
UNIT 32 A STUDY OF *THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE*

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32.0 OBJECTIVES

- The main objective of this unit is to enable you to appreciate *The Triumph of Life*.
- In order to help you do so we also help you discover Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) on the one hand and look at Shelley's poetry from the point of view of W.B. Yeats, one of the greatest of the admirers among the British poets of Shelley, on the other.
- After having read this unit you will also gain greater confidence in writing reference to context questions.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit has mainly three major parts - 32.2, 32.3 and 32.4 - on Rousseau, *The Triumph of Life*, and W.B. Yeats's essay on Shelley. I will tell you why I have arranged the material in this fashion.

Rousseau, introduced very briefly in 32.2, is a character in *The Triumph of Life*. He is in this poem, for Shelley what Virgil was to Dante in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. We'll talk about Rousseau only for this reason. You must know who he was in order to appreciate *The Triumph*.

Part 32.3 is devoted entirely to explicating the text of the poem prescribed for you. Now you know that you have to look for the text of *The Triumph of Life* in the appendix of this block. It is this section (32.3) which is the longest and you must read it little by little. Our discussion on this poem has been divided into five parts. Read one part carefully and then do the exercise. Each part ends with an exercise. You may take an-hour-and-a-half to do a sub-section. If you have to do the reading of this part in five days don't blame yourself for being too slow. This part (32.3) of the unit is not to be studied in one day. It will require a lot of input from you. This is borne out by the fact that the section on 'Answers to exercises' in this unit is longer than in any

other unit on the British Poetry course. Doing the exercises will help you understand the poem better.

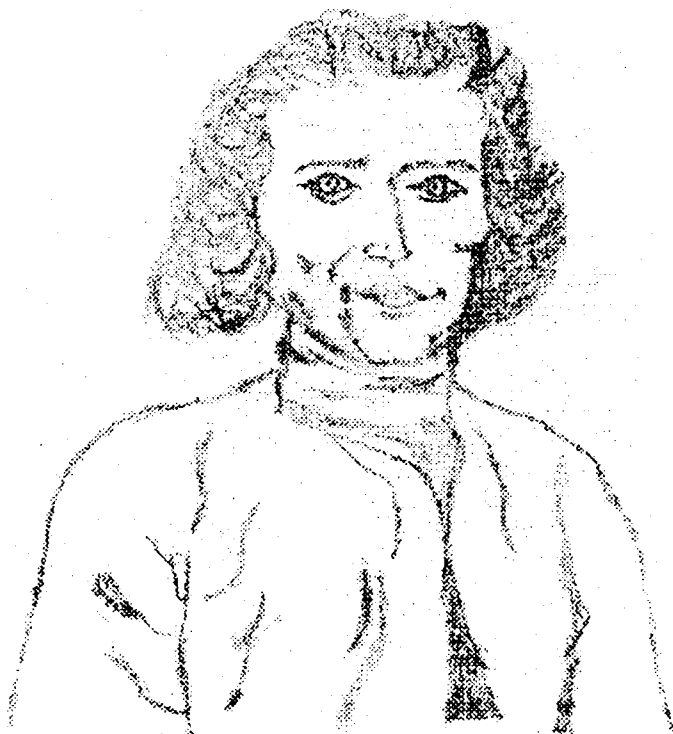
In this unit we have given you a model answer to a reference to context question. As you know you should expect to write such explanations at the term-end examination.

W B Yeats's 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' can be called one of the most significant studies of Shelley by a British poet. If you had been in a class-room of a main-stream university your teacher would have spent a couple of lectures discussing Yeats's Shelley. Well, s/he could have also discussed A.C. Bradley's essay on Shelley provided for you in this block but we do not propose to do that here. You will have to read Bradley on your own. However, you can discuss Bradley's essay on Shelley at the Study Centre or with your friends at a privately formed study circle.

After having come so far give yourself a short break and then plan your study of this unit before going further or if the poem tempts you, read it first. Then read about Rousseau in the next section.

You may be required to consult a reference work for other personages such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Dante, Voltaire, etc., who appear in *The Triumph of Life*.

32.2 JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU : THE LEADER IN *THE TRIUMPH*



Jean Jacques Rousseau

Jean Jacques Rousseau was one of the most influential of the eighteenth century writers and thinkers. If on the one hand he was largely responsible for the rise of Romanticism in England and on the continent, on the other he influenced leading German Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Hegel (1770-1831), and educationists such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), and even John Dewey (1859-1952).

Jean Jacques was born (June 28, 1712) to Isaac Rousseau a Jenevan watchmaker and Suzanne Bernard, niece of a Calvinist minister. His mother died a few days after his birth. Rousseau's education began at the age of six when he started reading books from his father's library. He first read novels and comedies but soon switched over to Plutarch and the great moralists. When Jean Jacques was ten years of age his father quarrelled with a member of an influential family of Jeneva and as a result went into exile leaving his two sons - Jean Jacques and his elder broth François - with his brother-in-law Gabriel Bernard. François was apprenticed but Jean Jacques was sent outside Geneva to live with J.-J. Lambercier, a minister, who taught him the classics.

In 1745, while at Paris, he took up with Thérèse Levasseur, a chambermaid at the hotel where he was staying. He had several children by her but they were all sent to a foundling home. Rousseau finally married her in a civil marriage in 1768.

While in Paris Rousseau met Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvetius and Voltaire. He wrote all the articles on music that Diderot and d' Alembert published in their *Encyclopédie* (1751-65).

In the meantime, Diderot encouraged him to compete for the prize announced by Dijon Academy in 1750 for an essay on the question whether the sciences and the arts had helped to purify morals. Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* won the first prize and its publication brought him recognition all over Europe. In this essay Rousseau had not used the word *Liberté*. However his opinion,

The sciences, letters, and arts ... wind garlands of flowers
around the iron chains that bind them [the people], stifle in
them the feeling of that original liberty for which they
seemed to have been born, make them love their slavery, and
turn them into what is called civilized people.

was taken unfavourably by the powers that were. Although a child of the Enlightenment (for the meaning of this word please read the introduction to block V) Rousseau was questioning not only monarchy and the church but also the sciences and the arts and indeed civilization itself. Rousseau thought that the atheism of the *philosophe* was a luxury of the bourgeoisie. He instead elaborated a "theism" of the heart. In 1762 Rousseau published *The Social Contract*, perhaps his most famous book after his *Confessions*, in which he observed, ' Men are born free and everywhere they are in chains.'

Rousseau sought a reordering of the society. He admired the ancient Greeks who thought that 'we begin properly to become men only after we become citizens.' The wise man according to Rousseau was one who 'no longer [regarded] himself as one, but [was] part of the whole, and [was] only conscious of the common life.' Rousseau blamed civilization for the ills of our society and thought that social and worldly life was a source of wickedness. He developed this theme in his novel *Émile*

Rousseau was unfortunate with his friends : Diderot, Hume and even Voltaire. Rousseau received an anonymous pamphlet on the last day of 1764 *Le Sentiment des citoyens* ('The Feelings of the Citizens') in which he had been attacked for being a hypocrite, a heartless father and an ungrateful friend. The effect on Rousseau was terrible and the pamphlet had been written by Voltaire.

When Rousseau recovered from the shock he began writing his *Confessions*, his defence of his life and work. On July 2, 1778 he died quietly at Ermenonville on the estate of the marquis René de Girardin.

32.3 READING THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

Shelley was writing *The Triumph of Life*, as you know, before he left San Torrenzo for Leghorn and was drowned on his voyage back on 8 July, 1822. The poem thus

remained unfinished. Notwithstanding its fragmentary status T.S. Eliot called *The Triumph* Shelley's finest work. In it Shelley achieved the detachment that we don't find in any of his earlier works of the same or greater length. *The Triumph* is written in *terza rima*, the verse form which Dante had used in his *Divina Commedia* and Petrarch in his *Trionfi*. Shelley tried this verse form for the first time in *Prince Athanase* (written at Marlow in 1817) and kept his hand in with *The Woodman and the Nightingale*, the *Ode to the West Wind* and some translation of Dante. You may recall (from our discussion in 2.5.1) that the *terza rima* is a special case of a triplet with the interlocking rhymescheme aba-bcb-cdc-ded-efe-... Examine the text of the poem and find out the rhymescheme for yourself.

The 'triumph' in the title of Shelley's poem stands also for triumphal procession as in Petrarch's *Trionfi* or *Triumphs* which is a sequence of seven poems celebrating the victory of Love over Man, Chastity over Love, Death over Chastity, Fame over Death, Time over Fame and God over Time. Shelley could also have been influenced by the Roman relief sculptures of ceremonial processions, which he must have seen in Italy, of victorious Generals' entry into Rome in ancient times. These processions included their prisoners of wars. Shelley's poem portrays the victory procession of Life which has people like Plato, Aristotle and Alexander, Dante and Petrarch, on the one hand and Napoleon Bonaparte, King Frederick II (1712-1786) of Prussia, Czarina Catherine II (1729-1796) of Russia and Leopold II (1747-1792) the Holy Roman Emperor, on the other. Voltaire, Kant, Milton and Wordsworth also figure in the procession but not the 'sacred few' of Athens and Jerusalem, i.e. Socrates and Jesus Christ who refused to make any compromise with Life and thus did not become its slave. The 'leader' of the poem, of course, is Rousseau who makes sense of the chaotic procession for the narrator. When Shelley was

Struck to the heart by this sad pageantry,
Half to myself I said - 'And what is life?
Whose shape is that within the car? And why' -
I would have added - 'is all here amiss? -
But a voice answered - 'Life!'

The voice is that of Rousseau :

What I thought was an old root which grew
To strange distortion out of the hill side.

The distorted root-like form is what remains 'of what was once Rousseau' and he comments upon some of the interesting figures in the procession for the narrator just as Virgil took Dante through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. The difference is that while Shelley and Rousseau look on and the procession moves Virgil and Dante had travelled through the nine circles of Hell and the seven cornices of Mount Purgatory.

Now first read the poem on your own and then read the next section of this unit. You may have to read the poem again in order to be able to do the exercises. Do not lose patience. At the end of the discussion exercises you will feel satisfied with your work.

32.3.1 Discussions on *The Triumph* :

For the sake of convenience we have divided the poem into five parts. Shelley himself, however, did not do so. Hence the text provided in the appendix is continuous.

I Lines 1 to 40 of *The Triumph of Life*:

You may need some help and like to write the meanings of the following words in the margin of the text.

- line 7 - *Orison* = a prayer
- 8 - A *Matin* is a service in the Church of England
- 9 - A censer is a vessel in which incense is burned.
- 25 - athwart = sloping position
- 26 - Locate the Appenine mountain range south of the Po valley on the map of the Italian peninsula.

Exercise I

Now answer the following questions :

1. What does the expression 'cone of night' in line 23 mean ?

2. What is the time of day that is described? Point out the two images that you find most effective.

3. Describe the narrator. What does he tell us about himself?

Having answered the questions above compare them with my responses given later, in 32.6, in this unit. Allow yourself some interval before going on to the next subsection i.e. II.

II. Lines 41 to 175 :

Now read lines 41 to 175 of the poem. You may need some help in reading it which may be had from the glossary below :

- line 51 - A bier is a table-like movable frame, sometimes with wheels, for taking a dead body to the graveside.
- line 78 - Mary Shelley had filled the gap left in the text of the poem by her husband with 'blinding'.
- line 85 - The crescent new moon is seen as a chariot in which is seated the shadow of the moon.
- line 91 - Mourners wear black material or **crape** on their clothes.
- line 92 - **dun** = dark
- line 94 - **Janus** was a Roman god of beginnings and endings. He is represented sometimes with two faces and sometimes four, one on each side of his head.
- line 111-116 - According to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 15) the Year of Jubilee was the 'year of release' in which the slaves were freed. The irony in Shelley's use of the word **jubilee** can be seen in his using it to describe a Roman triumphal procession in which the victorious army displayed the people they had conquered. The conquered people, in order to display their

subservience, were sometimes made to carry a yoke on their neck.

Shelley, in these lines, recalls that these 'triumphs' began about the end of the Republic when the Romans themselves were enslaved by their emperors.

line 121 - Age refers to a historical period, an era.

line 128-136 - The 'sacred few ... of Athens and Jerusalem' are obviously Socrates and Jesus Christ.

Now if you first answer the following questions and then read my responses to them given later in this unit you will be able to understand the second part of the poem better.

Exercise II

1. Comment briefly, in your own words, on the procession that the narrator describes in lines 41-73.

2. Please read lines 74 to 111. Shelley describes Life, the Conqueror, in those lines. State some of the significant observations of the narrator on Life and his procession.

- 3. In lines 111 to 175 Shelley describes the crowd that is accompanying the car of Life. Tell us in brief about the persons described.

2. The leader tells the narrator about the acts of the men of letters for which they stood chained to the chariot of Life (in lines 210-215). What was the fault of the men of letters?

3. What fault does Rousseau find with himself which forced him to become a captive in Life's victory procession? Please read lines 278-281 before answering this question.

4. What was Constantine's crime according to Shelley?

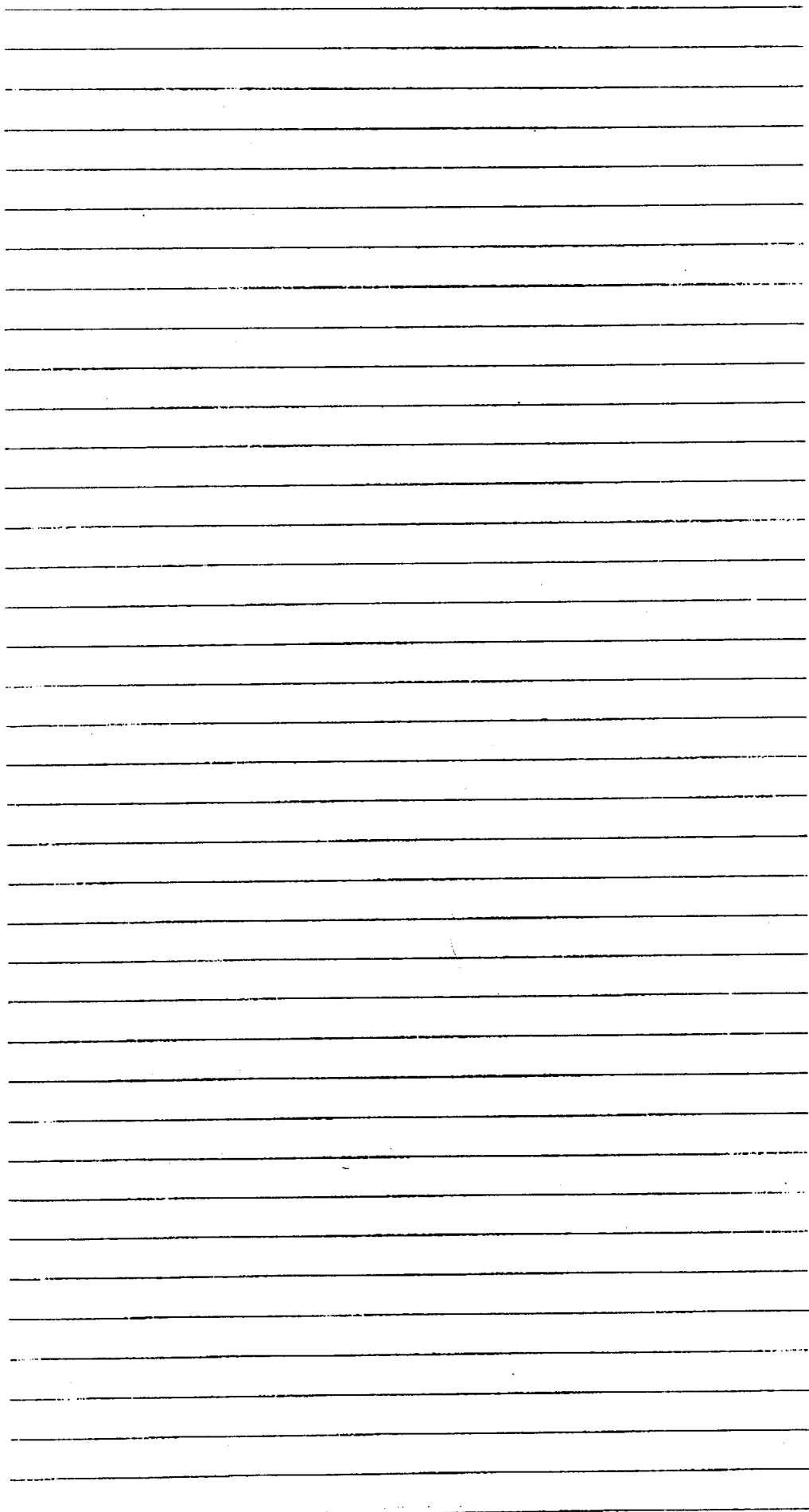
IV. Lines 296 to 438 :

In order to comprehend this portion of the poem better you may read the text along with the notes below :

- line 331 - To be oblivious of something is to be unmindful or forgetful of it. In poetry, however, the word is used in the sense of 'of or inducing oblivion'. Rousseau's account of his life in this poem is modelled partly on his *Confessions* and partly on Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*.
- line 345-46 - The sun, here, is symbol of the deity. It is reflected from water which is symbol of mortality. Shelley shows us the play of life and death, immortality and mortality.
- line 352 - Critics agree that 'A shape all light' in this line represents human creativity. It is like the sun in glory because we see things as much in the light of our imagination as in the light of common day.
- line 357 - In Greek mythology Iris is the goddess who acts like the messenger of the gods. She displays the rainbow as her sign.
- line 359 - Nephenthe, mentioned in Homer's *The Odyssey*, is an Egyptian drug which has the power to banish pain, anger and sorrow. Helen of Troy gives it to Telemachus (in *The Odyssey*, IV). Shelley's immediate source could be Milton's *Comus*, in which the character of that name, who is son of Circe, the daughter of the Sun, offers an 'orient liquor in a Crystal glasse' which is greater than 'Nepenthes', in order to seduce them.
- line 361 - Shelley's use of the word **palm** here, as in *Adonais* and *Prometheus Unbound*, for the 'sole' of the foot is quite without precedent. In *Adonais* Shelley has,

Out of her secret Paradise she sped,
Through camps and cities rough with stone, and steel,
And human hearts, which to her acry tread
Yielding not, wounded the invisible
Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell :

And in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley wrote,



Read the notes below for help in understanding the last section of the poem :

- Lines 439 - 41: A pavilion, as you know, is a large, light ornamental building used for exhibitions or public amusement. Shelley describes a 'wind-winged pavilion' built by Iris whom we met earlier in this poem. This pavilion, formed like an arch of victory is particoloured in vermilion, green and azure. Besides, the pavilion is progressing ahead of the procession. This arch is the arch of Life. Iris represents Life, its richness, its colourfulness, its joyous variety. In *Adonais* (L. II) Shelley had portrayed Life as a 'dome of many-coloured glass' :
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments.
- The triplet reminds us of the lines in *Adonais*.
- line 446 - Atomies are motes or grains or particles of dust.
- line 463 - Lethe in Greek mythology is the underworld river in Hades. When one drinks its water one forgets the past.
- line 472 - Dante was led through Paradise by his beloved Beatrice. In lines 472-74 the subject is Love which led, Dante - 'of him' - from the 'lowest depths of Hell / Through every Paradise and through all glory' and who returned from there to tell us 'How all things are transfigured, except love'.
- lines 481 - 83 Shelley scholars agree that the 'phantoms' in this passage are like the *simulacra* or masks described by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura* (Book IV). Lucretius describes ideas, beliefs, superstitions and passions of men peeling off from them and forming *simulacra* or masks and floating around in the air.
- line 495 - Ermine is the name given to stoat in winter when its fur turns white. Formely, important people such as kings and judges wore the white fur of this animal. Hence, metonymically, ermine stands for the important people in the society.
- line 496 - The Pope wears the tiara (or tiar) or triple crown which symbolises his dignity and sovereignty.
- line 500 - Skeletons are also called anatomies.
- line 505 - The bones of the dead are kept in a charnel house.
- line 530 - The shadows a person gave off were each in some aspect like the person from whom they derived and like one another in some respects.

Exercise V :

Explain one of the following passages with reference to the context and provide brief critical comments of your own :

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- c. Intellectual Beauty has no, only the happy dead to do her will, but ministering spirits who correspond to the _____ of the East, and the Elemental Spirits of medieval Europe, and the _____ of ancient Ireland, and whose too constant presence. ... give some of [Shelley's] poetry an air of rootless fantasy.
- d. I have re-read *Prometheus Unbound*, which I had hoped my fellow students would have studied as a _____ book, and it seems to me to have an even more certain place than I had thought among the _____ books of the world.
- e. ... our little memories are but a part of some great Memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age, and that our thoughts are not, as we suppose, the deep, but a little _____ upon the deep.
- f. The ancients [Shelley] says, called souls not only Naiads but _____, 'as the efficient cause of sweetness'; but not all souls 'proceeding into generation are called _____' but those who will live in it justly and who after having performed such things as are acceptable to the gods will again return (to their kindred stars). For this insect loves to return, to the place from whence it came and is eminently just and sober.'

As you must have noticed Yeats's essay on Shelley's poetry is divided into two parts: the first one is on Shelley's ideas, and the second one on the symbolism in his poetry. We may say that in the first part of his essay Yeats deals with Shelley's philosophy and in the second with his language, although in a restricted sense.

Yeats begins the first part of his essay on the 'Ruling Ideas' with a reminiscence of his student days. Yeats and some of his friends had rented a room in a 'mean street' in Dublin. This was used to discuss philosophy. Yeats goes on to admit that his friends found his opinion - that that philosophy only was going to survive the ravages of time and was useful to us which could be embodied in poetry - rather idiosyncratic. Yeats further goes on to point out that if we wish to discover the Will of the Maker it can be found in our poetry rather than our history or philosophy wherein, according to him, the 'heart withers.'

You may have been reminded of Gandhi ji's *Hind Swaraj* in which he speaks against history, technology and the legal and medical professions. (You may read this work prescribed for you and discussed in the third unit of Block I of *Indian English Literature*. MEG07.) In fact the resemblance between Shelley's views, as expressed by him, in his *Philosophical Review of Reform* and *The Masque of Anarchy* and Gandhi ji's ideas on passive resistance appears quite striking to us. W.B. Yeats in 1900 and Shelley in the first quarter of the 19th century anti-dated Gandhi ji in their appeal for non-violent struggle against tyranny.

Yeats reacts against the view held, as he says, by three generations that Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* was nothing but William Godwin's (1756-1836) *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) put into rhyme. Yeats points out that Shelley's ideas of liberty, which he termed Intellectual Beauty was so much more than political justice because,

the regeneration [Shelley] foresaw was so much
more than the regeneration many political dreamers have
foreseen,

So far so good. But Yeats goes on to point out that that *regeneration* 'could not come in its perfection 'till the Hours bore, Time to his tomb in eternity.' Perhaps this poetic stance though abstruse is common both to Yeats and Shelley that we, their readers,

must be able to comprehend in all its linements, with the help of 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry.'

Yeats's examination of Shelley's symbols carries him to the conclusion :

[Shelley] was born in a day when the old wisdom had vanished and was content merely to write verses, and often with little thought of more than verses.

Yeats seems to complain that the unity of life of the middle ages cannot be found in Shelley.

However, if you replace Shelley with Browning in the above passage you could appreciate the organic unity of life in Shelley's time and the loss of it in Browning's. Perhaps you could say that while Shelley was a poet of Goddo Pahan complex Browning was that of Anjali complex. What we imply is that there is more conscious artistry in Browning than in Shelley or to look at it *a la* Yeats, there was less of the unity of life in Browning's time than in Shelley's.

However, let's first look at Shelley's symbolism through Yeats's eyes. We would examine Browning's art in the next block.

Yeats points out that although Shelley had not studied magic and magical philosophy he used certain images repeatedly in his poetry and as the years passed by they concretized into symbols. Yeats's theory is that Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin sailed in open boats on many rivers on the continent in 1814. The ecstatic experience that he had gave him a lifelong system of symbols of the river, the cave and the tower.

Besides the river, or rivulet, the cave and the tower, Shelley also made use of the Porphyrian symbol of the bee. The bee returns to the place from where it comes and it's 'eminently just and sober.' The good soul does likewise. It returns to its 'kindred' star.

As you have read the essay yourself I would not try to detail all the symbols here once again but only point out how Yeats notices these symbols working out their effects in the poetry of *The Triumph of Life*.

'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', is an essay by a poet who is not known for the clarity of his thought as for instance Dryden and Pope, or for that matter even Wordsworth and Keats are. Shelley is Yeats's poet, a poet's poet and the former contributed to the latter's growth as a poet of a highly idiosyncratic nature. Hence you may be required to read Yeats's essay a few times. Do so and memorize a few passages from it, if you can.

32.5 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit you read *The Triumph of Life* and in order to do so you also read an introductory note on Jean Jacques Rousseau who is the leader in the poem.

In order to help you gain easy access to some of the best critical pieces on the poets and poems discussed on this course we have provided material on them in these blocks. However, we have not discussed each one in detail for obvious reasons. The brief discussion on Yeats's essay on Shelley is an exception. However, we hope you found it useful and you would read other essays on your own and discuss them with your friends in a study group. In this unit you wrote a couple of reference to context

questions which must have been useful in understanding the text of the poem and would be helpful later in writing your term-end examination.

32.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise I :

1. Shelley is definitely thinking about the gigantic cone-shaped shadow (umbra) of the earth made in space due to the light of the sun. The image speaks of Shelley's interest in science.
2. It is morning time. The opening lines describe the Sun 'Rejoicing in his splendour' and 'the mask of darkness' falling from the Earth. The S and E in the upper case further help us personify the two entities. The image also sets the tone, for the poem, of the conflict between hope and despair - life in life and death in life.

The other dominant image is that of prayer made by the birds, forests and flowers, oceans and continents and islands. We can see in our mind's eye the vapour rising from the waters which the poet portrays as the prayer of the ocean rising heaven-ward. The first twenty lines are rich in visual images of astronomical dimensions. However, the censers and incense, olfactory images, offer a rich experience to our sense of smell. These are also suitable for the time of day, i.e. morning, the time of prayer, that is described in the introductory lines of the poem.

3. The narrator had remained awake all night because of certain thoughts that disturbed him. These thoughts, he says, 'must remain untold'.

Was Shelley thinking about the Byron and Allegra affair or was the possible conflict between him and Mary - owing to Jane Williams towards whom he felt a certain amount of warmth at this point of time - on his mind? Or, were the deaths of Allegra and his own children that disturbed him? We cannot answer these with certainty.

However, the narrator tells us that he was now about to fall asleep with his head towards the mountain on the east and his feet towards the 'Deep' or 'ocean' - more realistically the bay of Lerici in the Gulf of Spazia. The poets are insular about the real world.

However, the poet is one with nature. The dew that fell on his hair and brow was the same as that which fell on the grass on the slope of the Appennine over which the chestnut tree was growing under which he was lying.

It was against such a background that the narrator had the epiphany which is the subject of this poem.

Now give yourself a break for a few hours or resume your work on this unit tomorrow.

Exercise II

1. Shelley describes the men, women and children as leaves and gnats blown aimlessly one way or the other. While some people are obsessed with fear of death all their life there are others who actively work to avoid it. What is, however, common about all human beings is their proneness to overlook the

real life - 'The fountains whose melodious dew / Out of their mossy cells forever burst.' People pursue their 'serious folly' without ever thinking about this life that is lost in the act of living.

Shelley's description of the Chariot of Life begins and ends with the mad revelry of the people in the procession. We read in lines 75 - 76 :

The throng grew wilder, as the woods of June
When the South wind shakes the extinguished day.

The libeccio, the southwest wind in Italy is the wind of hot storms on the Western coast. Shelley was actually there in June.

In the two lines above Shelley also makes use of the familiar epic device of comparing the dead with fallen leaves. In lines 50 - 52 you read how Shelley focussed his attention on one who,

Was borne amid the crowd as through the sky
One of the million Leaves of summer's bier. -
Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,

As Shelley was familiar with such comparisons in Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, it appears that Shelley wishes to place himself in their great tradition. He is here making use of an epic device in order to give dignity to his poem.

Just as this section begins with a brief description of the conquered so does it end with a similar description. The crowd gives way to the narrator who seems to rise up from it. He witnesses the noise that the crowd is making ;

... like clouds upon the thunder blast'

The million with fierce song and maniac dance
Raging around ;

You may notice that Shelley repeats in order to clinch the impression. However, he does so not without some variation. While earlier the image had only visual and tactile appeal now it is richly aural also.

The vision of the car of Life is thus properly placed in the middle of the conquered. The splendour of the chariot is described with the help of a simile. It was brighter than the sun in the same measure as the mid-day sun is brighter than the stars. However Life's carriage is like the young moon which holds the old moon in its lap. The **epic simile** in lines 79-85 suggests the movement of the chariot which is like the advent of a storm. While the light of the car is blindingly dazzling its movement is overpowering like a storm.

Paradoxically enough Life is 'Crouching within the shadow of a tomb' and is dressed in black. Quite appropriately the four faced Janus - *Janus Quadrifrons* - is the charioteer. However, paradoxically again,

All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded ...

The narrator wonders upon the utility of the four pairs of eyes of the charioteer of Life and its (i.e. Life's) beams that are meant to see,

... all that is, has been, or will be done. -

Life is all paradox piled upon paradox, mirror on mirror, mirrored is all the show and yet the movement of the ill-guided car is solemn and majestic.

3. Shelley briefly tells us that all those who were either famous or infamous in life could be seen in the procession of the conquered people. However, he does not find the 'sacred few'

... who could not tame
Their spirits to the Conqueror ...

i.e. Life. Socrates and Jesus Christ were among those who could not be seen. The narrator, however, as you must have noticed, does not name them. He makes use of the ancient literary device of periphrasis, which shows Shelley's piety, the "faith" of an "atheist".

A large portion of this section of the poem is devoted to the description of the ribald crowd, the revellers, who are in front of the chariot of Life. They are joyous but 'Kindle invisibly ... Like moths by light attracted and repelled.'

As against these are the old and the impotent who are left far behind the chariot of Life and 'frost,' performs the job - i.e. of destruction - that fire did in the case of the passionate lovers.

Exercise III

1. This part of the poem helps us identify Shelley with the narrator. When the narrator asks him, 'First who art thou?' the leader replies with the words quoted in the question. Shelley was born in 1792 and Rousseau had lived from 1712 to 1778. Thus he had lived his life - loved and hated, feared and suffered - and died before Shelley began to live. Rousseau tells Shelley about himself and his achievements upto line 207.
2. The leader shows the wise men as those wearing 'wreathes of light' while the Bishops and Archbishops wear mitres and monarchs crown and generals their helmets or distinguishing headgears. The 'wreath of light' of the men of letters is a sign of 'thought's empire' over other people's thought. Rousseau tells Shelley that their crime was that they were so preoccupied with establishing their suzerainty over other peoples' minds that they had no time to look inwards and try to know themselves which is the chief end of wisdom.

In lines 260 - 270 Rousseau exemplifies by pointing out at Alexander and his teacher, i.e. Aristotle. Aristotle's thoughts 'long outlived' both 'woes and wars' of Alexander, throned as he was in 'new thoughts of men'. This suzerainty of the ancients was challenged by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who had pointed out that 'the truth of nature lieth hid in certain deep mines and caves' - and thus rescued knowledge from the stranglehold, during the medieval period in Europe, of Plato and Aristotle.

3. The difference between Rousseau on the one hand and Homer, Virgil and Dante on the other was that while the latter 'inly quelled / The passions which they sung' the former wrote what they had suffered. So a poet like Rousseau, or for that matter Shelley also, sowed 'seeds of misery' for the people just like the 'deeds' of the tyrants and 'Anarchs'.

The 'living melody' of the great poets of the past suppressed the revolt in their readers which they in the first place incited, thus containing the bad social effect of their poetry. They exercised a salutary effect on their readers. These lines give us a peep into Shelley's - the author of the 'Mask of Anarchy' and *Queen Mab* - mind in the last phase of his poetic career.

4 Constantine the Great (274-337 A.D.) was Roman emperor from 306 to 37. He was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity and make it the state religion. By doing so he combined the authority of religion to that of the state and thus allowed the corruptions in political places to permeate religious authority.

Shelley names Constantine along with Julius Caesar (C. 101 - 44 B.C.), a Roman general and statesman, who formed the first triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus in 59 B.C. After the death of Crassus, in defiance of the Senate he crossed the Rubicon in 49 B.C. and defeated Pompey in a civil war and thus became dictator.

It is significant that Shelley calls them Anarchs, the word that Milton used for chaos in *Paradise Lost* (II, 988) and Pope after him also used it for chaos in *The Dunciad*. Shelley's use of the word 'Anarch' gives us the impression that he thought that if Caesar brought chaos into the society by assuming the crown Constantine further aggravated the same by making Christianity a state religion. In line 287 while blood symbolises war gold represents insatiable greed.

Exercise IV

Below is how the reference to context question could be attempted :

The given lines have been taken from P.B. Shelley's (1792-1822) *The Triumph of Life* (1822, published 1824).

In his last work, left unfinished when he died on 8 July 1822, Shelley is trying to understand 'Life'. He describes a 'Vision' in which he encounters Life victorious over all of us. Among those we witness - monarchs and men of letters - is Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Swiss-French thinker who tells him about some of the various personages in the procession of Life. Shelley asks Rousseau,

"Whence camest thou and whither goest thou?
How did thy course begin" ...

Rousseau tells him some of the bare facts, but his mind cannot 'compass' the cause of Life - 'Why this should be ...' However, Rousseau asks Shelley to participate in life instead of looking at it from a distance:

... from spectator turn
Actor or victim in this wretchedness,
And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn
From thee.

We find the same situation being repeated in the given lines. Earlier on Rousseau had asked a similar question to some evanescent deity - 'A shape all light.' He had wanted to know where he had come from? Where he was? and Why he was where he was? The supernatural visitant had asked him to 'arise' and 'quench' his thirst.

This section, i.e. the fourth, is highly allegorical. Shelley describes the lady holding a cup for Rousseau which as soon as he touches with his lips he forgets everything. He goes on to describe 'a new Vision never seen before.' And yet he can tell us little more than that 'the fair shape waned in the coming light.' In brief the question What is Life? remains unanswered. In the fifth section Shelley for the third time witnesses the chariot of Life.

The three lines given for explanation are a specimen of the economy of Shelley's style in this poem. He is attempting to answer a philosophical question and befitting

his subject he is simple and austere. The poem would have universal appeal. In India, in the ninth century Shankar had asked similar questions in his *Moh Mudgar* or what is popularly known as *Bhaj Govindam* :

कस्तवं कोऽहं कुत आयातः
 का मे जननी को मे तातः
 इति परिभाषय सर्वमसारं
 विश्वं व्यक्त्वा स्वप्नविचारम्॥

[Who are you ? Who am I ? Where have we arrived here from ? Who is my mother ? and who my father ? Reflect on the essence of existence and you will scoff at it as you laugh at the events of a dream.]

You should compare your explanation with some friend's, and /or ask a knowledgeable person to comment on it.

Exercise V

Passage (a) is about Dante. It has been discussed in the fifth part of our discussion.

Passage (b) is an example of epic simile. You may recall what an epic simile is from the discussion on *Paradise Lost* in Block IV. The epic simile here describes the *simulacra* or phantom and gives grandeur to the tone and atmosphere of the poem.

Although the theme of the poem is, as Mary Shelley thought, depressing the vitality and timber of the poetic voice of Shelley is quite assuredly felt in lines such as those given.

Exercise VI

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|----|--------------------|--------|
| a. | 'with folded arms' | |
| b. | hearts | |
| c. | Devas, | Sidhe |
| d. | sacred | sacred |
| e. | foam | |
| f. | bees, | bees |

32.7 FURTHER READING

Yeats's remarks on *The Triumph of Life* in his essay 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' are perceptive and should be carefully and critically considered in the light of your own reading of the poem.

You may read F.M. Stawall's 'Shelley's "Triumph of Life"' published in *Essays and Studies* V (1914), 104-31; G.M. Matthews, 'The Triumph of Life': A New Text', *Studia Neophilologica*, vol. XXXII, no. 2 (1960), 271-309; 'The "Triumph of Life" Apocrypha', *TLS*, 5 August 1960, 503; 'On Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"', *Studia Neophilologica*, vol XXXIV, no.1 (1962), 104-30; and Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life': A Critical Study*, *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 55 (1965), if you can come by them easily.

Desmond King-Helc's *Shelley: His Thought and Work* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1960) is more easily available in old libraries. Part four of Chapter XVI, i.e. pages 349-60 offers a simple discussion on the poem and can be studied with profit. 'In *The Triumph of Life*' writes King-Helc, 'Shelley seems to be more exacting in his definition of the individual good life, which he implies should be spent pursuing the

summum bonum, that 'shape all light' which lures artists, scientists, mystics, thinkers and youthful idealists to toil in its service.' Read King-Hele if you can find the book.

Miriam Allott's 'The Reworking of a Literary Genre : Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*' (239-278) in *Essays on Shelley* edited by her and published in 1982 by Liverpool University Press (Liverpool), is a comprehensive study of the poem.

Paul de Man's 'Shelley Disfigured' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (Columbia University Press : New York, 1984), Balchandra Rajan's 'The Triumph of Life : The unfinished and the question mark' (184-210) in *The Form of the Unfinished : English poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton U. Press, Princeton, 1985) and Tilottama Rajan's 'The Broken Mirror : The Identity of the Text in Shelley's *Triumph of Life*' (323-349) in *The Supplement of Reading : Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Cornell U.P. : Ithaca, London, 1990) are some of the influential readings of the poem which you may read if you can find them. I have seen *Deconstruction and Criticism* edited by Harold Bloom *et. al.* (Continuum : New York, 1994) in many libraries. It has three essays which throw light on *The Triumph* : Paul de Man's 'Shelley Disfigured' (39-73), Jacques Derrida's 'Living on. BorderLines', (75- 176) and J. Hillis-Miller's 'The Critic as Host' (217-253).

However, in view of the fact that we lay more emphasis on your reading and understanding the poem and not on accumulating critical opinions you should read only as many articles as you can read conveniently and profitably.