from his commanders for bringing a Jew into their sacred fortress. It is speculated among the Templars that perhaps Rebecca is a sorceress who has enchanted de Bois-Guilbert against his will; the Grand Master of the Templars concurs and orders a trial for Rebecca. On the advice of de Bois-Guilbert, who has fallen in love with her, Rebecca demands a trial-by-combat, and can do nothing but await a hero to defend her. To his dismay, de Bois-Guilbert is appointed to fight for the Templars: if he wins, Rebecca will be killed, and if he loses, he himself will die. At the last moment, Ivanhoe appears to defend Rebecca, but he is so exhausted from the journey that de Bois-Guilbert unseats him in the first pass. But Ivanhoe wins a strange victory when de Bois-Guilbert falls dead from his horse, killed by his own conflicting passions.

In the meantime, the Black Knight has defeated an ambush carried out by Waldemar Fitzurse and announced himself as King Richard, returned to England at last. When Athelstane steps out of the way, Ivanhoe and Rowena are married; Rebecca visits Rowena one last time to thank her for Ivanhoe's role in saving her life. Rebecca and Isaac are sailing for their new home in Granada; Ivanhoe goes on to have a heroic career under King Richard, until the king's untimely death puts an end to all his worldly projects.

Take a quiz on

Wilfred of Ivanhoe - Known as Ivanhoe. The son of Cedric; a Saxon knight who is deeply loyal to King Richard I. Ivanhoe was disinherited by his father for following Richard to the Crusades, but he won great glory in the fighting and has been richly rewarded by the king. Ivanhoe is in love with his father's ward, the beautiful Rowena. He represents the epitome of the knightly code of chivalry, heroism, and honor.

King Richard I - The King of England and the head of the Norman royal line, the Plantagenets. He is known as "Richard the Lion-Hearted" for his valor and courage in battle, and for his love of adventure. As king, Richard cares about his people, but he has a reckless disposition and is something of a thrill-seeker. His courage and prowess are beyond reproach, but he comes under criticism--even from his loyal knight Ivanhoe--for putting his love of adventure ahead of the well-being of his subjects.

Lady Rowena - The ward of Cedric the Saxon, a beautiful Saxon lady who is in love with Ivanhoe. Ivanhoe and Rowena are prevented from marrying until the end of the book because Cedric would rather see Rowena married to Athelstane--a match that could reawaken the Saxon royal line. Rowena represents the chivalric ideal of womanhood: She is fair, chaste, virtuous, loyal, and mild-mannered. However, she shows some backbone in defying her guardian by refusing to marry Athelstane.

Rebecca - A beautiful Jewish maiden, the daughter of Isaac of York. Rebecca tends to Ivanhoe after he is wounded in the tournament at Ashby and falls in love with him despite herself. Rebecca's love for Ivanhoe is in conflict with her good sense; she knows that they can never marry (he is a Christian and she is a Jew), but she is drawn to him nonetheless. Still, she restrains her feelings; Rebecca is a strong-willed woman with an extraordinary degree of self-control. The novel's equivalent of a tragic heroine, she is among the most sympathetic characters in the book.

Cedric the Saxon - Ivanhoe's father, a powerful Saxon lord who has disinherited his son for following Richard to the Crusades. Cedric is fiercely proud of his Saxon heritage, and his first priority is to the prospects of his people--hence his desire to marry Rowena to Athelstane rather than to Ivanhoe. Cedric's unpolished manners make him the butt of jokes among his Norman superiors, but he has a knack for making grand gestures to restore the balance--as when he shocks Prince John by toasting Richard at John's tournament feast.

Prince John - Richard's power-hungry and greedy brother, who sits on the throne of England in Richard's absence. John is a weak and uninspiring ruler who lets himself be pushed around by his powerful Norman nobles. But his tenacious desire to hold the throne makes a great deal of trouble for England; he aggravates tensions between the Saxons and the Normans, and does everything he can to keep Richard in his Austrian prison. John's chief adviser is Waldemar Fitzurse, and his allies include Maurice de Bracy and Reginald Front-de-Boeuf.

Brian de Bois-Guilbert - A knight of the Templar Order, also known as the Knights-Templars. The Knights-Templars are a powerful international military/religious organization ostensibly dedicated to the conquest of the Holy Land, but in reality is often meddling in European politics. Brian de Bois-Guilbert is a formidable fighter, but he is a weak moralist and often lets his temptations take control of him. Among the most complex characters in Ivanhoe, de Bois-Guilbert begins the novel as a conventional villain--he and Ivanhoe are mortal enemies--but as the novel progresses, his love for Rebecca brings out his more admirable qualities.

Locksley - The leader of a gang of forest outlaws who rob from the rich and give to the poor, Locksley is soon revealed to be none other than Robin Hood. Robin and his merry men help Richard to free the Saxon prisoners from Torquilstone and later save the king from Waldemar Fitzurse's treacherous attack. A gallant, witty, and heroic thief, Robin Hood adds an extra dash of adventure, excitement, and familiarity to the story of Ivanhoe--after all, the character of Robin Hood was deeply enshrined in English legend long before Scott wrote his novel.

Maurice de Bracy - A Norman knight who is allied to Prince John. John plans to marry de Bracy to Rowena, but de Bracy becomes impatient and kidnaps her party on its way home from Ashby, imprisoning them in Front-de-Boeuf's stronghold of Torquilstone. In most ways a cardboard villain, de Bracy experiences a strangely humanizing moment shortly after he kidnaps the Saxons: When he tries to force Rowena to marry him, she begins to cry, and he is moved by her tears. To his own surprise, he tries awkwardly to comfort her.