
UNIT 36 THE VICTORIAN AGE : SELECTED STUDIES

Structure

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36.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to:

- recognise the major and minor poets of the Victorian Age;
- examine the cultural background of the Victorian Age;
- answer critical questions on your examination paper in a better way; and
- write essays or term papers on this course.

36.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first units of previous blocks we have generally discussed the background of the respective periods in detail. However, we did not tell you how to answer examination questions or write essays for your counsellors. Some of you might need that kind of help. In this unit our focus would be on *your* style of writing for your examiners.

Most of you should be studying this block in all earnestness in August/September with the final exam just three or four months away. So we have fashioned this unit to cater to that need of yours. We are going to present a model short essay (or a note), and an answer of a critical question in this unit. Besides we are also going to provide you with a long essay or term-paper as we expect you to write some. Needless to say that in this unit we are going to prepare you for the final exam with respect to the Victorian Age in British poetry but you will be able to apply the skills you acquire here and the insights you gain while reading this unit to the subjects of other blocks and units of this course.

36.2 WRITING A SHORT ESSAY

If you are asked to write a short essay or a note on one of the topics out of three or four given on your question paper then how would you do it? You should prepare a number of topics on a given period and try to understand the focus of such a topic and ways and means of developing the central point. You may have to substantiate your

NOTES

APPENDIX

**POEMS PRESCRIBED FOR DETAILED
STUDY**

Sordello at Mantua'

When the star was high
 When the sun was high, but his fame arrived
 Before the sun, applauded, foes connived,
 And Naddo looked on angel, and the rest
 Angels, and all angels would be blest
 Superiorly blest, the thrice-renowned
 Goito-manufacture, when he found
 (Casting about the crowd)
 That happy vein, so late allowed,
 A sore annoyance was the song's effect
 He cared for not the song itself: reflect!
 In the world, might be singing's use?
 Just as angels means, whose profuse
 Process of the process which procured
 That process, Apollo: dreams abjured.
 No ever being means for ends—take both
 For granted or take neither! I am loth
 To say the mymes at last were Eglamor's;
 But Naddo's backline bade competitors
 Go for the gold, means meant to waste
 No more, but taste, the taste
 The gold, in short, -disturb
 The late coming, nor spur nor curb,
 Fancy nor reason, wanting in him, whence
 The staple of his verses, common sense:
 He built on man's broad nature—gift of gifts,
 That power to build! The world contented shifts
 With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort
 Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
 Its poet-soul—that's, after all, a freak
 (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)
 With our herd's stupid sterling happiness
 So plainly incompatible that—yes—
 Yes—should a son of his improve the breed
 And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed!"
 "Well, there's Goito and its woods anon,
 If the worst happen: best go stoutly on
 Now!" thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet!
 You pother with your glossaries to get
 A notion of the Troubadour's intent
 In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent—
 Much as you study arras how to twirl
 His angelot, plaything of page and girl—
 Once; but you surely reach, at last, —or, no!
 Never quite reach what struck the people so,
 As from the welter of their time he drew
 Its elements successively to view,
 Followed all actions backward on their course,
 And catching up, unmingled at the source,
 Such a strength, such a weakness, added then
 A touch or two, and turned them, into men.
 Virtue took form, nor vice refuse a shape:

Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,
 As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
 Sinner the other flared portentous by
 A greedy people. Then why stope, surprised
 At his success? The scheme was realized
 Too suddenly in one respect: a crowd
 Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
 To speak, delicious homage to receive,
 The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,
 Who said, "But Anafest—why asks he less
 Than Lucio, in your verses? how confess,
 It seemed too much but yestereve!" — the youth,
 Who bade him earnestly, "Avow the truth!
 You love Bianca, surely, from your song;
 I knew I was unworthy—soft or strong,
 In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
 Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,
 Digested. Courted thus at unawares,
 In spite of his pretensions and his cares,
 He caught himself shamefully hankering
 After the obvious petty joys that spring
 From true life, fain relinquish pedestal
 And condescend with pleasures—one and all
 To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain
 Himself to single joys and so refrain
 From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure
 His prime design; each joy must he abjure
 Even for love of it.

He laughed: what sage
 But perishes if from his magic page
 He look because, at the first line, a proof
 'T was heard salutes him from the cavern roof?
 "On! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,
 To the day's task; compel your slave provide
 Its utmost at the soonest; turn the leaf
 Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief—
 Cannot men bear, now, something better? —fly
 A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
 Of essences? the period sure has ceased
 For such: present us with ourselves, at least,
 Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
 Made flesh: wait not!"

Awhile the poet waits
 However. The first trial was enough:
 He left imagining, to try the stuff
 That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe
 Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
 To reach the light—his Language. How he sought
 The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
 That Language, -welding words into the crude
 Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
 Armour was hammered out, in time to be
 Approved beyond the Roman panoply
 Melted to make it, —boots not. This obtained
 With some ado, no obstacle remained
 To using it; accordingly he took
 An action with its actors, quite forsook
 Himself to live in each, returned anon
 With the result—a creature, and, by one

And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
 Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
 "Accomplished! Listen, Mantuans!" Fond essay!
 Piece after piece that armour broke away,
 Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
 To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
 As language: thought may take perception's place
 But hardly co-exist in any case,
 Being its mere presentment—of the whole
 By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
 By the successive and the many. Lacks
 The crowd perception? painfully it tacks
 Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
 Has rent perception? Into: it's to clutch
 And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,
 Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
 As to become Apollo. "For the rest,
 E'en if some wondrous vehicle expressed
 The whole dream, what impertinence in me
 So to express it, who myself can be
 The dream! nor, on the other hand, are those
 I sing to, over-likely to suppose
 A higher than the highest I present

Now, which they praise already: be content
 Both parties, rather—they with the old verse,
 And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse!"
 A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
 The angel, sparkles off his mail, which rings
 Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps;
 So might Apollo from the sudden corpse
 Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.
 He set to celebrating the exploits
 Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came

The world's revenge: their pleasure, now his aim
 Merely. —what was it? "Not to play the fool
 So much as learn our lesson in your school!"
 Replied the world. He found that, every time
 He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
 His auditory recognized no jot
 As he intended, and, mistaking not
 Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
 Sufficient to believe him—all, at once.
 His will... conceive it caring for his will!
 —Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still
 How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
 Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
 His fingers' ends; while past the praise-ride swept
 To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept:
 The true meed for true merit! —his abates
 Into a sort he most repudiates,
 And on them angrily he turns. Who were
 The Mantuans, after all, that he should care
 About their recognition, ay or no?
 In spite of the convention months ago,
 (Why blink the truth?) was not he forced to help
 This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
 Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers

With the bright band of old Goito years,
 As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why, there
 Sat Palma! Adelaide's funereal hair
 Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed
 A fairy dust upon that multitude,
 Although he feigned to take them by themselves;
 His giants dignified those puny elves,
 Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found
 Himself still footing a delusive round,
 Remote as ever from the self-display
 He meant to compass, hampered every way
 By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then
 Continue, make believe to find in men
 A use he found not?

Weeks, months, years went by;

And lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
 Sundered in twain: each spectral part at strife
 With each; one jarred against another life;
 The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man—
 Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran
 Here, there: let slip no opportunities,
 As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
 To drop on him some no-time and acquit
 His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit—
 That waiving any compromise between
 No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
 Beyond most methods) —of incurring scoff
 From the Man-portion-not to be put off
 With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,
 Though ne'er so bright. Who sauntered forth in dream,
 Dressed any how, nor waited mystic frames,
 Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
 But just his sorry self? —who yet might be
 Sorrier for aught he in reality
 Achieved, so pinioned Man's the Poet-part,
 Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse; the Art
 Developing his soul a thousand ways—
 Potent, by its assistance, to amaze

The multitude with majesties, convince
 Each sort of nature that the nature's prince
 Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew
 Into a bravest of expedients, too;
 Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
 Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone
 Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went
 To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—
 So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
 Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
 A minute's toil that missed its due reward!
 But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,
 John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
 That on the sea, with, open in his hand,
 A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
 The sullen wind was soon awake,
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
 And did its worst to vex the lake:
 I listened with heart fit to break.
 When glided in Porphyria; straight
 She shut the cold out and the storm,
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
 Which done, she rose, and from her form
 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
 And, last, she sat down by my side
 And called me. When no voice replied,
 She put my arm about her waist,
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
 And all her yellow hair displaced,
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
 Murmuring how she love me—she
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
 To set its struggling passion free
 From pride, and vainer ties dis sever,
 And give herself to me for ever.
 But passion sometimes would prevail,
 Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
 A sudden thought of one so pale
 For love of her, and all in vain:
 So she was come through wind and rain,
 Beside me looked up at her eyes
 Happy and proud: at last I knew
 Porphyria worshipped me: surprise
 Made my heart swell, and still it grew
 While I debated what to do.
 That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
 Perfectly pure and good: I found
 A thing to do, and all her hair
 In one long yellow string I wound
 Three times her little throat around,
 And strangled her. No pain felt she:
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.
 As a shut bud that holds a bee,
 I warily oped her lids: again
 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
 And I untied and curled the tress
 Which she had wrung so tight: her cheek once more
 Blushed like the hill I bent on my burning kiss;
 I covered her head up as before,
 And, by this time, my shoulder bore
 Her head, which leans no more upon it still:
 And, sure, she smothered her rosy little head,
 So glad she has 't, as 't most will,
 That all she scorned at once is fled,
 And I, as 't were, am gained instead!
 Myself would turn to stone, she guessed not how
 Myself would turn to stone, she guessed not how

Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

Robert Browning

3

The Bishop Orders His Tomb at
Saint Praxed's Church

ROME, 15—

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine... ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
-Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vinyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find... Ah God, I know not, I!
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast,
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,

For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
 Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
 Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
 Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black-
 I was ever antique-black I meant! How else
 Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
 The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me;
 Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
 Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
 The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
 Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
 Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
 And Moses with the tables. . . . but I know
 Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
 Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
 To revel down my villas while I gasp
 Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
 Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
 Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
 T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
 My bath needs be left behind, alas!
 One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
 There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
 And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
 Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
 And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
 —That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
 Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
 No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
 Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
 And then how I shall lie through centuries,
 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
 And see God made and eaten all day long,
 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
 And as you tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
 About the life before I lived this life,
 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
 —Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
 All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
 My Villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
 Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,

And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
 To comfort me on my entablature
 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
 "Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
 To death,—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
 And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
 Well go! I bless ye: Fewer tapers there,
 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs—
 Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
 That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
 Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
 As still he envied me, so fair she was!

4

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"
 (See Edgar's song in "LEAR")

I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
 That hoary cripple, with malicious eve
 Askance to watch the working of his lie
 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
 Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
 What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
 All travelers who might find him posted there,
 And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
 Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
 For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
 Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
 Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
 I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
 Nor hope rekindling at the end described,
 So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
 What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
 Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
 With that obstreperous joy: success would bring—
 I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
 My heart made, finding failure in its scope.