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TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

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SEMESTER - I

ENGLISH POETRY: CHAUCER TO THE NEO CLASSICAL

ENGLISH



Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The **Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course 2** of the MA English Programme introduces the learners to the realm of English poetry from the time of Geoffrey Chaucer of the 14th century to the Neoclassical poets like John Dryden and Alexander Pope of the 17th and 18th centuries. Chaucer belongs to a period, roughly called Middle English that spans from 1066 to about 1550. The most distinguishing feature of this period is that it is essentially religious. However, this essential character of poetry starts to dissolve during the Renaissance period, which can approximately be dated back to 1500-1660. A new stress on individuality and inwardness becomes an emerging element in the poetry of this period. This is also the time for the flourish and perfection of the English sonnets, the greatest exponent of which is William Shakespeare. Shakespearean sonnets mainly deal with the theme of love and the problems faced by lovers.

The 17th century poets still recognised God as the source of order. Yet, secular elements began to emerge with the Metaphysical poets like John Donne who excelled in his use of witty paradoxes and ingenious ideas. However, towards the end of the century, the focus of poetry becomes almost entirely secular. Explicitly religious poetry is replaced by social poetry best represented by John Dryden and Alexander Pope. T. S. Eliot later aptly observes that Donne made poetry out of a learned but colloquial dialogic speech, Dryden out of the prose of political oratory, and Pope out of the most polished drawing room manner. Another significant seventeenth century poet is John Milton in whose poetry we see influences of the changes taking place during the Civil War of 1642-51 and the aftermath.

Some critics tend to ignore the 18th century poetry on grounds that it is 'prosaic'. However, we have to use the term 'prosaic' as meaning not only 'like prose', but as 'lacking poetic beauty'. Thus, we ought to distinguish between poetry which is like 'good prose', and which is like 'bad prose'. However, John Dryden appeared to cleanse the language of verse and bring it back to the order of prose. For this reason, he has been considered a great poet by none other than T. S. Eliot. Moreover, the tradition of English satire in the hands of Dryden becomes almost the lampoon as he had a special gift for farce, while Pope is more personal than the true satirist. The inclusion of two famous poems by Dryden and Pope in this course serves the purpose of representing the extraordinarily rich neoclassical period of English poetry that gave a proper shape to the English language to be used by the future generation of poets.

For the convenience of the learners, this Course is thematically arranged into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with Poetry from Chaucer to Shakespeare, **Block 2** shall deal with Metaphysical Poetry to the poetry of Milton, and **Block 3** shall deal with Neoclassical Poetry.

Block I Chaucer to Shakespeare comprises a total of five units, i.e. Units 1-5.

Unit 1: Introducing Medieval Poetry deals with some important aspects of Medieval poetry. The English language of this period had shaken down to the standard of the East Midland speech, the language of the capital city and of the universities. In the hands of Chaucer, French and English amalgamated to form the Standard English tongue. Gradually, there started emerging a sharper spirit of criticism, a more searching interest in human affairs, and a less complacent acceptance of the established order. By the time of Chaucer, the English poetic style has established itself to inaugurate a new development in poetic writings from England.

Unit 2: Chaucer: The General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* (Part I) deals with life and works of Geoffrey Chaucer, the greatest of the Medieval poets with particular emphasis on his poem *The General Prologue.* The poem *The General Prologue* provides the account of a motley group of pilgrims who represent almost all sections of society, as they happen to meet at the Tabard inn in Southwark and plan to begin their journey to Canterbury under the guidance of the host—Harry Bailly. Thus, this unit introduces the learners to the kind of poetry that Chaucer used to write.

Unit 3:Chaucer's The General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* (Part II), which shall be studied in connection with the previous unit, deals exclusively with Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Against the Hundred Years War was still on and when the social setup of England was almost devastated, the framework of *The Canterbury Tales* was a significant decision on the part of Chaucer to bring the people together.

Unit 4: Thomas Wyatt & Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey: The Appeal "And wilt thou leave me thus?" (Wyatt) & "Love that doth reign and live within my thought" (Surrey)

This unit deals with two sonnets written by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard. Earl of Surrey (1517-47) who had been the forerunners of the sonnet tradition in English. Wyatt's love poems express the laments of the unrequited or deserted lover, and introduce many of the poetic topics like—sexual love as a hunt, the lover as a ship running aground on the rocks etc. On the other hand, Surrey's love poems look more conventional, stiff and imitative compared with Wyatt's freedom and emotional power. However, Surrey has the enormous historical importance of having introduced blank verse into English.

Unit 5: William Shakespeare: Sonnet 65 "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea" & Sonnet 144 "Two Loves I have of Comfort and Despair"

This unit deals with two important sonnets by William Shakespeare. While his reputation is based primarily on his great plays, he also became famous as a poet. With particular reference to his *Sonnets*, the study of his nondramatic poetry can illuminate Shakespeare's activities as a poet during his age, especially in the period of extraordinary literary ferment in England in the last few years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Block 2:Metaphysical poetry to Milton introduces the learners to Metaphysical poetry, which shall be studies in terms of a few poems selected from the great metaphysical poets like John Donne and Andrew Marvell of the 17th century. The 17th century poets still recognised God as the source of order. Yet, secular elements began to emerge with the Metaphysical poets like John Donne who excelled in his use of witty paradoxes and ingenious ideas. However, towards the end of the century, the focus of poetry becomes almost entirely secular. Although the 17th century poets like John Donne lost their popularity in the subsequent period, it was the modern poet, T. S. Eliot who restored the significance of these 17th century poets collectively known as the Metaphysical poets. Another significant 17th century poet is John Milton in whose poetry; especially in his epic *Paradise Lost,* we encounter the changes taking place during the Civil War of 1642-51 and the aftermath. Like in case of Block 1,this Block is also divided into five units, i.e. Unit 6-10.

Unit 6: Introducing Metaphysical Poetry serves as the introduction to Metaphysical Poetry. There has been no such thing as metaphysical poetry during the 17th century. However, the term was later applied to a certain group of poets of the 17th century, owing to the common features and techniques, use of wit and conceits in their poems. The knowledge about new scientific changes perplexed the minds of the poets of

the 17th century, and triggered in them a tendency to challenge existing ideas and thoughts of the universe. The metaphysical poets emerged during such a literary climate with an aim to introduce newer poetic techniques, mixing intellect with emotions.

Unit 7: John Donne:"The Good Morrow" & "Death Be Not Proud" deals with two poems by John Donne: 'The Sun Rising' and 'Death, Be Not Proud'. John Donne was the leading English poet of the Metaphysical School of Poetry, and is often considered to be one of the greatest love poets in the English language. From this unit, the learners will be able to get some ideas contained in these two poems, while at the same time, also being acquainted with Donne's poetic style characterised by his use of conceits, paradox and puns.

Unit 8: Andrew Marvell: "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden" deals withMarvell's poems namely "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden". Just like Donne, Andrew Marvell is also acclaimed as one of the finest metaphysical poets. "To his Coy Mistress" is often considered one of Marvell's finest poems. The second poem "The Garden" too is often considered a famous English poem in which the poet's personal emotions and feelings are told throughout the words of nature.

Unit 9: John Milton: Paradise Lost "Book I" (Part I) deals with the life and works of John Milton with special reference to his epic poem *Paradise Lost.* Milton was a controversial writer of his time. Being a strict Puritan, he openly challenged some of the very basic biblical doctrines, particularly Preordination and Free will, which he deals with in *Paradise Lost*.

Unit 10: John Milton: Paradise Lost "Book I" (Part II), which needs to be studied along with the previous unit, deals with a detailed analysis of the various aspects of the poem *Paradise Lost.* What is so striking is the fact that the whole poem cannot be considered a continuous narrative as the main story begins in the middle (In Medias Res), and earlier events are presented in terms of dreams, reminiscences and conversations.

Block 3: Neoclassical Poetry, which is the last Block of DSC Course 2, introduces the learners to English Neo-classical Poetry through John Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* and Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock.* Neoclassicism, as you have read already, refers tothe literary principle according to which literary works and Criticism of poetry and drama, were to be guided by rules and precedents derived from the best ancient Greek and Roman authors. Such a view that dominated French literature in the 17th and 18th centuries marked a significant influence on English writing too, especially from 1660 to 1780. The most influential summary of the neoclassical doctrine is Boileau's verse treatise *L'Artpoetique*(1674); and Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711). In England, neoclassicism reached its height in the Augustan period, when its general view of the world was presented so beautifully in Pope's Essay *on Man* (1733-4). Some modern critics often refer to the period 1660-1780 In England as the Neoclassical period, but as an inclusive label, this is also equally misleading in that the emergence of the Novel falls outside the realm of neoclassicism, there being no acknowledged classical model for the new form.However, in the field of poetry, the tradition of English satire in the hands of Dryden becomes almost the lampoon as he had a special gift for farce. While, Pope is more personal than the true satirist is. The inclusion of two famous poems by Dryden and Pope in this Block serves the purpose of representing the extraordinarily rich neoclassical period of English poetry that gave a proper shape to the English language to be used by the future generation of poets. This Block comprises five units, i.e. Units 11-15.

Unit 11: Introducing Neoclassical Poetry deals with the various characteristics of Neoclassical Poetry with particular reference to the important poets like Dryden and Pope. Various circumstances combined to make this age abound in satirical writing. It was a period of bitter political and personal contention, of easy morals and subdued enthusiasms, of sharp wit and acute discrimination. For these reasons, the learners will learn that satire acquired a new importance and a sharper edge in poems like Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel,* Butler's*Hudibras,* and Pope's *Dunciad.*

Unit 12: John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I) deals withthe noted 18th century poet John Dryden and his poem *Absalom and Achitophel*. Besides being a poet, a dramatist, a translator and a prose-writer, Dryden's creative energy is seen through his ability to rise above his contemporaries in writing satires. Dryden believed that "delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights." With such a belief in place, Dryden wrote *Absalom and Achitophel*— one of his most successful verse satires.

Unit 13: John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part II) deals witha discussion of the poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* and the various important aspects related to the poem.

Unit 14: Alexander Pope: "The Rape of the Lock" (Part I) deals withthe poet Alexander Pope and his poem *The Rape of the Lock* an important 17th century addition to English poetry. The poem subjects a trivial event to an extended mock-heroic treatment playing upon the gender conflict and the superficial concerns of the society-women while still celebrating their womanly qualities and beauty.

Unit 15: Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock* (Part II), which is the last unit of the Block as well as of the Course, deals with a discussion of the poem in place. The poem *The Rape of the Lock* traces the various events of a fateful day on which Belinda, a beautiful lady, who often glorified her beauty at a dressing table, played cards, flirted with gentlemen, drank coffee, finally had her hair cut. Often considered Pope's masterpiece, this mock-heroic poem is based on an actual incident of Lord Petre's cutting off a lock of hair from Arabella Fermor's head.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING MEDIEVAL POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Different Forms of Mediaeval Poetry

1.4 Important Medieval Poets and Their Works

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.6 Further Reading

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.8 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify the important issues related to poetry written in the medieval period
- classify the different forms and aspects of medieval poetry
- make a list of the important medieval poets
- trace some of the important works of medieval poetry.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course. In this unit, we shall discuss some important aspects of Medieval poetry, which shall help you to read the next two units of this course. As the old English period was over, the Medieval period set in, the English language has shaken down to the standard of the East Midland speech, the language of the capital city and of the universities. With regard to poetic diction, French and English amalgamated to form the Standard English tongue, which gained its first full expression in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Gradually, there started emerging a sharper spirit of criticism, a more searching interest in human affairs, and a less complacent acceptance of the established order. Although the authorship of many works is not clear, for the first time, Chaucer—a figure of

outstanding literary importance, gives to the age the form and pressure of his genius. You will note that by the time of Chaucer, the English poetic style has established itself, and the main lines of future developments had been laid down. By the end of this unit, we hope that you will be able to discuss medieval poetry in terms of its various aspects.

1.3 DIFFERENT FORMS OF MEDIEVAL POETRY

The Medieval period saw a great and significant advance in poetical forms of literature. However, credit goes to Geoffrey Chaucer who gave Medieval poetry its name. With regard to poetry, we can observe the various forms separating themselves and straightening out into form and coherence, as you will read in the following.

The Lyric:

Lyrics—chiefly religious and love-lyric, continues to be written and developed during this period. Although Chaucer himself contributed very little to it, a number of anonymous bards added to the common stock of lyrics. For example, we can refer to such exquisite pieces as *The Nut-brown Maid,* a hybrid between the lyric and the ballad, and the lovely carols of the Church.

The Ballad:

By the late 14th century, the traditional ballad, exemplified by *Chevy Chace, Sir Patrick Spens* and the Robin Hood poems, had become an important source of popular entertainment, especially in the North. The origins of this form are much disputed. However, whether the ballad was composed by minstrels or was the result of communal activity, it is essentially simple and popular. Mainly about love, local legends, the feats of local heroes, supernatural happenings, or religious stories, the ballad deals with human beings' elemental passions, while its situations are such as affect the individual or family rather than the larger social unit of clan or nation. Its tone is impersonal and detached and the composer's personality is not to be felt. The verse form (most commonly *abcb,* with alternating lines of four and three iambic feet) was subject to considerable variation, but was always simple and easily memorised.

The Rise of the Allegory:

You should note that the rise of allegory too began to affect all branches of poetry in the medieval period. Even at its best, the allegorical method is crude and artificial, but it is a concrete and effective literary device for expounding moral and religious lessons. In this period, we have excellent examples dealing with Courts of Love, Houses of Fame, Dances of the Seven Deadly Sins, and other symbolical subjects. Especially, in the earlier stages of his career, Chaucer himself did not escape the prevailing habit. However, the allegory reached its climax in Herbert Spenser's *The Faerie Queene.*

Descriptive and Narrative Poems:

In this form of poetry, *The Canterbury Tales* is the outstanding example. But, in many passages of Langland and Gower too, we have specimens of the same class of poetry. Although there were some weaknesses in the narrative poetry of the day which were partly due to lack of practice, and partly to the reliance upon inferior models, there were some advancements made by Chaucer. Despite the problems of long speeches and irrelevant episodes, the habit of dragging into the story scientific and religious discussions, and an imperfect sense of proportion in the arrangement of the plot, Chaucer presented a powerful grip upon the central interest, a shrewd observation and humour, and quite often a brilliant rapidity of narration.

The Metrical Romance:

A metrical romance is a type of prose poem that deals with themes such as love, rites of passage, chivalry, adventure and interpersonal relationships. Knights, fair maidens and epic journeys appear frequently in a metrical romance. Thus, the metrical romance became the most dominant poetic form among royalty, nobility and wealthy landowners during the medieval period and the Renaissance. The defining feature of a metrical romance is the presence of a valiant hero or knight with excellent moral character. One example may be Spenser's "Fairie Queen". However, as you are already told, among the lower classes, it was supplanted by the ballad and the *fabliau*—that is a short humorous tale, realistic in subject but satiric in style.

With regard to *metre,* it is curious to observe that with increasing practice the tendency is toward simplicity. The extremely complicated stanzas are becoming simple and less common, and '**rhyme royal'** and other shorter verses were coming into favour. It is this amalgamation of simplicity with freedom that remained the dominating characteristic of English verse of the medieval period.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In the use metre, what are the changes that you encounter in Medieval poetry?

Q 2: What are the most dominant poetical forms that evolved in Medieval poetry?

Q 3: How did the Ballad come to be composed during the Medieval age?

Q 4: What is a Metrical Romance?

1.4 IMPORTANT MEDIEVAL POETS AND THEIR WORKS

[Adapted from Edward Albert's History]

In this section, we shall try to discuss the important medieval poets and some of their important works.

Geoffrey Chaucer: (1340-1400)

In many documents of the time, Chaucer's name is mentioned with some frequency. And these references, in addition to some remarks he makes regarding himself in the course of his poems, are the sum of what we know about his life. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is now generally accepted as being 1340. He was born in London, entered the household of the wife of the Duke of Clarence in 1357, and saw military service abroad, where he was captured. Next, he seems to have entered the royal household, for he is frequently mentioned as the recipient of royal pensions and bounties. When Richard II succeeded to the English throne (1377), Chaucer was confirmed in his offices and pensions, and shortly afterwards, he was sent to Italy on one of his several diplomatic missions. Then, ensued a period of

depression probably due to the departure his patron John of Gaunt to Spain in 1386. He was the first poet to be buried in what is now famously known as “Poets’ Corner” in Westminster Abbey.

It is now customary to divide the Chaucerian poems into three stages: the French, the Italian, and the English, of which the last is a development of the first two.

(a) The poems of the French group, which are also the earliest, are closely modelled upon French originals, and the style is clumsy and immature. Of such poems, the longest is *The Romaunt of the Rose,* a lengthy allegorical poem, written in **octosyllabic couplets** and based upon *Le Romaunt de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung. This fragmented poem of 8000 lines was once entirely ascribed to Chaucer. Other poems of this period include *The Book of the Duchesse,* probably his earliest and written in 1369, the year when John of Gaunt’s wife died, *The Compleynt unto Pite, An A.B.C.,* and *The Compleynt of Mars.*

(b) The second or Italian stage shows advancement upon the first. In the handling of the metres, the technical ability is greater, and there is a growing keenness of perception and a greater stretch of originality. To this period belong *Anelida and Arcite* and *The Parlement of Foules.* The characterisation of the birds in the latter poem shows Chaucer’s true comic spirit. *Troilus and Criseyde* is a long poem adapted from Boccaccio. Reality and a passionate intensity underlie its conventions of courtly love. The complex characters of Criseyde and Pandarus reveal a new subtlety of psychological development, and indicate Chaucer’s growing insight into human motives. *Troilus and Criseyde* is held to be Chaucer’s best narrative work of the stage.

Another important poem from this period is *The Hous of Fame,* a dream allegory composed in octosyllabic couplets. In his dream, Chaucer is carried by an eagle to the House of Fame and watches that other candidates for fame approach the throne, some being granted their requests and others refused. In this group is also included *The Legend of Good Women,* in which Chaucer, starting with the intention of telling nineteen affecting tales of virtuous women of

antiquity, finishes with eight accomplished and the ninth only begun. After a charming introduction on the daisy, there is some masterly narrative, particularly in the portion dealing with Cleopatra. The poem is the first known attempt in English to use the heroic couplet, which is none the less handled with great skill and freedom.

(c) The third or English group contains work of the greatest individual accomplishment. The achievement of this period is *The Canterbury Tales,* though one or two of the separate tales may be of slightly earlier composition. For the general idea of the *Tales* Chaucer may be indebted to Boccaccio, but in nearly every important feature, the work is essentially English. For the purposes of his poem, Chaucer draws together twenty-nine pilgrims, including him. They meet at the Tabard Inn, in Southwark in order to go on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The 29 pilgrims are carefully chosen types, of both sexes, and of all ranks, from a knight to a humble ploughman; their occupations and personal peculiarities are many and diverse; and, as they are depicted in the masterly *Prologue* to the main work, they are interesting, alive, and thoroughly human. At the suggestion of the host of the Tabard, and to relieve the tedium of the journey, each of the pilgrims is to tell two tales on the outward journey, and two on the return. In its entirety, the scheme would have resulted in an immense collection of over a hundred tales. However, as it happens, Chaucer finished only twenty, and left four partly complete. There are two prose tales, Chaucer's own *Tale of Melibeus* and *The Parson's Tale.*

During his lifetime, Chaucer built up such a reputation as a poet that many works were at a later date ascribed to him without sufficient evidence. Of this group, the best examples are *The Flower and the Leaf,* quite an excellent example of the dream-allegory type, and *The Court of Love.* It has now been settled that these poems are not truly his. However, Chaucer's Poetry is marked by some important features that are as the following.

(a) The first thing that strikes us is the **unique position** that Chaucer's

work occupies in the literature of the age. Besides, he is the forerunner in the race of great literary figures dominating the ages in English poetry.

(b) Among Chaucer's literary virtues, his acute **faculty of observation** is very prominent. He was a man of the world, mixing freely with all types of humankind; and he used his opportunities to observe the little peculiarities of human nature.

(c) Chaucer's **power of descriptions**, of men, manners, and places, are of the first rank in their beauty, impressiveness, and humour. The *Prologue* contains ample material to illustrate Chaucer's power in describing his fellow men.

(d) In the literature of his time, when so few poets seem to have any perception of the fun in life, the **humour** of Chaucer is invigorating and delightful. The prevailing feature of Chaucer's humour is its urbanity: the man of the world's kindly tolerance of the weaknesses of his erring fellow-mortals. Chaucer lays less emphasis on pathos, but it is not overlooked. In the poetry of Chaucer, the sentiment is humane and unforced. We have excellent examples of **pathos** in the tale of the Prioress and in *The Legend of Good Women.*

(e) As a storyteller, Chaucer displays a **powerful narrative technique** exemplified by his fondness for long speeches, pedantic digressions on such subjects as dreams and ethical problems, and long explanations, which could have been avoided if necessary. *Troilus and Criseyde* is an example of his prolixity, while *The Knight's Tale* reveals his haphazard and dawdling methods. Still, both contain many admirable narrative passages.

(f) In the matter of poetical technique, English literature owes much to Chaucer for his **metrical skills**. He virtually imported the decasyllabic line from France to English, and he used it in both stanzaic and couplet forms. The seven-lined stanza *a b a b b c c* became popular as the Chaucerian or *rime royale.*

***William Langland or Langley (1332 –1386)*:**

Langland is the presumed author of a work of Middle English alliterative poetry, generally known as ***Piers Plowman*.** This poem,

the full title of which is *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman,* appears in its many manuscripts in three forms, called respectively the A, B, and C texts. The A text is the shortest, being about 2500 lines long; the B is more than 7200 lines; and the C, which is clearly based upon B, is more than 7300 lines. Until quite recently, it has always been assumed that the three forms were all the work of Langland; but the latest theory is that the A form is the genuine composition of Langland, whereas both B and C may have been composed by a later and inferior poet.

From the personal passages in the poem, it appears that the author was born in Shropshire about 1332. The vision in which he saw Piers the Plowman probably took place in 1362. The poem itself tells of the poet's vision on the Malvern Hills. In this trance, he beholds a fair "feld ful of folk." The first vision, by subtle and baffling changes, merges into a series of dissolving scenes which deal with the adventures of allegorical beings, human like Do-wel, Do-bet, and Do-betst, or of abstract significance like the Lady Meed, Wit, Study, and Faith. During the many incidents of the poem, the virtuous powers generally suffer most, till the advent of Piers the Plowman—the Messianic deliverer—restores the balance to the right side. The underlying motive of the work is to expose the sloth and vice of the Church, and to set on record the struggles and virtues of common folks.

Langland's frequent sketches of homely life are done with sympathy and knowledge, and, unlike Chaucer, he portrays vividly the terrible hardships of the poor peasant. The style has a sombre energy, an intense but crabbed seriousness, and an austere simplicity of treatment. The form of the poem is curious. It is a revival of the Old English rhymeless measure, having alliteration as the basis of the line. The lines themselves are uniform in length, and there is the middle pause, with (as a rule) two alliterations in the first half-line and one in the second. Yet, in spite of the Old English metre, the vocabulary draws freely upon the French, to an extent equal to that of Chaucer himself.

John Gower: (1330–1408)

Gower was an English poet, a contemporary of Langland and a friend of Chaucer. His date of birth is uncertain, but he died in 1408. He was a

man of means, and a member of a good Kentish family. The three important works of Gower are noteworthy, for they illustrate the unstable state of contemporary English literature. His first poem, *Speculum Meditantis,* is written in French; the second, *Vox Clamantis,* is composed in Latin; and the third, *Confessio Amantis,* is written in English, at the King's command according to Gower himself. In the last poem, we can find conventional allegorical setting, with a disquisition on the seven deadly sins, illustrated by many anecdotes. These anecdotes reveal Gower's capacity as a storyteller.

John Barbour: (1320–1395)

Barbour is the first of the Scottish poets. He was born in Aberdeenshire, and studied at both Oxford and Paris. His great work is *Bruce* (1375), a lengthy poem of twenty books and thirteen thousand lines. The work is a history of Scotland's struggle for freedom from the year 1286, until the death of Bruce and the burial of his heart (1332). The heroic theme of the poem is the rise of Bruce, and the central incident of the poem is the battle of Bannockburn. The poem, often rudely but pithily expressed, contains much absurd legends and a good deal of inaccuracy. However, it is no mean beginning to the long series of Scottish heroic poems.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the scheme of the poem The Canterbury Tales?

Q 6: Enlist the unique features of Chaucer as a Poet.

Q 7: What are the important works of John Gower?



1.5 LET US SUM UP

As has been intended, this unit must have acquainted you with the context of medieval poetry as well as with the important medieval poets like

Chaucer and Langland. You have learnt that by the medieval period, the English language had shaken down to the standard of the East Midland speech, the language of the capital city and of the universities. With regard to poetic diction, French and English amalgamated to form the Standard English tongue, which gained its first full expression in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. With regard to poetical *metre,* it is curious to observe that simplicity was maintained. The extremely complicated stanzas became simple and less common, and 'rhyme royal' and other shorter verses were coming into favour. Among the famous medieval poets, mention must be made of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, John Gower and John Barbour. You have also learnt that with regard to medieval poetry, we can observe the emergence of various poetical forms like—The Lyric, The Ballad, Allegory, Descriptive and Narrative Poems, as well as the Metrical Romance. However, among the lower classes of the society, metrical romances were supplanted by the ballad and fabliau. The form of poetry, that developed during that period and as practised by Chaucer himself in his *The Canterbury Tales*, is mostly descriptive or narrative. But, the metrical romance was still a popular form. Among the lower classes, metrical romance was supplanted by the ballad. Besides that a growing favour was being shown to the *fabliau*—a short French tale, realistic in subject and humorous satirical in style.



1.6 FURTHER READING

1) *Abrams, M. H.* (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Edition). Thomson Learning.

2) Albert, Edward. (1979). *History of English Literature*. (5th Edition), Oxford University Press.



1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Use of poetical *metres* became simple… …complicated stanzas became simple and less common… …'rhyme royal' became popular… …the amalgamation of simplicity with freedom remained the dominating characteristic of English verse of the medieval period.

Ans to Q 2: Religious and love-lyrics… …the traditional ballad… …the allegory… …Descriptive and Narrative Poems… …The Metrical Romance.

Ans to Q 3: Mainly about love, local legends, the feats of local heroes, supernatural happenings, or religious stories, the ballad deals with human beings' elemental passions… …Situations are such as affect the individual or family… …It came to be composed in an impersonal and detached tone.

Ans to Q 4: A Metrical Romance is a type of prose poem that deals with themes such as love, rites of passage, chivalry, adventure and interpersonal relationships… …Knights, fair maidens, and epic journeys appear frequently in a metrical romance… …Spenser's "Fairie Queen" is a great example.

Ans to Q 5: For the scheme, Chaucer draws together twenty-nine pilgrims, including himself… …they are carefully chosen types as they are depicted so beautifully in the masterly *Prologue* to the main work… …at the suggestion of the host of the Tabard, and to relieve the tedium of the journey, each of the pilgrims is to tell two tales on the outward journey, and two on the return… …however, Chaucer finished only twenty.

Ans to Q 6: His unique position in the literature of the age… …his power of observation… …power of descriptions… …the use of humour… …his powerful narrative technique… …his metrical skills, especially his use of *rime royale.*

Ans to Q 7: The three important works of Gower are *Speculum Meditantis* written in French; *Vox Clamantis* written in Latin; and *Confessio Amantis* written in English.



1.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Provide a sketch of the intellectual and social background of Medieval poetry.

Q 2: Discuss the three stages of Chaucer's poetic development with examples from each.

Q 3: Who are the important poets of the Medieval period? Write a note on the important aspects of some of these poets with reference to their works.

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UNIT 2: CHAUCER: THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO *THE CANTERBURY TALES* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Chaucer: The Poet

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Poetic Works

2.4 Chaucer as a Social Critic

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.7 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- have some ideas on the life and works of Chaucer
- assess the significance of Chaucer as the 'father' of English poetic tradition
- examine the context in which the poem *The Canterbury Tales* was written
- discuss Chaucer as a great critic of his contemporary society and the people.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to Geoffrey Chaucer, the greatest of the Medieval poets, and his poem *The General Prologue.* A 14th century courtier, a statesman, a soldier, and a politician, Geoffrey Chaucer managed to write a great quantity of poetry. You will read in this unit that he had extraordinary ability for different poetical accomplishments. It was with Chaucer that the English language and literature gradually developed. The poem *The General Prologue* provides the account of a motley group of pilgrims who represent

almost all sections of society, as they happen to meet at the Tabard inn in Southwark and plan to begin their journey to Canterbury under the guidance of the host—Harry Bailly. You will also find it interesting to read that several traditions—popular, learned and courtly, meet in this work. Chaucer was a poet of the court, but he had his readers from all classes of his society. Thus, this unit on his *The General Prologue* intends to introduce you to the kind of poetry that Chaucer used to write, and to make you acknowledge the kind of influence he could exert on his successors as the first important English poet of the 14th century, because of which he became popular as the 'father of English poetry'.

2.3 CHAUCER: THE POET

Chaucer's authority as the 'father' of the English poetic canon is almost undisputed. In the following subsections, you will get to read briefly about his life history as well as about his most famous poetic works, which would guarantee his position as a real craftsman among his contemporaries.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

2.3.1 His Life

Geoffrey Chaucer came from a family of wine-merchants. He was born in 1343/44. During his childhood, the "Great Plague" or "Black Death" took place and many of the English villages were wiped out. When he was a young boy of only 14 years or so, he was engaged as a page boy in the services of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster and her husband Prince Lionel, son of Edward III. In 1359, he became a squire, well versed in the arts of Chivalry-fighting battles as well as paying court and Christian duty. The Squire in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a reflection of his own days as a squire. In the early 1360s, Chaucer withdrew from the court to study for a while at Oxford or Cambridge. He made many trips abroad to Europe

in the King's service and became well acquainted with Italian and French literature.

Chaucer married Phillipa Roet, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Phillipa and became close to John of Gaunt, Edward's third son, next only to the King. He wrote his first poem *The Book of the Duchess* as memorial for Blanche, John of Gaunt's first wife. The experiences he gathered through his career as courtier, man of affairs, and civil servant brought him into firm contact with people of all ranks and professions and provided great opportunities for observing his fellow men. When Chaucer travelled to Italy in 1372-73 on diplomatic mission to Genoa, and then to Florence, he came across the works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch which widened and deepened his literary resources and encouraged him to seek newer and wider fields. He was particularly inspired by Dante's great work *Divine Comedy,* a poem that could encompass a wide range of ideas and feelings beyond any other work of those times. Chaucer fully used the intellectual and imaginative resources of the Middle Ages to present the moral and theological universe in which medieval men lived. Chaucer also tried to bring alive the psychological and social world of his time which turns out also to be the contemporary world of ours.

Chaucer is credited with standardising the Middle English language from a combination of the Kentish and Midlands dialects. However, many would like to argue that this is an over statement as the influence of the court and bureaucracy of which Chaucer was a part also remains a more probable influence on the development of the Standard English language. Chaucer placed the English language almost on the same level as French, which was then the official language. He also enriched the English language with many new words and phrases. For these reasons, he was termed the 'father' of modern English. If you read Chaucer's work, you will find that he follows certain medieval traditions like—dream allegory and courtly love. However, you will also notice that modern ideas like—humour,

practical realism and characters drawn from all classes of society also make an entry into the world of Chaucer. Chaucer brought many new things to English literature and thus dominated the 15th century English literary field. William Caxton, who brought printing to England, thought that *The Canterbury Tales* was the most suitable work to be published, as it was the work of the man who, according to him, "embellished, ornated and made fair our English."



LET US KNOW

Chaucer made important contributions to English Literature by using English at a time when much courtly poetry was written in either French or Latin. His use of the English language encouraged his followers and imitators to write in English. This speeded the transition of the English language from the French as the language of literature in the subsequent periods.

His poems like *The House of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde* were written after his Italian experience. After the death of Edward III, there was bitter in fighting in court and Chaucer disappeared from royal service for the next few years to write his greatest classic work *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer moved back to London and rented a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey. He died on 25th October 1400, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He left behind a grand legacy for the English life— the creation of a language and a poetic tradition unequalled for a long time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the experiences that moulded Chaucer's literary career in his later life?

Q 2: What did William Caxton say in praise of Chaucer?

Q 3: What role did Chaucer play in perfecting the English language?

2.3.2 His Poetic Works

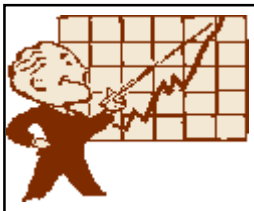
So far, you must have realised why Chaucer is considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages. Although the chronology of his works is not so certain, much critical attention has been attributed to his role in standardising the English language. Chaucer, for most of his life, was greatly influenced by the classical and European literature available to him. He was a poet, a songwriter and a great translator. Chaucer began his poetic career by translating one of the most famous of all medieval poems —*The Romance of the Rose* from French. His next famous poem *The Book of the Duchess*, in the tradition of dream allegory, was written at the end of 1369 to commemorate the death of Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster, and to console the bereaved duke. Similarly, his other works too can be put into an approximate order in terms of their relation to each other, the dates of known sources, and the influences of French and Italian traditions. For example, *House of Fame* is probably Chaucer's next work on which the influence of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is very prominent. This is yet another dream poem, which actually opens with the discussion of dreams themselves. Early poems such as *The Book of the Duchess* are influenced by French literary forms. Later, he was influenced by contemporary Italian writers such as Boccaccio and Petrarch. And, by the time, he wrote *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales*, he had already developed his own distinctive style as a poet.

The Parliament of Fowls is a poem in the dream convention in which the influence of Dante and Boccaccio only enriches the style and the content of the poem. This poem is significant for Chaucer's unique style of metrical verse form known as "Rhyme Royal" consisting of seven-line-stanza (rhyming *ababbcc*). He may have adapted the form from a French Ballade stanza or from the Italian Ottova Rima, with the omission of the fifth line. This particular form derived its name from its use by the King James I of Scotland

in his famous *King's Quair. The Parliament of Fowls* is actually a poem that celebrates Saint Valentine's Day. *Troilus and Criseyde* had probably been written in the middle of 1380s. This poem extols Chaucer's genius as a storyteller and metrical technician. According to the literary historian David Daiches, it is in a sense, the first real 'novel' in English as it tells a love story with a delicacy of psychological awareness, a brilliant handling of details, a firm hold over the structure, and controlled digression. "Ryme Royal" has been adapted to the changing demand of the narrative. Its immediate source is Boccaccio's Il Filostrato, although Chaucer adds a multidimensionality to this work by incorporating moral overtones, subtle psychology and varied details. In *The Legend of Good Women* Chaucer returns to the love-vision as his framework. This is an unfinished work that portrays faithful women, like Cleopetra, Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela as a direct contrast with the faithless women like Criseyde in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

However, it is with the poem *The Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer's reputation as a poet comes to the forefront. Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury was canonised as a saint and became St. Thomas A' Becket. His shrine at Canterbury became very famous as a pilgrimage centre and acquired a reputation for miraculous cure for all diseases. Pilgrims came to this place from all places particularly during the springtime. Chaucer bases the scheme of his *The Canterbury Tales* on these pilgrims making their way to the famous Pilgrimage centre of Canterbury Cathedral. There were total 29 pilgrims. The poem too followed a unique scheme—two stories from each of the pilgrims on the outward journey, and two again on the return that would contribute to more than a hundred stories. However, unfortunately, Chaucer could finish only twenty and left four partly complete. *The General Prologue, which* sets the scene and establishes the character, was probably written in 1380s. Chaucer in this poem drew his literary experiences from his observations of men of different occupations during his days.

Chaucer's father's house was near the River Thames quays (platforms where goods were loaded or unloaded from ships), his father being a wine merchant. Nearby lived the nobility, merchants, beggars, craftsmen, whores, politicians and churchmen. Therefore, Chaucer's boyhood was crowded with every type and profession and he knew the London of his times quite thoroughly. These experiences were sure to have helped him in creating his characters for *The General Prologue*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name some of the great works of Chaucer?

Q 5: What do you mean by 'Dream Vision'? In which poems, does Chaucer use 'Dream Vision' as a technique?

Q 6: Explain the proposed structure of *The Canterbury Tales*?

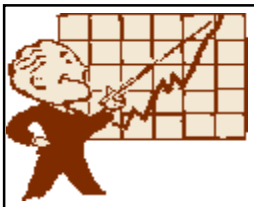
Q 7: What is Rhyme Royal? Why is it called so?

2.4 Chaucer as a Social Critic

The considerations of the features of *The General Prologue* establish his position as a social critic. The poem reflects many of Chaucer's own preoccupations and attitudes. For example, his hatred for the corruption in church and his hopes for an equal and free society are reflected in the various character portrayals of *The Prologue*. The characters of the Friar, the Monk, the Summoner and the Pardoner clearly reflect Chaucer's social criticism of church corruption. By creating his characters as types representing every possible profession and status of society, giving them their individuality, Chaucer creates real living beings that represent their own age. The best way to discuss the significance of Chaucer as a social critic is to examine the various characters from their personal traits. There are certain characters among the pilgrims, who are presented as ideal virtuous types like the Parson, the Ploughman and the Knight. Each of these characters has important roles to

play in society. For example, the Knight is a man at the top of the social ladder and he shows excellent example to others by his loyalty to his knightly vows of chivalry, virtuousness and idealism. The Parson fulfils his mission in the Church, by serving the poor just like a true Christian, and his brother the Ploughman shows that humanity and service to society can exist even in the midst of personal difficulties like poverty. The Parson and the Ploughman seem like the incarnation of Christ serving his people.

You will understand the fact that Chaucer's *General Prologue* is one of the greatest pieces of realistic literature, if you examine his presentation of society in all its aspects. Vice is presented in the form of characters who are arch villains. For example, the Pardoner and the Summoner, who terrorise and threaten people for personal gain; the Miller and the Reeve who cheat common people and their employers for money. Chaucer also presents the artifice and hypocrisy of his society, through his portrayal of characters like the Prioress, the Guildsmen and their wives who took their servants with them on their pilgrimage. By drawing a true picture of the contemporary society in all its aspects, good and bad, Chaucer showed himself to be an excellent social critic as well as one of the greatest writers of all time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Assess the significance of Chaucer as a social critic.

Q 9: Comment briefly on Chaucer's poetic style.



2.5 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you should be familiar with Chaucer and his poem *The General Prologue*. From the sections that you have read, you must have realised that Chaucer's position in the history of English poetry can never

be questioned. His genius as one of the greatest of the English poets is revealed through his narrative style in *The General Prologue*. You have found that *The Prologue* has an unusual framework. It is a work, where the narrator is also a character in his own fiction. Chaucer himself is one of the pilgrims who is a simple rural person and who joins the pilgrims at the inn at Southwerk. Chaucer's greatness lies in his being a comic writer which is prevalent in the *Prologue*. You have also seen how Chaucer uses the comic devices of irony, satire and pun to enhance the personal details and human faults and failings, artifice and hypocrisy of the pilgrims that every true person possesses. Through his brilliant comedy, Chaucer depicts a vivid, realistic picture of the medieval society as well as the true human world. Besides these, Chaucer's skill as a fictional writer, his dramatic qualities of description and narrative skill emerge beautifully in *The Prologue* and prove the truth of the accepted opinion of Chaucer as the 'Father' of English Poetry.



2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Chaucer's experience as a page boy… …experience as a squire… …experiences gained from visit to Europe… …acquaintance with Italian and French literature etc.

Ans to Q 2: Chaucer used the intellectual and imaginative resources of the middle ages… …This made Caxton say that Chaucer "embellished, ornated and made fair our English."

Ans to Q 3: Chaucer standardised the Middle English language… …he placed the English language almost on the same level as French… …he added many new words and phrases to the English language.

Ans to Q 4: *The Book of the Duchess… …The House of Fame… …The Parliament of Fowls… …The Legend of Good Women… …Troilus and Criseyde… …The Canterbury Tales.*

Ans to Q 5: It is a type of narrative popular in the middle ages… …dream visions were a popular form of storytelling in the middle ages these are mainly allegorical… …*The Book of the Duchess, The Parliament of Fowls* are some examples.

Ans to Q 6: *The General Prologue* follows a unique scheme… …two stories from each pilgrim on the outward journey, and two again on the return… …however, the poem remains unfinished… …Chaucer drew his literary experiences from his observations of men and society.

Ans to Q 7: It is a unique style of metrical verse consisting of seven-line-stanza rhyming *ababbcc*… …It is called so due to royal use… …King James I of Scotland in his famous *King's Quair* used the verse form.

Ans to Q 8: Chaucer both describes and satirises… …he is very true to tradition and presents everything with truth… …Chaucer's characters are presented as typical human beings of their own times although some are universal human figures.

Ans to Q 9: Chaucer's hatred for church corruption are reflected in the various character portrayals like that of the Friar, the Monk, the Summons and the Pardoner… …he creates characters as types representing every possible profession and status of society… …and the portrayals are done from their personal traits.



2.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on Chaucer's contributions to Medieval English poetry?

Q 2: In what ways, do you think, can Chaucer be considered the father of English poetry? Discuss in detail.

Q 3: *The General Prologue* offers a detailed picture of English social life in action. How does Chaucer's own life influence the writing of *The Prologue*?

Q 4: How far do you think Chaucer's presentation of the characters is true to our own times?

Q 5: Mention some important aspects of the medieval society as revealed through the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*.

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UNIT 3: CHAUCER'S THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO *THE CANTERBURY TALES* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 The Poem: *The General Prologue*

- 3.3.1 Extracts from the Text of the Poem
- 3.3.2 Reading the Poem
- 3.3.3 Chaucer's Characterisation
- 3.3.4 Chaucer's Poetic Style

3.4 Let Us Sum Up

3.5 Further Reading

3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.7 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read the poem *The General Prologue* in terms of its various aspects
- make a list of the characters in the poem and examine their type
- explain Chaucer's art of characterisation
- assess Chaucer's poetic style
- discuss Chaucer as a social critic.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals exclusively with Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. From the previous unit, you have learnt that *The Canterbury Tales* was written in the last phase of Chaucer's poetic career. It is probably his most ambitious project. You are expected to go through the whole *General Prologue,* but we are providing only the first 100 lines in original and modern English version. It has been done to enable learners like you to get an idea of Chaucer's English language while at the same time understanding the

poem through modern English. When the Hundred Years War was still on and when the social setup of England was almost devastated, the framework of *The Canterbury Tales* was a significant decision to bring the people together. You will note from your reading of the unit that this poem is regarded as one of the greatest works of Medieval English literature.

3.3 The Poem: *The General Prologue*

In the following subsections, an attempt has been made to discuss the various aspects of the poem in terms of the different important aspects like the storyline, Chaucer's art of characterisation and poetic style.

3.3.1 Extracts from the Text of the Poem (1-100 lines)

[Original Version Taken from http://www.librarius.com/canttran/gptrfs.htm & Modern Version taken from Nevill Coghill's translation of *The General Prologue*]

Original Version

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye-
(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende

Modern Version

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire's end

Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke.
Bifil that in that seson, on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste;
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse
To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.
But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.
A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,

Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.
It happened in that season that one day
In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide:
They made us easy, all was of the best.
And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.
But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say
What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.
There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
Truth, honor, generousness, and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,

As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
And evere honoured for his worthynesse.
At Alisaundre he was, whan it was wonne.
Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
Aboven alle nacions in Pruce;
In Lettow hadde he reysed, and in Ruce,
No Cristen man so ofte of his degree.
In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.
At Lyeys was he and at Satalye,
Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See
At many a noble armee hadde he be.
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
And foughten for oure feith at Tramyssene
In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo.
This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye
Agayn another hethen in Turkye.
And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys;
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
In al his lyf unto no maner wight.
He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.
But, for to tellen yow of his array,
His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
Of fustian he wered a gypon
Al bismotered with his habergeoun,
For he was late ycome from his viage,
And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.
With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,
A lovyere and a lusty bacheler;
With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.

As well in Christian as in heathen places,
And ever honored for his noble graces.
When we took Alexandria, he was there.
He often sat at table in the chair
Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
No Christian man so often, of his rank.
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin;
In Anatolia he had been as well
And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene
Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight.
Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armor had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.
He had his son with him, a fine young Squire,

Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.
And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie
In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie,
And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a meede,
Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede;
Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day,
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May.
Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde.
Wel koude he sitte on hors, and faire ryde.
He koude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste, and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.
So hoote he lovede, that by nyghtertale
He slepte namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,
And carf biforn his fader at the table.

A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.
In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He'd seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.

3.3.2 Reading the Poem

The original scheme of Chaucer, as you have been informed, was to produce an immense collection of over a hundred tales as each of the pilgrims were to tell two stories on the outward journey and two on the return. However, Chaucer could finish only twenty and left four partly complete. The poem *The Canterbury Tales* is incomplete also in the sense that whatever survive of the original plan are just some fragments, usually consisting of two or more tales whose sequence is clear. Scholars however, accept almost unanimously, the order of the famous 15th century Ellesmere

Manuscript of the poem on which perhaps the subsequent versions of the poem are based.

The 'plot' of the *Canterbury Tales* is not very difficult to understand. In early April, the narrator is lodged at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, ready to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. At the same time, a group of twenty-nine pilgrims arrives at the Inn. The narrator also becomes a part of this group and subsequently provides significant character portraits of the participants in the group, each representing a different aspect of the English society. The host of the Tabard Inn, Harry Baily, too decides to join the pilgrims, and proposes a game to divert them on the road: all will tell stories, and the best tale will be rewarded at the end of the journey with a supper. The bulk of the poem thus consists of the tales of twenty-three pilgrims. However, Chaucer's description of the pilgrims in his *Prologue* remains to be one of the most vivid, varied and extensive pieces of character drawing in English literature. It consists of 878 lines (as you find in Nevill Coghill's translation of the book) that form an entire work of literature of its own. The text contains three parts: a short introduction, the series of portraits of the pilgrims, and their agreement to a tale (story)-telling game. You should note that the twenty-nine pilgrims Chaucer took were carefully chosen types, of both sexes, of all ranks from the Knight to the Plowman. As depicted in the *Prologue,* their occupation and personal peculiarities are many, yet they are interesting as types but have successfully maintained their individual traits.

Look at the first lines of the *Prologue.* It begins with an invocation to the month of April, the season of spring, when this joyful season inspires the world of nature into growth and new life.

"When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath

Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages"

These lines indicate nature awakening to new life with the coming of spring after the long draught of winter. It begins with a description of the month of April in which the change from the cold dreamy winter to the 'life giving spring' is clearly perceived. In the context of the poem, spring means a veritable new lease of life in society. But, this is not all. Chaucer also implicitly refers to the other important aspects of nature—'regenerational', 'vegetational', 'habitational' whose presence in these lines makes the context of the poem brilliantly presented before the readers like us. You find that the West wind is personified as the God Zyphuros whose sweet breath inspires new life in the spring season. The lines also refer to the Sun passing through the Zodiac sign of the Ram (Aries) during springtime, thereby presenting before us a possible date in the month of April, probably the 11th April, on which the poem was perhaps written.

Chaucer then starts his descriptions of the pilgrims, portraying the society of medieval England and giving us a glimpse of humankind with their positive and negative aspects. He does this with humour and realism as well as with great insights into the truths of human nature. It seems that in describing the pilgrims, the medieval division of the three estates i.e. the military estate, the clerical estate, and the professional estate is strictly followed by Chaucer. The pilgrims are grouped in order of social precedence. The military order begins with the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman who form the first group in the poem. The knight and his son Squire are aristocrats and they travel with their servant, the Yeoman. In the clerical (or religious) order of the Church are included the Prioress, the Nun, the Monk,

and the Friar almost all of whom ignore the religious vows and live luxurious life ignoring the duties delegated to them by the Church. The professional class includes characters like the Merchant who is an expert in business dealings, the Clerk who is a student studying for career in the church, the Sergeant of the Law who is the king's servant in legal matters, the Five Guildsmen who are the members of a trade and craft guild. You have read in your social history course that the Guilds in medieval cities were organisations of social life. The Shipman is also the captain of the ship that sails from Dartmouth on the coast of Devon, the Doctor or physician is a master of his art. Then we also find the Wife of Bath, a very important lady. She is extremely skilful in her profession of the cloth-making trade. But Chaucer treats her with bold humour. Another minor character is the Manciple, who is a servant of a college or inns or court, who purchased the provisions, and was not above cheating.

In *The Prologue*, Chaucer gives a good representation to the rural countryside, for a good number of characters are from the country. Among them are: the Franklin who is a country gentlemen and a landholder and therefore a rich man. He is shown to be very hospitable and benevolent. The list of other such characters include the Parson who is the ideal Parish priest free from the faults of the other churchmen and an extremely good man who cares for his parishioners more than himself, the Ploughmen, brother of the Parson, who is poor but good. But Chaucer portrays the characters of the Miller, the Reeve, the Summoner, and the Pardoner as dishonest ones. The Miller is engaged in grinding corn for the farmers but successfully continues his monopoly business that leads to frequent quarrels with his customers. Similarly, the Reeve, an estate manager, makes profits by cheating his master. The Summoner is a minor official in the Church who summons accused persons to the Bishop's court to be tried for sins. He is a corrupt and vicious man who uses his power to blackmail people. The Pardoner, on the other hand sells 'pardons' or 'indulgencies', which were reductions

of punishment imposed by an ecclesiastical (religious) court. The Pardoner is the last of the corrupt pilgrims that Chaucer portrays.



LET US KNOW

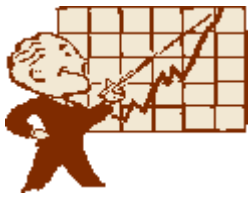
You have seen that *The General Prologue* is an exposition and introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*. The realistic and lively style that Chaucer employed in the *Prologue* makes us imagine that we are meeting real people in real life situation. At the same time, Chaucer remains true to his tradition. For example, the highest and lowest members would not go on a pilgrimage; for serfs and poor peasants were not free to travel and a nobleman would only travel with his own group. There are only two women characters in the group of pilgrims: the Wife of Bath and the Prioress, because, usually women did not travel alone, but these two women did, because they were independent and were their own mistresses.

You should further note that in order to differentiate one character from the other, Chaucer has given each character a different profession. You should not be surprised to find that this differentiation is also signified by the dresses they wear and the particular ways they behave with others. This is because, in Chaucer's time, each rank or profession had distinctive features even to the smallest details of costumes. For example, the Knight, the Miller, the Clerk, the Merchant—all are distinctive and differentiated from each other by their costume, manners and speech, which also appropriate their respective profession and social status. Thus, we find the Knight in warlike attire, the squire "embroidered like a meadow", and the Merchant in a "motley dress." Some characters like the Monk and the Clerk are even presented with some biographical note. Thus, in keeping with the miscellaneous characters, a wide range of tastes and interests is represented by the tales the characters tell. At the same time, Chaucer's use of humour is another quality that gives

his characters their amazing life and realism. For example, the Squire's lock of hair is described as "laid in press", the Wife of Bath's hat weighs 10 bs, the Reeve has thin skinny legs etc. However, you will notice that Chaucer, in most of such humorous portrayals is sympathetic, except in the case of the Monk and the Friar whom Chaucer satirises. If humour is marked by the sense of the comic, then Chaucer emerges as a great humourist when he describes the hunting Monk who is fat and whose baldhead 'shines like a looking glass'. On the other hand, the Friar is presented as a 'festive fellow' and as Chaucer writes: "Therefore instead of weeping and of prayers/ One should give silver for a poor Friar's care." Another important aspect that you must consider is—individuals as the pilgrims are, they are also representatives. Many of them exhibit types—for example, the 'gentle Knight', the 'venal Friar', and 'he Hypocrite Pardoner' etc.

Nevill Coghill, the famous translator of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* writes: "In all literature there is nothing that touches or resembles the *Prologue*. It is the concise portrait of the nation, high and low, old and young, male and female, lay and clerical learned and ignorant, rogue and righteous, land and sea, town and country, but without extremes. Apart from the stunning clarity, touched with nuance, of the characters presented, the most noticeable thing about them is their normality. They are the perennial progeny of men and women. Sharply individual, together they make a party…The tales these pilgrims tell come from all over Europe, many of them from the works of Chaucer's near contemporaries. They exemplify the whole range of contemporary European imagination, then particularly addicted to stories, especially to stories that had some sharp point and deducible maxim, moral, or idea. Almost every tale ends with a piece of proverbial or other wisdom derived from it and with a general benediction on the company." (Coghil, 17) Because of the vivid reality of the characters as well as the inclusive representation of the

English society, *The Canterbury Tales* has been meaningfully called a Human Comedy by many.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How are the portraits in *The General Prologue* grouped?

Q 2: How does Chaucer portray his contemporary society in *The General Prologue*?

Q 3: How does the plot of the poem *The General Prologue* start?

Q 4: How is the month of April portrayed by Chaucer?

Q 5: How did costume represent rank during Chaucer's time?

3.3.3 Chaucer's Art of Characterisation

Through the characters in *The Prologue,* Chaucer wanted to show his audience different aspects of his contemporary society and its people. The idea of the pilgrimage was made only to make it serve as the background for his story because it was the only occasion when people from different walks of life and social strata, could come together on an equal footing. Moreover, Chaucer includes only those characters, which were likely to go on a pilgrimage. We have to realise that it was also a fashion among the people of the higher ranks to go on pilgrimages with a retinue that included the so-called lower class people like the serfs or the poor peasants who were otherwise not free to travel. Women did not usually travel, unless they were independent like the Wife of Bath, or in a superior position like the Prioress—the Reverend Mother of a Convent.

Thus, Chaucer is seen to have divided the characters into groups, using the medieval divisions of society into estates: the military estates, the clerical estate and worker's estate. Chaucer groups the people (the characters) on the basis of the tenets of medieval social precedence placing the Knight as an aristocrat at the beginning. He has also created a large group from the Middle

Class—the new, upcoming class of medieval society which reflects the changes transforming medieval social life, particularly with the rising importance of money. Have a look at the following list of characters in the frame of the poem. [Adapted from http://www.librarius.com/canttran/gptrfs.htm]

What is most interesting about Chaucer's characterisation is the fact that he presented the characters as typical human beings with their strengths and weaknesses, faults and failings, good and bad qualities the details of which you can read in the longer version of the poem. The characters (portraits) emerge before the readers as typical human beings in their social, economic and moral dimensions. A very important aspect of the characters is that they are both types and individuals. As types, commonly known and recognised by the audience, they are familiar to both the literate as well as illiterate people. For example, the hunting **Monk,** the corrupt **Friar**, the dedicated **Knight**, the gay and fun loving **Squire**, the **Prioress** and the **good Parson**—all could readily be identified. These characters also became well known to people in popular literary traditions. While, as individuals, the characters also have a distinct identity of their own. They emerge as people with distinctively recognisable human traits. Each character is a member of his/her class or profession but is also an individual with definite personal qualities like: the Prioress's love of jewellery and her tendency of showing off her table manners before the other pilgrims; the Friar's love of wine and women's company, and the **Wife of Bath's** tendency of always aspiring to be the first in the line. So, Chaucer's art of characterisation makes room for reading the poem in the context of the medieval society which was transitional in different ways during the post-feudal England.



LET US KNOW

The 14th century England was an age of political upheavals with the Hundred Years War being fought between England and France. Along with this, it was a period when the 'Black Death' and the 'Peasants' Revolt' occurred. As far as the *Prologue* is concerned, Chaucer tried to maintain the 'feudal hierarchy' in the portraits of the pilgrims to a considerable extent. However, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* does refer to some of the professions that emerged as an effect of the breakdown of the feudal system.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How did Chaucer chose his Pilgrims?

Q 7: What are the important aspects of Chaucer's characters?

3.3.4 Chaucer's Poetic Style

Geoffrey Chaucer was an important craftsman moulding the English language with much subtlety and flexibility. It is often stated that Chaucer's European consciousness enabled him to render in the English language the dominant themes and attitudes of European literature. His relaxed attitude enabled him to contemplate the varieties of human nature portrayed with sympathy, irony and amusement. His technical brilliance lies in his metrical handling of language with breadth of view, knowledge, interests and the experience of life. While discussing Chaucer's style Christopher Cannon writes:

"Although we do not understand ourselves to be thinking along these lines now, we still employ this theory every time we say that a line of poetry, or a particular turn of phrase, is 'Chaucerian'. For the subtle but sure consequence of assuming that language and 'the artist' are equivalent is the belief that a writer's work is as cohesive as personhood (its parts are so integral that they form an indivisible

whole) and just as distinctive (entirely unlike the work of any other person). In the case of Chaucer, such 'style' is the 'peculiar complexity' which sets his writing apart as if it were itself an individual. It is 'the meanings and values that make him Chaucer'."

This above-mentioned quotation summarises almost every aspect of Chaucer's poetic style.

The General Prologue reaches the heights of greatness as one of the most brilliant pieces of literature of the medieval times. The greatness of the poem lies in its variety. The collection of tales represents not only a remarkably perfect poem but excellent drama. In addition, the collection of portraits of the pilgrims who came together at the inn before setting on their journey represented a wide range of psychological types of human characters. Through its depiction of the vast range of human figures, *The Prologue* and *The Canterbury Tales* present a total picture of the 14th century English society. The style in which this poem is written also gives us an insight into the attitudes of the people towards a variety of subjects, which concerned the life and society of those times such as the church, marriage, money (materialism), the relationship between men and women, and also the position of women in a male dominated society.



LET US KNOW

Chaucer's Humour

The humour, which steeps nearly all his poetry, has great variety: kindly and patronising, as in the case of the Clerk of Oxenford; broad and semi-farcical, as in the Wife of Bath; pointedly satirical, as in the Pardoner and the Summoner; or coarse, as happens in the tales of the Miller, the Reeve, and the Cook. It is seldom that the satirical intent is wholly lacking, as it is in the case of the Good Parson, but, except in rare cases, the satire is good-humoured and well meant.



3.4 LET US SUM UP

This unit must have helped you to read the poem *The General Prologue* in terms of its various issues and aspects. By now, you must have gained some ideas on Chaucer's art of characterisation and on how he used to draw the various characters for this poem from various walks of his contemporary times. You have learnt that Geoffrey Chaucer was a real craftsman moulding the English language with much subtlety and flexibility. His relaxed attitude enabled him to contemplate the varieties of human nature portrayed with sympathy, irony and amusement. Finally, this unit has helped you to consider Chaucer as a social critic because through this poem he reflects his own preoccupations, attitudes and views on the ills of society.



3.5 FURTHER READING

1) Anderson, John J. (1974). *Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*. The Casebook Series, Macmillan, 1974.
2) Beryl, Rowland. (1979). *Companion to Chaucer Studies.* Oxford University Press, London.
3) Bloom, Harold. (1991). *The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Modern Critical Interpretations, Chelsa House.
4) Bowden, Muriel. (1988). *A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer*. Thames and Hudson, London.
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6) Daiches, David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature. (Vol. I)* New Delhi: Random House India.
7) F. N. Robinson. (1976). *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*. Oxford University Press.
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3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: In terms of three estates—the military estate, the clerical estate and the estate of workers… …in order of social hierarchy… …The military order begins with the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman… …. the clerical (religious) order of the Church include—the Prioress, a nun, the monk and the friar… …the professional class includes the Merchant, the Clerk, the Sergeant of the Law, Five Guildsmen, the Cook, the Shipman etc.

Ans to Q 2: Chaucer used language with much subtlety and flexibility… ... he handled the English language with breadth of view, the knowledge, the interests and the experience of life.

Ans to Q 3: The poem starts in early April as the narrator is lodged at the Tabard Inn, ready to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. Arrival of twenty nine pilgrims ... ... the narrator also becomes a part of this group and subsequently provides significant character portraits of the participants in the group, each representing a different aspect of the English society... ..., the host of the Inn, Harry Baily, proposes a game to divert them on the road: all will tell stories, and the best tale will be rewarded at the end of the journey with a supper... ... the poem thus consists of the tales of twenty-three pilgrims.

Ans to Q 4: In the month of April, change from the cold dreamy winter to the 'life giving spring' is clearly perceived… …spring means a veritable new lease of life in society… …Chaucer refers to three other important aspects of nature—'regenerational', 'vegetational', 'habitational'… ...West wind is personified as the God Zyphuros.

Ans to Q 5: the Knight, the Miller, the Clerk, the Merchant—all are distinctive and differentiated from each other by their costume… … the Knight is found in a warlike attire, the squire "embroidered like a meadow", and the Merchant in a "motley dress."... ...in keeping with the

miscellaneous characters like the monk, a wide range of tastes and interests is represented by the tales the characters tell.

Ans to Q 6: Chaucer chose them from different walks of life and social strata… …Chaucer included only those characters, which were likely to go on a pilgrimage… … the people of the higher ranks going on pilgrimages with a retinue was very common… …such pilgrimage also included lower class people like the serfs or peasants who were otherwise not free to travel… …Women did not usually travel, unless they were independent like the Wife of Bath, or in a superior position like the Prioress—the Reverend Mother of a Convent.

Ans to Q 7: They are both types and individuals… …they are both the literate as well as illiterate people… …characters like the Monk, the Friar, the Knight, the Squire, the Prioress and the good Parson—all could readily be identified as types… …but each character is a member of his/her class or profession, but is also an individual with definite personal qualities like: the Prioress's love of jewellery, the Friar's love of wine etc.



3.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: From your study of the portraits of *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, discuss some of the striking details about these characters.

Q 2: *The Prologue* has been referred to as the mini portrait of a nation. Discuss *The Prologue* as a reflection of medieval society.

Q 3: Discuss the Prioress, the Wife of Bath, The Monk and the Friar as examples of Chaucer's humour, satire and irony.

Q 4: What do the ideal characters in Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* indicate? Discuss some of them like the Knight, the Poor Parson and the Ploughman.

Q 5: The depraved characters in *The Prologue* indicate the truth of human life and society. Discuss in detail two of such characters—the Summoner and the Pardoner.

Q 6: The Prologue has been called a portrait gallery of the 14th century England. Discuss.

Q 7: Chaucer's characters have been said to be types as well as individuals. Discuss and illustrate your answer with examples from the text.

Q 8: Discuss the Church characters as presented in *The Prologue*. How is the village priest so different from the Pardoner and Summoner?

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UNIT 4: THOMAS WYATT & HENRY HOWARD, EARL OF SURREY: THE APPEAL "AND WILT THOU LEAVE ME THUS?" (WYATT) & *"LOVE THAT DOTH REIGN AND LIVE WITHIN MY THOUGHT"* (SURREY)

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 The Sonnet Tradition

4.4 Thomas Wyatt: The Poet

4.5 Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey: The Poet

4.6 Reading Wyatt's *The Appeal "And wilt thou leave me thus?"*

4.7 Reading Surrey's *"Love that doth reign and live within my thought"*

4.8 Let us Sum up

4.9 Further Reading

4.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.11 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the established sonnet conventions and their variations
- describe the life and works of Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard
- explain the various important aspects of the poem "The Appeal "And wilt thou leave me thus?"
- discuss the poem A Praise of his Love "Give place ye lovers"
- appreciate both Wyatt and Surrey as the two most significant sonneteers in English.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with two sonnets written by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, earl of Surrey (1517-47) who had been the forerunners of the sonnet tradition in English. You will learn that Wyatt's lyrics have been greatly valued by the later ages. Wyatt's love poems, express the laments

of the unrequited or deserted lover rather than the joys of mutuality like one can find in most 16th century love poetry. His sonnets introduce many of the topics that became so popular in the Elizabethan sonnet: sexual love as a hunt, the lover as a ship running aground on the rocks etc. Technically, Wyatt is important for the musical quality of his lyrics, an example of which is “My lute, awake”. The name of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey is regularly coupled with that of Wyatt. He too was an exponent of sonnet writing in English. His love poems looked more conventional, stiff and imitative compared with Wyatt’s freedom and emotional power. But, he has the enormous historical importance of having introduced blank verse into English. An attempt has been made in this unit to read two poems written by Wyatt and Surrey respectively, and it is expected that from this unit you will get some ideas of sonnet writings in the 16th century.

4.3 THE SONNET TRADITION

The sonnet, a name derived from the Italian *sonnetto,* meaning song or a little sound, is a 14-line poetic form that developed near the close of the Middle Ages. Italian Giacomo da Lentino (1188–1240) and other members of the court of Frederick II (1194–1250) are known as the inventors of the form, and Provençal courtly love poetry was an important influence. The sonnet increased in popularity throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Many writers sought to model their verses upon those of another Italian, Francesco Petrarch (1304–74), who created what is known as the Petrarchan sonnet. A sonnet is typified by three distinct forms, the Italian form being the most common. Developed from the Sicilian *strambotto* (meaning a Sicilian peasant song), this verse form consists of two quatrains and two tercets. In the Italian sonnet, the octave develops one thought, and the sestet grows out of the octave’s thought, varying and completing it as if the sestet were a response to the octave, with a possible change in point of view. The usual rhyme scheme is *abba abba* (the octave) and *cde cde* (the sestet). The octave may be known as two quatrains if printed in quatrains, and the sestet may be known as two tercets.

This poetic form of the sonnet originated in Italy and literary historians

named Giacomo da Lentini as the first Italian sonneteer. But, this kind of poetry flourished in the 13th century in the hands of Italian poets like Guittone d'Arezzo, Dante Alighieri, Guido Cavalcanti and so on. The most prominent name associated with the early Italian sonnet was of course Petrarch, by whose name the Italian sonnet later came to be identified. According to some scholars, the Occitan (the Provencal language) word *sonet* meaning 'a little song' is also at the root of the word 'sonnet'. In Italian (Petrarchan) sonnets, the fourteen lines were divided into one 'octave' (two quatrains) and one 'sestet' (two tercets). The usual rhyme scheme in Petrarchan sonnet was *a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a* for the octave and *c-d-e-c-d-e* or *c-d-c-c-d-c* for the sestet.

In English literature, it was Sir Thomas Wyatt who pioneered sonnet writing, followed by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey in the 16th century. They were the followers of the Petrarchan convention of sonnet writing; but the latter brought some modifications to the Petrarchan model by introducing a different structural pattern of three quatrains and one couplet. Their sonnets were later included in Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonnetts* (1557). Some other sonneteers who contributed to the development of the early English sonnets were Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville and William Drummond of Hawthornden. However, the English sonnet was given a more solid footing by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (first published in 1591) and Spenser's *The Amoretti* (1595) can be termed as two landmarks in the history of the English sonnet. Then there was Shakespeare, the undisputed master of the English sonnet, whose 154 sonnets established the English (Elizabethan) sonnet convention as a distinguished literary genre.

The English sonnet form, known as Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet form, consisted of three quatrains and one couplet, a pattern initiated by Surrey and brought into perfection by Shakespeare. It was usual in the English sonnet to compose each line in iambic pentameter, though there were also some notable exceptions to this rule. For example, the first sonnet in *Astrophel and Stella* was in iambic hexameter. The usual rhyme scheme of the English sonnet was *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g.* Edmund Spenser,

of course, enriched the English sonnet form by introducing some variations. He initiated a rhyme scheme *abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee* with the quatrains connected by the interlocking rhyme scheme. His variety of sonnet is known as Spenserian sonnet.

The Petrarchan model was revived into the English sonnet by John Milton in the 17th century. Apart from him, John Donne and George Herbert, also wrote sonnets following both Petrarchan and Shakespearean rhyme schemes, while occasionally allowing variations to them. The Restoration period was a bleak period for the English sonnet, because sonnet became almost non-existent now in English literature until William Wordsworth brought it back during the period of the Romantic revival. Wordsworth as a sonneteer was a follower of Milton. Other Romantic poets like Keats and Shelley also contributed greatly to the sonnet writing. Among the 19th century English poets, some remarkable names flourishing in the field of sonnet were Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins. By this time, two other forms of sonnet, namely **curtal sonnet** (containing 10½ lines) and **caudate sonnet** (containing 24 lines), came into being. Now, thematically and formally, a great flexibility came to the sonnet writing. Among the 20th century English and American poets who had a knack for writing sonnets, some prominent names were Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent Millay, E. E. Cummings, William Butler Yeats, Wilfred Owen, W. H. Auden, Robert Lowell, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill etc. They carried out new experiments into sonnet writing by including half-rhymed, unrhymed and even unmetrical poetic compositions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who introduced the term sonnet?

Q 2: What is the pattern of the Petrarchan sonnet?

Q 3: Outline the development of the English sonnet.

Q 4: What is the pattern of English sonnet?

4.4 THOMAS WYATT: THE POET



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was a 16th century English poet who is credited with introducing the sonnet into English. He was born at Allington Castle, near Maidstone in Kent, though his family was originally from Yorkshire. His father, Henry Wyatt, had been one of Henry VII's Privy Councillors, and remained a trusted adviser when Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509. In his turn, Thomas Wyatt followed his father to court after receiving his education at St. John's College, Cambridge. None of Wyatt's poems was published during his lifetime—the first book to feature his verse, *Tottel's Miscellany* of 1557, was printed a full fifteen years after his death.

Wyatt's professed object was to experiment with the English tongue, to civilise it, to raise its powers to those of its neighbours. A significant amount of his literary output consists of translations and imitations of sonnets by the Italian poet Petrarch, he also wrote sonnets of his own. He took subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure. Petrarch's sonnets consist of an Octave rhyming *abba abba*, followed, after a turn (volta) in the sense, by a sestet with various rhyme schemes. Wyatt employs the Petrarchan octave, but his most common sestet scheme is *cddc ee*. This marks the beginnings of an exclusively "English" contribution to sonnet structure—that is three quatrains and a closing couplet. 15 years after his death, the printer Richard Tottel included 97 poems attributed to Wyatt among the 271 poems in the famous *Totell's Miscellany Songs and Sonnets*.

While Wyatt's poetry reflects classical and Italian models, he also admired the works of Chaucer, and his vocabulary reflects Chaucer's. Many of his poems deal with the trials of romantic love and the devotion of the suitor to an unavailable or cruel mistress. His other poems are scathing, satirical indictments of the hypocrisies and pandering of the ambitious

courtiers to advance at the Tudor court. Thus, Wyatt was one of the earliest poets of the English Renaissance. He was responsible for many innovations in English poetry and, alongside Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced the sonnet from Italy into England. His lyrics show tenderness of feeling and purity of diction. He is one of the originators of the convention in love poetry according to which the mistress is painted as hard-hearted and cruel.

Critical opinions of his work have varied widely. Thomas Warton, the 18th century critic, considered Wyatt "confessedly an inferior" to his contemporary Henry Howard, and that Wyatt's "genius was of the moral and didactic species and be deemed the first polished English satirist." The 20th century saw an awakening in his popularity and a surge in critical attention. C. S. Lewis called him "the father of the Drab Age", from what Lewis calls the "golden" age of the 16th century, while others see his love poetry, with its complex use of literary conceits as anticipating that of the Metaphysical Poets in the next century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What does Wyatt's poetry reflect?

4.5 HENRY HOWARD, EARL OF SURREY: THE POET



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–1547) was born at Kenninghall Palace, Norfolk, England, to Lord Thomas Howard and Elizabeth Stafford Howard, the daughter of the Duke of Buckingham and a descendant of King Edward III of England. He was given the title Earl of Surrey in 1524 when his father became Duke of Norfolk. Two of his cousins, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, were married to Henry VIII. Surrey's family connections provided him with a wealth of opportunities. He had a fiery temper, which landed him in trouble a number of times. He was imprisoned

for brawling in 1537 and 1542, for rioting in 1543, and finally for high treason in 1546.

Surrey apparently began composing poetry while he was imprisoned at Windsor Castle in 1537. He remained, by necessity, an occasional poet, writing for the most part when he was not fulfilling some political office or following some military campaign. However, Surrey made a valuable contribution to English literature when he translated Books II and IV of the Roman poet Virgil's *The Aeneid*, an epic telling of the end of the Trojan War and the founding of Rome. In his translation, Surrey uses, for the first time in English, blank verse— unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter, or lines of 10 syllables alternating between unaccented and accented syllables. This poetic form has since come to seem like a natural part of the English language.

Another of Surrey's great innovations was the development of the English sonnet (sometimes called Shakespearean after William Shakespeare). The form of the sonnet that Surrey developed, in contrast with that of Wyatt, has three four-line units, known as quatrains, and a concluding two lines, the couplet. Surrey's rhyme scheme was abab cdcd efef gg. In this type of sonnet, the poet poses a problem in the three quatrains, with each quatrain dealing with a separate, though related, aspect of the problem. The poet then presents a conclusion in the couplet.



LET US KNOW

There remains confusion as to the exact number of poems written by Wyatt. There are several reasons for this uncertainty. As many of Wyatt's works were translations of the Italian poet Petrarch and others, some anthologists have chosen not to attribute these versions to Wyatt. Wyatt's canon is believed to be somewhere between 100 and 250 poems, not including his satires and psalms. A further complication to clearly establishing the breadth of Wyatt's work is the fact that he was not alone in translating some poems, and it becomes a challenge to attribute correctly, which version belongs to which poet. For instance, the Wyatt poem "The Long Love

That In My Thought Doth Harbour" is a translation of Petrarch's Rime 140.

Wyatt's contemporary (sometimes described as equal, or even superior) Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, also penned a translation of a Petrarch poem, which he called 'Love That Doth Reign and Live Within My Thought'. Various critics have argued the respective literary merits and demerits of the three works. It is wrong to dismiss Wyatt's achievements in transforming Petrarch's initial works as mere translation. Wyatt uses the tradition and respect held by Petrarch's work to scaffold the new form of English poetry, and to catalogue the political and social tensions of his time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are Surrey's contributions to English poetry?

Q 7: Mention Surrey's great innovation as a sonneteer.

4.6 READING WYATT'S *THE APPEAL "AND WILT THOU LEAVE ME THUS?"*

The Text

And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay, for shame,
To save thee from the blame
Of all my grief and grame;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath loved thee so long
In wealth and woe among?
And is thy heart so strong
As for to leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,
That hath given thee my heart
Never for to depart,
Nother for pain nor smart;
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus
And have no more pity
Of him that loveth thee?
Hélas, thy cruelty!
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay, say nay!

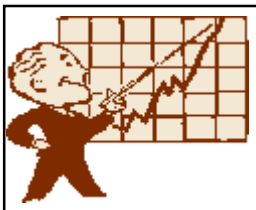
In the first verse, the narrator appeals to his lady love not to leave him in such a state of grief and sorrow. If she does, she will then be responsible for all his misery. He repeats his rhetorical question from the first line: “And wilt thou leave me thus?” The narrator then repeats his petition in **the second verse**, questioning as to whether she will abandon he who has loved her constantly, through times of profit and anguish. He then questions whether her heart has the strength and capacity to withstand the pressure of her terrible deed. Again, he pleads with her not to desert him. In **the third verse**, again beginning with his repeated request, he says that he gave his heart to her to be together, and not out of a desire to experience pain or embarrassment. His plea this time is for her not to leave him so broken and humiliated. By **the fourth verse,** the appeal is more plaintive. He asks for compassion, as he has loved her. By line 22, he bemoans her unkindness and brutality. The song concludes with the opening two lines being repeated.

The song is composed of four sestets (six-line verses), each with a refrain, ‘Say nay! Say nay!’, which reflects the tone of desolation and anguish. In the first stanza, the narrator’s appeal for her to deny her rejection places the effect of the separation more to her disadvantage rather than his. The narrator implies that the lady will be held accountable for the distress she has caused him. Here Wyatt is reminding the audience that courtly

relationships are public entities in many ways, and the lady may damage her own reputation by dissolving this union. This implication reminds us of the tense social and patriarchal relationships within the Tudor court, wherein being out of favour could have fatal consequences.

The second stanza, deals with losses beyond those of the heart and mind. He reminds his ladylove of his loyalty, and how he has stood by her through good and bad times, which is expressed in the alliterative phrase 'wealth and woe'. Relationships were often conducted with fiscal implications, and money brought power and security to any match. Here, there is a suggestion that his support of her may have been more than as a lover, but also as a financial patron. These sorts of bonds would be difficult for a lady to give up unless there was a replacement for her former beau. There is a veiled warning in the question as to whether the lady's heart can survive the impact of such a callous action as abandoning the narrator. Her rejection could have consequences on her own emotional—and perhaps physical state. If she were to break his heart, she may, in turn, damage her own or even fall prey to the court. By the forth stanza, the narrator is filled with hopelessness at the lady's dismissal of him. He asserts that her cruelty has destroyed him.

The song concludes with the repetition of the opening two lines. Here Wyatt is using the structure of the song to add further social comment. By using a cyclical arrangement, there is an indication that the situation, along with the refrain and the despair, will be repeated. There is no real resolution offered, merely an indication that the lady will continue to break hearts and the narrator will continue to misplace his loyalty. There is much passion in the song, as indicated by the frequent use of exclamation marks, but no logic or conclusion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: In what ways, does Wyatt portray social and patriarchal relationship in his sonnets?

Q 9: How is suffering expressed by Wyatt in his poems?

4.7 READING SURREY'S *"LOVE THAT DOTH REIGN AND LIVE WITHIN MY THOUGHT"*

The Text

Love that doth reign and live within my thought
And built his seat within my captive breast,
Clad in arms wherein with me he fought,
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.
But she that taught me love and suffer pain,
My doubtful hope and eke my hot desire
With shamefaced look to shadow and refrain,
Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.
And coward Love, then, to the heart apace
Taketh his flight, where he doth lurk and 'plain,
His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pain,

Yet from my lord shall not my foot remove,–
Sweet is the death that taketh end by love.

This is one of Surrey's characteristic sonnets, "Love that doth reign and live within my thought" adapted from Petrarch's Sonnetto in Vita 91. Surrey writes of love as a military drama. In the first quatrain, Love is characterised as a military figure who takes the field:

"Love that doth reign and live within my thought,
That built his seat within my captive breast;
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest."

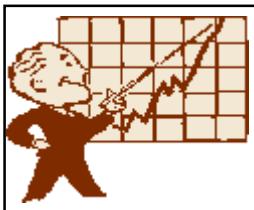
The Beloved's response to the narrator is presented in the second quatrain:

"But she, that taught me to love, and suffer pain;
My doubtful hope, and eke [also] my hot desire….."

In the couplet, the speaker enters the drama, stating his intention to die on the field of battle in the pursuit of his love: "Yet from my Lord shall not

my foot remove: Sweet is his death that takes his end by love." In addition to developing blank verse and the English sonnet, Surrey was also among the earliest English poets to struggle for smooth metrical patterns in his lines. The meter, or rhythm, of very old English poetry is accentual, meaning that each line contains a certain number of stressed syllables but can have any number of syllables. Later poets used a syllabic-accentual meter, meaning that each line contains the same number of syllables and the same number of accented syllables. A line of iambic pentameter, for instance, always contains 10 syllables, five of which are stressed.

Prior to Surrey, English poets only loosely followed syllable counts in their lines. Surrey, however, learned from the Italians "the structural value of regularity, of keeping exact iambs," and he worked at making his lines' rhythms metrically correct. His verse is, consequently, smoother than the verse of his predecessors, and after his death, poets followed his example. Dennis Keene, one of Surrey's editors observed that Surrey, "having achieved a revolution in the rhythm and vocabulary of poetry…determined the nature of poetic vocabulary for the following two hundred years."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How does Surrey portray the theme of love in the poem?

Q 11: What is Surrey's contribution to English metrical system?



4.8 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you must have learnt that Wyatt and Surrey were the first English poets to write poetry in the sonnet form that Shakespeare later used, and Surrey was the first English poet to write poetry in blank verse (which is also known as unrhymed iambic pentameter) in his translation of the second and fourth books of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Together, Wyatt and Surrey, due to their excellent translations of Petrarch's sonnets, are known as "Fathers of the English Sonnet." While Wyatt introduced the sonnet

into English, it was Surrey who gave them the rhyming meter, and the division into quatrains that now characterises the sonnets variously named as English, Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnets. In both the poems, the narrators wails over the loss or rejection of their lady love out of intense emotional bereavement, which also refers to the complex social relationships.



4.9 FURTHER READING

Holton, Amanda. (Ed). (2011). *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others (English).* Penguin Publishing Group.

Web Resources:

http://www.gradesaver.com/collected-poems-of-sir-thomas-wyatt/study-guide/summary-and-wilt-thou-leave-me-thus https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Wyatt_(poet)



4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Italian Giacomo da Lentino (1188–1240) and other members of the court of Frederick II (1194–1250) are known as the inventors of the form, and Provençal courtly love poetry was an important influence. The sonnet increased in popularity throughout Europe during the Renaissance.

Ans to Q 2: In Italian (Petrarchan) sonnets, the fourteen lines were divided into one 'octave' (two quatrains) and one 'sestet' (two tercets). The usual rhyme scheme in Petrarchan sonnet was *a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a* for the octave and *c-d-e-c-d-e* or *c-d-c-c-d-c* for the sestet.

Ans to Q 3: The sonnet was introduced in England by Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey… …they brought some modifications to the Petrarchan

model by introducing a different structural pattern… …the English sonnet became famous in the hands of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser… …But, it was Shakespeare who established the English sonnet convention as a distinguished literary genre.

Ans to Q 4: The English sonnet form consisted of three quatrains and one couplet… …the rhyme scheme of the English sonnet was *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g…* …Spencer initiated another rhyme scheme *abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee* with the quatrains connected by the interlocking rhyme scheme.

Ans to Q 5: Wyatt's poetry reflects classical and Italian models… …many of his poems deal with the trials of romantic love, and the devotion of the suitor to an unavailable or cruel mistress… …his other poems are scathing, satirical indictments of the hypocrisies and pandering of the ambitious courtiers to advance at the Tudor court.

Ans to Q 6: Surrey translated Books II and IV of the Roman poet Virgil's *The Aeneid*… …in his translation he used blank verse— unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter, or lines of 10 syllables alternating between unaccented and accented syllables for the first time… …this poetic form became famous in the English language.

Ans to Q 7: The form of the sonnet that Surrey developed, in contrast with that of Wyatt, has three four-line units, known as quatrains, and a concluding two lines, the couplet. Surrey's rhyme scheme was abab cdcd efef gg. The poet poses a problem in the three quatrains, with each quatrain dealing with a separate, though related, aspect of the problem. The poet then presents a conclusion in the couplet.

Ans to Q 8: The lady has been held accountable for the distress she has caused the poet… … this reflects courtly relationships, and that the lady may damage her own reputation by dissolving her union with the man… …This is a reminder of the tense social and patriarchal relationships within the Tudor court.

Ans to Q 9: Her rejection could have consequences on her own emotional—and perhaps physical state… …the narrator is filled with hopelessness

at the lady's dismissal of him, as he asserts that her cruelty has destroyed him.

Ans to Q 10: Surrey writes of love as a military drama. In the first quatrain, Love is characterised as a military figure who takes the field.

Ans to Q 11: Surrey, learned from the Italians "the structural value of regularity, of keeping exact iambs," and he worked at making his lines' rhythms metrically correct. His verse is, consequently, smoother than the verse of his predecessors, and after his death, poets followed his example.



4.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Wyatt and Surrey's contributions to English sonnets.

Q 2: What significance do Wyatt and Surrey retain in the history of English poetry?

Q 3: Explore the theme of betrayal in Wyatt's sonnets. Write with reference to at least three sonnets.

Q 4: What view of women does Wyatt illustrate in his work? Exemplify your ideas with reference to some of his important sonnets.

Q 5: Select a few sonnets to illustrate Wyatt's skill in using the form to portray the issues and concerns of his age.

Q 6: The theme of unrequited love is an important element in English sonnets. Comment with reference to Wyatt's sonnets.

Q 7: Surrey established a smooth metrical pattern through his lines. Discuss.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 5: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: SONNET 65 "SINCE BRASS, NOR STONE, NOR EARTH, NOR BOUNDLESS SEA" & SONNET 144 "TWO LOVES I HAVE OF COMFORT AND DESPAIR"

UNIT STRUCTURE:

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 William Shakespeare: The Poet

5.3.1 His Life

5.3.2 His Poetic Works

5.4 Reading the Sonnets

5.4.1 The Text of the Sonnets

5.4.2 Major Themes

5.4.3 Shakespeare's Poetic Style

5.5 Critical Reception of Shakespeare as a Poet

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explore the growth of the English sonnets as a particular poetic form during the Elizabethan period
- discuss Shakespeare's pivotal role in ushering in a new epoch in the history of the English sonnet
- examine the thematic concerns and stylistic qualities of the prescribed sonnets of Shakespeare
- gain a broader perception of Shakespeare's contributions to the English sonnet tradition.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this course and it is based on two sonnets composed by Shakespeare. You know that the Sonnet is defined as a form of poetry consisting traditionally of fourteen lines with occasional exceptions to it. A kind of personal poetry expressing a single emotion or idea, the sonnet uses a fixed rhyme scheme and a distinct structure. It was none other than Shakespeare with whom we identify the tradition of the English sonnets. It is also because, Shakespeare perfected the sonnet form in England by introducing a distinctively different rhyme scheme from the Petrachan tradition introduced in England by Wyatt and Surrey. This unit is based on two important sonnets of Shakespeare, which convey a very complex sense of difficulty faced by lovers. The selection of these two sonnets in this unit is made in order to make you learn how Shakespeare conceived the idea of love. By the time you finish reading the unit, you will not only understand the themes of these two sonnets, but will also get an opportunity to examine the art of Shakespeare as a poet of the Elizabethan period.

5.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS

5.3.2 His Poetic Works

In this section, we shall discuss briefly the life history of Shakespeare and some of his famous works.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

William Shakespeare, the most renowned playwright of England, was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. The exact date of his birth is not known, but the biographers said that he had been baptised on 26 April 1564. He was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Many of his biographers speculated that William

Shakespeare had received his education at the King's New School at Stratford. In November 1582, he got married to Anne Hathaway, a lady eight years older than him, and in course of time, he became the father of three children –Susanna, Hamnet and Judith.

Nothing concrete is known about Shakespeare during the period from 1585 to 1592, and though some biographers offered many invented stories pertaining to this part of his life, these seven years were in fact 'lost years' in the life of Shakespeare. There were, of course, some evidences to suggest that during this period, Shakespeare established himself in the career of an actor and playwright on the London stage. He also came into partnership with some other players to own a playing company called the 'Lord Chamberlain's Men', which, from 1594, became the only company to stage Shakespeare's plays. This leading playing company of London was later renamed 'King's Men'. The part owners of this company gave birth to their own theatre called 'Globe' in 1599. In 1608, they also took over Blackfriars indoor theatre, an important theatre in London at that time.

Most of the known literary works of Shakespeare were supposed to be written between 1589 and 1613. He wrote about 38 plays, but the exact dates of their composition are still in the dark. Some of Shakespeare's later plays were written in collaboration with some other dramatist, probably John Fletcher. Some historians said that Shakespeare had written two more plays, namely *Love's Labour's Won* and *The History of Cardenio*, which were subsequently lost. There were eleven other plays, which were occasionally treated as Shakespeare's, but there has been no significant evidence to authenticate this claim.

From 1594, some of Shakespeare's plays started appearing in print in quarto editions. In 1623, after Shakespeare's death, two of his friends from 'King's Men', John Heminges and Henry Condell, published the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. This edition included 36 of his plays, excluding *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and

Pericles, Prince of Tyre, which were recognised as Shakespeare's only later.

Shakespeare breathed his last at Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April 1616 at the age of 52. His creative height earned him the epithet of the 'Bard of Avon'.

5.3.2 His Poetic Works

Though there is no dearth of poetry in Shakespeare's plays, he also applied his creativity in producing some non-dramatic poetic creations in addition to his plays. In between 1593-94, Shakespeare published two poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. It was a time when plague occurred in London, and its consequence was the closure of the theatres. These two were long narrative poems dealing with some erotic subjects. The most remarkable of his non-dramatic poetic works, his 154 sonnet sequence, was published by Thomas Thorpe in 1609 in a quarto entitled *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS: Never before imprinted* (with notable errors of punctuation marks in the title). Like his plays, it was not possible to know for certain the exact dates of composition of his sonnets too; it might be that the act of composing sonnets spread over his entire literary career. However, there are evidences to show that many of his sonnets were written during the 1590s, and by 1598, some of them were privately circulated among his friends; it is possible that he wrote the sonnets targeting private readership. In 1599, a book titled *The Passionate Pilgrim* appeared in print and two of Shakespeare's sonnets, no. 138 and 144 first saw the light in this book. The book bore Shakespeare's name, but probably it was published without his permission. Another poem of Shakespeare, titled *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, was included in Robert Chester's book *Love's Martyr* published in 1601. You will note that the 1609 edition of Shakespeare's sonnets also included a narrative poem *A Lover's Complaint*, which contained 47 seven-line stanzas.

To speak of the sonnets, scholars are not sure whether Shakespeare had written the sonnets in the same order as they were presented in the 1609-edition. However, they preferred to divide them into two broader groups. The first group consists of sonnets 1 to 126, addressed to a young friend of the poet known as the Fair Youth. Sonnets 127 to 152, which form the second group, were addressed to a woman of uncertain identity, who is often referred to as the Dark Lady. The last two in the sequence, sonnets 153 and 154, treating the power and might of Cupid, the Greek god of love, are placed in a separate category.

Again, uncertainty surrounds the identities of the persons who figured in the sonnets; there is even a question mark on whether they were historical individuals or imaginary figures. Some scholars also raised questions on whether the 'I' in the sonnets was the representation of the poet himself. The dedication page in the 1609 edition, opened more doors for speculations in this respect. The book was dedicated to some mysterious Mr. W.H., who was referred to as the 'only begetter of these ensuing sonnets', the word 'begetter' adding to the confusions. At the foot of the dedication page, there were the initials 'T.T., which might mean Thomas Thorpe, the publisher. Some scholars believed that this Mr. W.H. was the Fair Youth addressed to in many of Shakespeare's sonnets, though according to some others, Mr. W.H. was a different person. The identity of Mr. W.H. could not be ascertained and there were many real life contenders, like William Herbert (the Earl of Pembroke), Henry Wriothesley (the Earl of Southampton), William Hall (a printer), Sir William Harvey, (Southampton's stepfather), William Haughton (a contemporary dramatist), William Hart (Shakespeare's nephew), William Hatcliffe of Lincolnshire, William Hughes (an actor) etc.

According to Bertrand Russell, Don Foster and Jonathan Bate, 'Mr. W.H.' was the outcome of a simple printing error in Shakespeare's initials, 'W.S.' or 'W. Sh'. While many scholars believed that the word 'begetter' in the dedication might mean

'inspirer' (some friend or patron of Shakespeare), Bate had the opinion that it meant 'writer' (Shakespeare himself). German scholar D. Barnstorff also believed that 'W.H.' stood for 'William (Shakespeare) Himself'. On the other hand, Colin Burrow suggested that 'W.H.' meant 'Who He', not someone specific, purposefully formulated by the publisher to add to the mystery and ambiguity about the sonnets. Now, the Fair Youth might be William Herbert (the Earl of Pembroke), Henry Wriothesley (the Earl of Southampton), William Hughes or an unknown commoner. Scholars also tried to identify the Dark Lady with historical personages like Mary Fitton, Emilia Lanier etc. In some of the sonnets (sonnets 78–86), there were references to a Rival Poet, and his identity was also as mysterious as that of the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady. It was suggested that he might be Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Robert Greene or some other contemporary poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the three categories of Shakespeare's sonnets?

5.4 READING THE SONNETS

5.4.1 The Text of the Sonnets

Sonnet 65: "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea"

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,

Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time’s best jewel from Time’s chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Sonnet 144: “Two Loves I have of Comfort and Despair”

I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour’d ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn’d fiend
Suspect I may, but not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another’s hell:
Yet this shall I ne’er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

5.4.2 Major Themes

Sonnet 65: “Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea”

Love is the central theme of Shakespeare’s sonnets as was the case with the Italian as well as the pre-Shakespearean English sonnets. However, it was not the sole thematic concern for Shakespeare to deal with. In the process of exploring different kinds of love in his sonnets, Shakespeare took the opportunity to treat some other important themes like beauty, mortality, the role of time

as destroyer, the power of art etc. In the first group of sonnets, from sonnet 1 to 126, Shakespeare expressed his deep love for the unnamed Fair Youth, adored his beauty and articulated a feeling, which some critics liked to equate with homosexual desire, while for some others it was a revelation of a kind of platonic love. In the first 17 sonnets of this group, described by some critics as 'procreation sonnets', the poet urged the Fair Youth to marry and beget children with the intent to immortalise his beauty by passing it to his progeny. In the other sonnets of this group, his love for the young man led him to take a serious note of solitude, death and transience of life. Shakespeare also felt offended with the young man for preferring the Rival Poet to him, for betraying him through his yielding to the seduction by his mistress, the so-called Dark Lady who was central to the second group of sonnets, and for using his beauty to cover up his immoral behaviour. But, the poet continued with love and admiration for his friend. Some critics called the Fair Youth Shakespeare's alter ego.

Sonnet 65 belongs to this first group of sonnets, which deal with Shakespeare's love for the young man. This sonnet shows how the speaker valued the love he bore in mind for his friend the young man as well as the beauty of that man. But, in order to put emphasis on his love, and on his friend's beauty, Shakespeare elaborately dealt with the theme of the ravaging power of time. The speaker lamented that the passage of time has a devastating effect on love and life. Time is so powerful that it puts to decay everything; it does not spare even those things that appear to be strong—imperishable and permanent—like brass, stone, earth and boundless sea. The rocks and gates made of iron, which are supposed to be great and formidable, are indeed not strong enough to resist the time-inflicted mortality. In such a situation, the speaker felt depressed to think that it is quite impossible for a very fragile thing like beauty, whose strength is comparable only to that of a flower, to withstand the destructive force of time. The battering storm

of time thrusts destructive assault on all the things that embody beauty in life, like the sweet breath of summer. The speaker is scared to think that though the rare beauty of his friend was the best gift of time, it also would not be able to escape the ravaging hand of time. Unfortunately, there is no strong hand that can hold back the swift movement of time or prevent it from destroying beauty. By causing beauty to fade, time causes harm to love.

But, towards the end of the poem, Shakespeare brought in another theme, that of the immortality of art, or supremacy of art over time. Shakespeare used this theme also to highlight the significance of the themes of love and beauty again. He said that art (poetry) is one thing about mankind, which may be able to resist the all-powerful time. Art is immortal and with art, the war against mortality can be fought successfully. The speaker hoped to create a miracle with his pen:”O, none, unless this miracle have might, / That in black ink my love may still shine bright.”

Through his verse, he wanted to keep his love continually and permanently shining in spite of the presence of all-destroying time. It was his belief that his poetry would remain unaffected by the ceaseless passage of time, and therefore, beauty, though apparently fragile, could defeat time through poetry. In this way, we can see that by glorifying art, the speaker glorified love and beauty, because in his attempt to earn victory over time through verses (sonnets) lay his deep yearning to achieve immortality for love and beauty.

Sonnet 144: “Two Loves I have of Comfort and Despair”

The theme of love continues to dominate the poetic design in the second group of sonnets from sonnet 127 to 152; but this time the primary emphasis is on the usual man-woman love. In these sonnets, the speaker expressed his extra-marital love for a married lady of dark complexion. In his treatment of the theme of love in these sonnets, Shakespeare went away from the centuries old tradition of Petrarchan love sonnets, which also influenced the

English sonneteers before him as well as many of his contemporaries. Contrary to the women of the traditional sonnets who were adored for their angelic demeanour, virginity and constancy, Shakespeare's Dark Lady was crude, lascivious and faithless. According to some critics, by expressing overtly sexual love for the Dark Lady in this group of sonnets (particularly in sonnet 151 which appeared to be quite bawdy), Shakespeare came away from the spiritual love expressed for the Fair Youth in the first group of sonnets. Another sonnet (sonnet 129) reveals the poet's consciousness of sin with regards to lust and love. The Dark Lady proved to be treacherous to the poet, particularly by seducing his friend, and Shakespeare condemned this act in unambiguous terms. In course of time, the love affair between the poet and the lady took a triangular shape with the Fair Youth at the third angle, and this caused despair in the poet's mind, which he ventilated in clear words. In this way, his exploration of love was not confined to a linear, one-dimensional form.

Usually known as the 'key sonnet', sonnet 144 has a sombre tone. Love being the central theme in this sonnet too, it expresses the speaker's agony that was consequent upon his being caught in the sordid love triangle. It fully reveals the speaker's interior conflict caused by his being torn between two objects of love; one (the Fair Youth, whom he called better angel) gave him comfort, while the other (the Dark Lady, who was referred to as worse spirit) caused him despair. The female bad angel, by making the male better angel yield to her temptation, took him away from the speaker, and this shocking development in this love triangle brought the speaker to a hellish state of mental anguish: "To win me soon to hell, my female evil/Tempteth my better angel from my side". He was upset because both his young friend and his mistress had discarded him and they had come closer to each other. So, it was the betrayal and faithlessness in love and friendship that the speaker was brooding over.

There is another perspective to view this point. The inner conflict of the poet caused by the presence of both good angel and bad angel in his inner self was the conflict between the ideal and the real, though both were potent for him. He was troubled with the thought that his inner world of beauty collided with the utterly confused external life of activity, against which he was powerless. Like Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus,* the speaker has to divide his loyalties between both good and evil angels, or in other words, between virtues and vices or between the desired and the attained.

In this sonnet, the poet deals with an important theme of the danger of sexual love. The Dark Lady wooed the Fair Youth by arousing in him sexual desire, which the young man could not resist, and in this process, both of them proved their faithlessness to the speaker. By robbing the young man of his purity by subjugating him to her sexual pride, the lady of dark complexion would corrupt the saintly young man’s mind and turn him into a devil. The speaker was not sure whether his friend would really turn into an evil spirit under the evil influence of his mistress, but he suspected so. He guessed that his angelic friend indulged in a sexual act with the bad angel, the Dark Lady. The speaker would not know it for certain, but he had the doubt about it. The speaker held the notion that their copulation would lead to the young man’s suffering from venereal disease, the ultimate curse of unscrupulous sexual acts (which was rampant in the contemporary Tudor society), because he believed that, his amoral mistress was promiscuous.



LET US KNOW

Shakespeare adopted different perspectives to view love – a breaking away from the tradition. He loved both the young man and the dark complexioned lady, and both left a very significant impact on his life. But, his love for the young man was basically spiritual; though he might have homosexual relation with him,

at certain level it crossed the bound of mere physicality. But, his love for the mistress was based on erotic desire only. Both kinds of love were essential for the poet, but he esteemed his relation with the young man much above that with his mistress, which meant, he preferred spiritual need to the physical need and found depressing the loss of spirituality to the earthly desires.

Shakespeare, in this and many other sonnets, depicted the woman as a very strong individual, not by virtue of her love, but of her will power. The speaker was aware of the weaknesses in the character of his friend, who would allow the lady to corrupt him; but he held his mistress solely responsible for the seemingly unscrupulous affair between his friend and her. Against the despairing powerlessness of the speaker against his lamentable losses, the woman here was worryingly powerful, her power gaining sustenance from her will.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: What are the major themes of Sonnet 65?

Q 3: Mention the main themes of Sonnet 144? Do you think that the sonnet throws light on Shakespeare's spiritual anguish?

5.4.3 Shakespeare's Poetic Style

Instead of being lost in the traditional sonnet style based on the Petrarchan model, Shakespeare rather gave a distinct identity to the English sonnet style. Though the sonnet structure of three quatrains and one couplet had been introduced to the English sonnet much before Shakespeare, it was Shakespeare who raised it to a completeness. Shakespeare used in almost all his sonnets iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg.* Of course, in sonnets 99, 126, and 145 he did some other experiments. In sonnet 99, he used fifteen lines instead of fourteen, in sonnet 126 there

were six couplets in addition to two blank lines marked with italic brackets, in sonnet 145 Shakespeare also used iambic tetrameters. The poet came away from the normal rhyme scheme of the conventional Elizabethan sonnet in sonnet 29 too, in which he replaced 'f' with 'b' by repeating it, and therefore, the rhyme scheme became *abab cdcd ebeb gg.* The critics are not sure about whether this variation was intentional or it resulted from some casually committed error.

Usually a sonnet is a compact form of argument, and Shakespeare took this argumentative approach of sonnet to a high level of artistry. In Petrarchan sonnet, the octave brings about the 'proposition', which may be elaboration of some problem. Then, the sestet leads to a 'resolution' in the form of a revelation or epiphany on the part of the poet. The first line of the sestet (the ninth line of the poem) creates the 'volta' or 'turn', which marks the sudden shift from the proposition to the resolution, or the change in the poem's mood, tone or attitude. In the typical Elizabethan sonnets, also, the proposition part belongs to the first two quatrains, and the 'volta' comes in the beginning of the third quatrain (the ninth line of the poem).

Shakespeare added some modifications to this design. In the three coordinate quatrains in his sonnet, there is a well-balanced yet swift development of the proposition, while the sharp thematic 'volta' comes in the couplet, which summarises the theme, or leads to some unexpected revelation, sometimes in the level of an epigram. He used the three quatrains to develop the same idea, sometimes in a repetitive manner, to accentuate it. For example, in sonnet 65, the three quatrains deal with the unstoppable ravages of time and the speaker's worry about how to protect the beauty of his friend from the destructive hand of time. He put all the arguments in these three quatrains in the unique way of putting questions; but his questions are by no means interrogative, they are the answers in themselves. In the couplet, the poet unexpectedly brought about the resolution that the beauty of his friend could be immortalised

through his verses. The thought expressed in the three quatrains is juxtaposed with the new realisation in the couplet. In sonnet 144, the three quatrains describe the speaker's worry about the probable damaging effect of the unscrupulous love affair between the young man and the dark-complexioned lady on the young man. Then in the couplet, there is a sudden change in tone, from the supposition about the spiritual harm done to the young man by his sexual relation with the speaker's mistress to the concrete possibility of the physical harm in the form of venereal disease.



LET US KNOW

Sonnet being a lyrical composition, Shakespeare added dramatic elements to it. The lyrical quality in his sonnets lies in their revelation of the finer feelings of the poet's heart with a musical splendour. The dramatic about the sonnets is the poet's observation of the world around him and presentation of the conflicts in his soul. He adopted unsurpassable felicity in the use of his diction. A kind of simplicity and lucidity that can be attributed to Shakespeare alone marks his sonnets. He also excelled in using vivid metaphors as well as various kinds of conceits. The structure of Shakespeare's sonnet is compact and close-knit.

There is a variety of tones Shakespeare used in various sonnets. Sometimes, the tone is humorous, sometimes it is sordid. In sonnet 65, for example, the tone at the beginning is melancholic, which gradually took the shape of distress and grief, owing to the speaker's sense of utter helplessness in front of the ruthless movement of time. The intensity of this feeling of grief suited the lyrical approach of this poem. But, in the couplet, the poet dramatically transformed the feeling of grief into a confirmation of some hope for victory against time through poetry. Similarly, a tone of despair occupied the entire sonnet 144. The dramatic quality of sonnet 65 is enhanced by introduction of a number of contrasts in

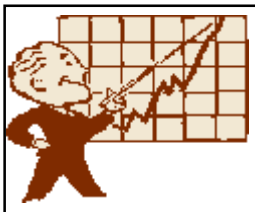
it. Here, soft and beautiful things are contrasted with hard things like brass, stone, rocks, gates of steel etc., the changeability and mortality caused by the passage of time is contrasted with immortality of poetry, the blackness of the ink is contrasted with the brightness of the love it will preserve. The questioning method in which the idea was allowed to develop in the poem also produces a dramatic effect.

Imagery is another important stylistic feature in Shakespeare’s sonnets. It emanates from a wide range of areas pertaining to the natural world, the human life and the world of the abstract. Pictorial quality is seen in its remarkable height in sonnet 65. To illustrate the destructive power of time, Shakespeare presented seemingly invulnerable and permanent natural objects like brass, stone, earth, iron and sea. The graphic expressions in this poem, like ‘wreckful siege’, ‘battering days’, ‘impregnable’, ‘gates of steel’, ‘Time’s best jewel’, ‘Time’s chest’ etc. produce a visual effect in the minds of the readers. The picture in which beauty is shown as ‘holding a plea’ echoes legal parlance. Shakespeare’s metaphorical language is exemplified by the use of the word ‘rage’ to indicate the power of ‘sad mortality’. The idea of summer’s honey breath attempting to resist the ‘wreckful siege’ of time is a vivid extended metaphor, in which the summer symbolises life itself. Another metaphor is the use of the expression ‘Time’s best jewel’ to mean the poet’s friend. Some other metaphorical expressions are ‘his swift foot’ and ‘his spoil of beauty’. Again, in a figurative way, the flower is used to emphasise the delicacy and fragility of beauty as well as the transience of life. In this sonnet, Shakespeare also used personification; he personified beauty, summer and time, enhancing the dramatic effect and increasing the richness of the poem.

Imagery is used in sonnet 144 too. The poet spoke of two objects of his love; and he described one of them as ‘a man right fair’, while the other was referred to as a woman ‘colour’d ill, making

the words 'fair' and 'ill' serve double purposes of bearing both physical and spiritual meanings. However, in this sonnet, Shakespeare's imagery is mainly abstract and suggestive. The poet compared his male and female lovers with 'better angel' and 'worse angel' respectively. The expressions like hell, devil, fiend etc. stand for the evil side of human life. The expression 'one angel in another's hell' is also suggestive of sexual act. The word 'fire' in the last line of the sonnet also specifically indicates venereal disease.

Some critics opined that certain sonnets of Shakespeare have parallel with the corresponding (or sometimes adjacent) Penitential Psalms. For example, the reference to earth, sea, and rage, summer in sonnet 65 echoes the reference to earth, sea, 'raging crowns the year with his goodness' in the corresponding Psalm. Similarly, the reference to the spirit in Psalm no. 43 can be linked with the reference to the good and evil spirit, apart from its suggestive expression of 'one angel in another's hell' in sonnet 144, though the sexual innuendo in this expression was absent from the Psalm.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the main stylistic qualities in Shakespeare's sonnets?

Q 5: What do you mean by the term 'Volta'?

Q 6: Comment on Shakespeare's use of Imagery in Sonnet 65.

5.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE AS A POET

Shakespeare's sonnets earned great acclaim from critics for the intensity and seriousness as well as the structural beauty with which he handled the subjects of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time. In 1598, Francis Meres, a cleric and author, termed these sonnets as '*sugred* (sugared, meaning sweet) *Sonnets among his private friends*'. Great dramatist and poet Dryden applauded Shakespeare's poetry for the presence

of *'the largest and most comprehensive soul'* among *'all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets'.* He found picture in every word of Shakespeare's poetry. William Wordsworth also expressed high opinion of Shakespeare's sonnets by saying that *"Shakespeare unlocked his heart"* in his sonnets. But, at the same time, he also did not hesitate to point out the weaknesses in them; he was particularly critical of the second group of sonnets, beginning with sonnet 127, which were addressed to the Dark Lady. Wordsworth wrote:

"These sonnets, beginning at 127, to his Mistress, are worse than a puzzle-peg. They are abominably harsh, obscure & worthless. The others are for the most part much better, have many fine lines, very fine lines & passages. They are also in many places warm with passion. Their chief faults, and heavy ones they are, are sameness, tediousness, quaintness, & elaborate obscurity." Samuel Taylor Coleridge found in Shakespeare's sonnets "boundless fertility and laboured condensation of thought, with perfection of sweetness in rhythm and metre."

Some critics believed that Shakespeare's sonnets paved the way for a new breed of 'modern' love poetry in English. Though during the 18th century, Shakespeare's natural genius was highly recognised, and his name got linked with the title of the 'national poet' of England, there was a relative decline in the popularity of his sonnets. In the 19th century, of course, the reputation of his sonnets was on a gradual rise. Shakespeare's sonnets were 'double-shotted with thought', critic J. A. Noble remarked that the term 'intellectualised emotion' would be more appropriate as regards Shakespeare's sonnets.

Shakespeare could arouse among the modernist poets new curiosity. His imagery became a subject of serious study for accomplished poets like T. S. Eliot, G. Wilson Knight and the 'New Critics'. In the late 1930s, John Crowe Ransom criticised Shakespeare for not being successful in his job of writing sonnets, as he believed that Shakespeare was not fit for amateurs." His major objection to Shakespeare's sonnets was their seeming 'incoherence'. According to him, half of Shakespeare's sonnets were 'tolerably workmanlike', but the rest were 'seriously defective'.

But, according to Russell Fraser,

"Singular in its concern with last things, Shakespeare's sonnet is true to the rest of them in the way its subject is invested. *He* doesn't believe in the kernel of truth at the center and doesn't strip away the husk but adds layer on layer. His multilayered performances don't preclude meaning, though; and the sonnets—never mind how much trouble they give — aren't conundrums. But Shakespeare's meaning is comprehensive like the life his poems describe."

Gertrude Garages, on the other hand, said that critics of Shakespeare's sonnets conceived opposite views on whether they were autobiographical or dramatic and vicarious. She did not herself perceive the sonnets as autobiographical in ordinary sense. According to her, they were autobiographical in a different sense – they revealed the inner feelings coming out of the poet's soul.

This way, you must have already noticed that Shakespeare was taken into great consideration in the subsequent periods. However, new studies done on Shakespeare's sonnets in modern times, added more impetus to the discussion and reception of Shakespeare as a significant poet of the English canon.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

By now, you must have learnt that Shakespeare had the pivotal role in establishing the English or Elizabethan sonnet convention as he brought a variety to sonnet-writing by not only developing new formal style, but also introducing wider perspectives to the treatment of the traditional love-theme in sonnet, besides encompassing some other serious issues of life like beauty, time, poetry etc. You have found that the sonnet 65 is addressed to the Fair Youth, and here, the poet expressed profound love for him and side by side with it, he dealt with the theme of the destructive power of time. However, this feeling of despair was transformed into an affirmative assertion of hope that his poetry can immortalise his love for his friend by defeating

time. In a more depressing tone, Shakespeare, in sonnet 144, spoke about the betrayal and faithlessness of both his young friend and his mistress, whom he referred to as good angel and bad angel respectively. The poet’s favouring his friend over his mistress indicates his preferring spiritual love to sexual love. However, at a deeper level of interpretation, the poet suggested an inner conflict within himself between his inner ideal world and the external world of reality. The poet also laid stress on the woman’s strength of will in this sonnet. Shakespeare’s poetic style perfectly matched the thematic directions of his sonnets. His sonnets are quite rich in vivid and wide-ranged imagery. He brought the use of metaphor, conceit, personification etc. to a level of great artistry. So, we can rightly say that Shakespeare furthered the Elizabethan love poetry to an extreme extent of splendour by adding new dimensions to it. His sonnets opened up new vistas as regards sensibility and art.



5.7 FURTHER READING

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5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Shakespeare's 154 sonnets are classified into three groups… …sonnets from 1 to 126 deals with his love for his friend the Fair Youth... …sonnets from 127 to 152 are addressed to his mistress the Dark Lady… …the remaining two sonnets are about the love-god Cupid.

Ans to Q 2: One major theme of sonnet 65 is the poet's profound love for the Fair Youth… …then, he also highlights the theme of the power of time, which caused everything in the world to decay… …but finally, the poet asserts that time's destructive movement can be made ineffective with the power of poetry.

Ans to Q 3 : The poet's assertion of the supremacy of spiritual love over sexual love… …he has also treated the themes of betrayal and faithlessness in love and friendship as well as the danger of sexual love in the form of venereal disease… …yes, the poem also throws light on the poet's spiritual anguish caused by the conflict of his internal and external worlds, and his recognition of the strength of will in women.

Ans to Q 4: Shakespeare perfected the sonnet form into three quatrains and one couplet… …his unique design, as regards the 'volta', brought the argumentative nature of sonnet to a different level… …other stylistic qualities include – lyrical quality, the felicity of his words, the simplicity in language, the variety of tone, the use of contrasts, metaphors and conceits… …use of vivid imagery is another noteworthy feature of Shakespeare's sonnet.

Ans to Q 5: The first line of the sestet creates the 'volta' or 'turn'… …it marks a sudden change in the poem's mood, tone or attitude… … in the typical Elizabethan sonnets the volta comes in the beginning of the third quatrain… …but Shakespeare added some modifications… …the 'volta' comes in the concluding couplet.

Ans to Q 6: To illustrate the destructive power of time, Shakespeare presented seemingly invulnerable and permanent natural objects like brass, stone, earth, iron and sea. The graphic expressions in this poem, like ‘wreckful siege’, ‘battering days’, ‘impregnable’, ‘gates of steel’, ‘Time’s best jewel’, ‘Time’s chest’ etc. produce a visual effect in the minds of the readers.



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss in detail Shakespeare’s role as a sonneteer in the Elizabethan period.

Q 2: What, according to you, are the similarities and differences between the English and Italian sonnets?

Q 3: Critically examine Shakespeare’s treatment of the theme of love with special reference to the prescribed sonnets.

Q 4: Discuss with examples from Sonnet 65 the text the time/art dichotomy as revealed by Shakespeare.

Q 5: Discuss the spirituality/sensuality dichotomy present in the treatment

UNIT 6: INTRODUCING METAPHYSICAL POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 The Tradition of Metaphysical Poetry

6.4 Beginning and Development

6.5 Important Practitioners

6.6 Receptions of Metaphysical Poetry in Subsequent Periods

6.7 Let Us Sum Up

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints only)

6.9 Further Reading

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gather an idea of the 17th century lyric poets who were commonly called metaphysical poets
- trace the beginning of metaphysical poetry
- analyse the common features in the poems of the metaphysical poets
- explain the development of metaphysical poetry and discuss its major practitioners
- analyse the impact of metaphysical poetry in the works of later writers.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this Block and serves as the introduction to Metaphysical Poetry. This unit deals with some poets of the 17th century grouped under the term “metaphysical poets”, and the various nuances that are characteristics of their works. You must keep one thing in mind that there was no such thing as metaphysical poetry during the 17th century.

However, the term was later applied to a certain group of poets of the 17th century, owing to the common features and techniques, use of wit and conceits in their poems. Here we shall discuss the tradition of metaphysical poetry that began in the 17th century, differing from the preceding age in employing spiritual themes and unique comparisons. As you know, the Renaissance and Reformation led the way to a vast socio-political change in the society creating religious and political crisis. The knowledge about new scientific changes perplexed the minds of the writers and triggered in them a tendency to challenge existing ideas and thoughts of the universe. The metaphysical poets emerged during such a literary climate with an aim to introduce newer poetic techniques, mixing intellect with emotions.

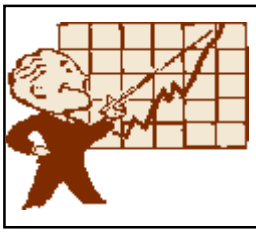
By tracing the beginning of metaphysical poetry, we shall in this unit, reflect on its development, and analyse its important characteristics. The major poets who are commonly referred to by the term 'metaphysical poets' are John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell. This introductory unit shall familiarise you with these poets and their major works. The unit shall focus upon the renewed significance of these poets due to the revival that interested later writers like Dr. Samuel Johnson, T.S. Eliot, etc. Although during its own time, metaphysical poetry did not receive its due recognition yet this form of poetry formed a significant area of study for modern writers as well as readers in the twentieth century.

6.3 THE TRADITION OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

The literature of 17th century in general depicted a critical and political inclination with a taste of satire. Apart from the prose writers and dramatists, the poets were charged immensely to write on religion, politics, love, nature, etc. A group of poets displayed a greater intellectual objectivity unlike the earlier poets of the Elizabethan age. Unlike Elizabethan poetry that was largely pagan, these metaphysical poets used poetry as a medium to reflect the richness of their intellect. Having a marked difference from its preceding age (Elizabethan age) in style and form, these poets made extensive use of their intelligence, and presented a new kind of poetry to the readers. They

used 'wit' in exploring philosophical notions about the world and their poetry was religious in tone. Their poetry was characterised by the presence of new forms of techniques that they had introduced to set them apart from the poets of the Elizabethan age. For these poets, the structure and form of a poem are more important. They devoted much of their passion on the style of the poems. A common feature found in these poets is the logical arrangement of thoughts or feelings. Love poems and religious poems are to be found in their poems. Most notable among the love poet was John Donne. It must be mentioned that the term metaphysical was primarily related to the poet John Donne. Other poets, who share common features with this poet, together came to be grouped under the metaphysical school of poetry later. Noticeable among all the features was the use of language by the metaphysical poets.

The poets of the Metaphysical School shared certain common characteristics like wit, inventiveness and a love of elaborate stylistic technique like conceits. This poetry is often dramatic in effect and is categorised as 'cerebral' or intellectual poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1. In what way, did metaphysical poetry, contradict the Elizabethan love poetry?

6.4 BEGINNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Metaphysical poetry is said to have begun with John Donne. The balanced manner in which he strategically juxtaposed intellect with emotions by drawing upon comparisons those are 'far-fetched' made him one of the greatest poets in English literature. His reflection of humanity and the terseness of his verses were able to capture the minds of the modern readers as well. As stated earlier, this kind of poetry was a reaction to the sensuous poetry of the preceding era, since the metaphysical poets were concerned with wit and expression of deeper psychological realms which was often dialectic. Inspired by Donne, a few other poets wrote on a similar plane by

using conceits and intelligence in their poetry.

You must be interested to know that it was John Dryden who first used the term 'metaphysics' to refer to John Donne's poetry in his book called *Discourse Concerning Satire* in 1693. According to Dryden, Donne's poetry "affects the metaphysics". M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* described this as John Donne's use of "the terminology and abstruse arguments of the medieval Scholastic philosophers". (158)

The next significant reference to these poets appeared in Dr. Samuel Johnson's book *Lives of the English Poets*. In one of the chapters of his book titled "Life of Cowley", pointing to the faults of the metaphysical poets Dr. Johnson wrote:

"The fault of Cowley, and perhaps of all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality, for of the greatest things the parts are little; what is little can be but pretty, and by claiming dignity becomes ridiculous. Thus, all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration; and the force of metaphors is lost when the mind by the mention of particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2. Name the English poet who used the term metaphysics to refer to John Donne?

Q 3. What, according to Samuel Johnson, was the defect of metaphysical poets?

6.5 IMPORTANT PRACTITIONERS

The following is a reference to some of the most dominant Metaphysical poets in 17th century English poetry.

John Donne: (1573-1631)

The most well known among the metaphysical poets is John Donne.

Born in London, his father was a merchant. He was related to Thomas More and the dramatist John Heywood who belonged to his mother's side. Both his parents were Catholic. Donne received education at Oxford and Cambridge; at Lincoln's Inn, he also pursued law. In 1596, John Donne found himself participating in the expedition of Essex for Cadiz and in 1597 for Azores. He wrote the poems titled "The Storm" and "The Calm" while he was on the sea and in the camp during the expedition. He befriended Thomas Egerton while on the expedition. Anne More was Egerton's niece with whom Donne fell in love. They married secretly in 1601 for which they had to pay price. Frustrated and left with poverty for almost seven years, the two of them suffered until Anne More's father accepted to look after the young couple by making an allowance. However, with his wife's demise, the allowance ceased to come his way and Donne and his seven children faced a difficult situation in extreme poverty. But, this was not to last very long because Donne became a preacher of great worth in the coming years and later became the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He held this position until his demise in 1631. His reputation as a preacher was immensely great for he came to be known as one of the most eloquent preachers of his time. His sermons were very close to his heart. "Death's Duel" is an example of his sermon. As a poet, John Donne focussed mainly on themes such as love, religion and death among others.

John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* was written around the time when he was bereaved out of poverty and his career did not make any advancement. It captures the essence of his bereaved situation having many religious allusions and at the same time reflecting his religious crisis. He renounced Catholicism at that time. This collection contains poems having varied tones, most of which have a dramatic beginning. Abrupt opening is a marked feature of his poetry as we can see in the following lines of his famous poem "The Canonization" that appeared in *Songs and Sonnets*:

"For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,

With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love."

Other well known poems from this collection are "The Flea", "The Undertaking", "The Indifferent", "The Sun Rising", "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", "The Broken Heart", "Farewell to Love" and "The Relic" to name a few. John Donne's treatment of love, through his use of conceits, has placed him among one of the greatest love poets in English literature. His poetry is marked by the growing skeptical attitude towards scientific progress and the dissemination of knowledge regarding the earth to shrink from its position of being the centre of the universe. In his "Introduction" to John Donne, John Hayward noted: "Donne's verse is intermittently overcast with dark imagery and charged with queer scientific tropes" (10) which reflected the struggle of doubt and faith in the poet.

Holy Sonnets, also called 'Divine Meditations', consisting of nineteen poems was included in the first edition of *Songs and Sonnets* which appeared two years after the poet's demise. The poems depicted his deep religious and personal opinions and are representative of his devotion towards God. Donne's obsession with the theme of death is evident in the sonnet namely "Death Be Not Proud". Another well-known sonnet is "Batter my Heart".

George Herbert: (1593-1633)

Born in a Welsh family, George Herbert was a preacher who pursued his education at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was the younger brother of Lord Herbert of Cherbury who was also a poet and a philosopher. After Donne, he was one of the greatest religious poets of the metaphysical school of poetry. His works mainly encompassed devotional writings—religious themes being his primary concern. His major work was *The Temple* that was published in 1633. The poems of this collection depicted his treatment of religious themes and his devotion towards the Church of England. His poems were personal in nature and carried an

intimate dialogue between him and God. Written in a colloquial manner, his poems were directly addressed to God and are marked for the simplicity and lucidity of tone. This was possible because unlike Donne, he never used far-fetched images to describe his point. Rather he drew inspiration from everyday ordinary sources to convey his concerns. Herbert's poems were, however, a reflection of his intellectual sensibility. The dignity of his subject matter was influenced by the metaphysical strain in him. As quoted by W.J. Long, Herbert's poems capture "the Church, her holidays and ceremonials, and the experiences of Christian life" (198). Among his poems, mention may be made of "Affliction", "The Church Porch", "The Pilgrimage", "The Pulley", "The Altar", "Easter Wings", "Church-Monuments", "Discipline", "Death", "Love" (III), etc. Herbert's greatness lies in employing different verse forms and metrical forms in his poems. His versatility and his use of wit established him as one of the best religious poets of the metaphysical school of poetry. As an example of his use of conceits and unique kind of versification, lines from the poem "Heaven" may be cited:

O who will show me those delights on high?

Echo. I.

Thou Echo, thou art mortall, all men know.

Echo. No.

Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves?

Echo. Leaves.

And are there any leaves, that still abide?

Echo. Bide.

What leaves are they? impart the matter wholly.

Echo. Holy.

Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?

Echo. Yes.

Then tell me, what is that supreme delight?

Echo. Light.

Light to the minde : what shall the will enjoy?

Echo. Joy.

But are there cares and businesse with the pleasure?

Echo. *Leisure.*

Light, joy, and leisure ; but shall they persever?

Echo. *Ever.*



LET US KNOW

Conceits: A *conceit* is an extended metaphor with a complex logic that governs a poetic passage or entire poem. By juxtaposing images and ideas in surprising ways, a ***conceit*** invites the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison.

The definition of conceit is provided by Dr. Samuel Johnson in "Life of Cowley" as 'Wit' which was "a kind of *Discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtle surprises. (*Lives of the English Poets*)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4. Write a very short note on John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*.

Q 5. Describe George Herbert as a religious poet.

Richard Crashaw: (1613–1649)

Crashaw was included in this school of poetry for his use of conceits, and his religious poetry. He was, however, immensely influenced by Italian poetry, which found expression through his love poetry. As an imitator of Italian poetry, his poems were sensuous in tone, and later in his career, he diverted his themes to religion. The most noteworthy collection of poetry by Crashaw was *Steps to the Temple*, published in 1664. This collection also consisted of a section on secular poems under the heading "The Delights of the Muses". He belonged to the metaphysical school only by his extensive use of conceits. Among the poems that he had penned, mention may be made of "The Flaming Heart" and "The Hymn to Saint Teresa". There is a striking resemblance of Crashaw's poetry to that of the **Cavalier lyricists**.

Extracts from the poem “The Flaming Heart” are given below for your reference:

O thou undaunted daughter of desires!
By all thy dow’r of lights and fires,
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove,
By all thy lives and deaths of love,
By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they,
By all thy brim-fill’d bowls of fierce desire,
By thy last morning’s draught of liquid fire,
By the full kingdom of that final kiss
That seiz’d thy parting soul and seal’d thee his,
By all the heav’ns thou hast in him,
Fair sister of the seraphim!



LET US KNOW

Cavalier Lyricists: In the latter half of the 17th century, another group of poets emerged who penned chiefly songs and lyrics for the court. Almost all of them were Royalists and supported King Charles I during the English Civil War. The poets associated with this group were Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace and Sir John Suckling. Being patrons of art, they shared a common practice of constructing secular poems that were refined, polished and elegant. They did not intend to use poetry as a medium, rather they emphasised on simple courtly topics. The love for nature is visible in all of their works. These poets were influenced by John Donne to a great extent. However, they wrote poems that were light-hearted and trivial exposing their sensuously expressive tones. These poets were also influenced by Ben Jonson’s style of intermingling myth, allegory and fantasy in his poems. The most common themes of the Cavalier poets were thus to be found in dealing with issues of nature, beauty, love, war, etc.

Henry Vaughan: (1621–1695)

Another poet associated with this group is Henry Vaughan. He was born in 1622 at Breknockshire and received his education at Oxford. However, he left Oxford and studied law in London. He also practised medicine in his later career. As a poet, he was very much influenced by George Herbert. Although he was not a priest like Herbert yet his most remembered poem are included in *Silax Scintillans*– a collection of religious poems. Even though he borrowed themes and metrical forms largely from Herbert, his poems reflected lucidly his own philosophy. He was remembered more for showing excellence in treating themes of childhood and nature. To him, nature was the medium through which he could reach out to Eternity. The metaphysical strain in him is evident from his meticulous handling of diction and images in his poetry. His poem "The Retreat" depicted his love and admiration for nature and had influenced poets of the Romantic age, particularly William Wordsworth. His works include poems such as "The World", "Departed Friends", "The Hidden Flower", "Regeneration", "The Retreat", "Idle Verse", "The Star", "I Walked the Other Way", "The Waterfall", etc. The juxtaposition of mystical elements with illustrative images and the solace he found in nature as a link to God– all these features make him a metaphysical poet.

Abraham Cowley (1618-1667):

He is one of the most important writers of his time. Born in 1618, he went to Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge. Only in form, he can be called a metaphysical poet. He was more inclined to the poetic tendency found in John Dryden. His poetry lacked the passion that was filled in the poetry of John Donne. His use of conceits and images was rather a construction and ornamentation for he did not use them to explore deeper experiences and provide resolutions. In Cowley, the fading away of metaphysical strain is more pervading for he was at the crossroads between Metaphysical poetry and the Classicism which was to dominate the coming century. His love poems were published in *The Mistress*, which is full of wit. He laid much emphasis on wit as evident from his poem "Ode: Of Wit":

Hence 'tis a wit that greatest word of fame

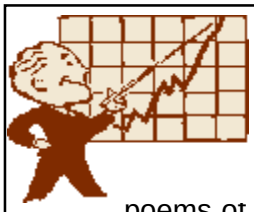
Grows such a common name.
And wits by our creation they become,
Just so, as titular Bishops made at Rome.
'Tis not a tale, 'tis not a jest
Admir'd with laughter at a feast,
Nor florid talk which can that title gain;
The proofs of wit for ever must remain. (Ode: Of Wit, Cowley)

Cowley might not be very appealing as a metaphysical poet but his influence was greatly felt by Dryden and Pope in the eighteenth century. His entry in Dr Samuel Johnson's important work titled *Lives of the English Poets* is suggestive of his influence and continuing popularity. Cowley is best remembered as the last of the metaphysical poets when concepts like wit and conceits were losing their charm and literature showed influence of the Classics. "Written in Juice of Lemon", "My Picture", "Against Hope", "The Enjoyment", "On the Death of Mr Crashaw", "Hymn to Light", "My Picture", etc. are some of the poems penned by him.

Andrew Marvell: (1621–1678):

You will get a detailed discussion on Andrew Marvell in Unit 8 of this course. Some of his important sonnets include the following names:

"On a Drop of Dew", "Bermudas", "A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body", "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn", "To His Coy Mistress", "Mourning", "The Definition of Love", "Damon the Mower", "The Garden", "An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" and so on. Mention may also be made of **Thomas Traherne**'s poems like "The Preparative", "Felicity", "Shadows in the Water" and "Consummation" with regard to metaphysical poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6. What was the influence of Italian poetry on the poems of Richard Crashaw?

Q 7. Name a few important poems by Henry Vaughan. What are his chosen themes?

Q 8. Name the metaphysical poet who was included in Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*.

6.6 RECEPTIONS OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY IN SUBSEQUENT PERIODS

The interest in Metaphysical poetry was revived in the early 19th century with Herbert J. C. Grierson's publication of John Donne's poems in 1921.Grierson's edition reflected the increasing influence of both the poet and the personality- John Donne after two decades from his death. However, Alexander Grossart's publication of the poems by Donne, Herbert, Crashaw and Marvell must be added to the list of influences that have helped in the revitalisation of metaphysical poetry. With the publication of Edmund Gosse's life writing on John Donne, a certain amount of importance was laid on the study of poetry of the great metaphysical poet John Donne. In the article titled "The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, 1872-1912", **Joseph E. Duncan** has been noted mentioning about the causes of the popularity of the most eminent metaphysical poet, John Donne as "[f]rom the mass of Donne criticism there emerged three closely related conceptions of the man: Donne the rebel, Donne the mystery, and Donne the unique individual. These conceptions of the man are basic to the recent critical accent on the originality, complexity, and psychological realism of his work." Indeed, Donne's versification was unique in the manner in which he broke away from the monotony that poetry fell into during the 16th century, by introducing innovative techniques and by emphasising on deeper psychological realms. Poetry became grave where intellect was displayed to its maximum. Much of the revival was attached, therefore, to the poet and preacher John Donne's personality.

Grierson in *Metaphysical Poets and Lyrics of the 17th Century: Donne to Butler* wrote that "metaphysical poetry . . . has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence". Grierson's "Introduction" is one of the landmarks in reviving the reputation of Donne in particular and metaphysical poetry in general. As mentioned by T.S. Eliot, this work of Grierson is a

wonderful piece of criticism that triggered in Eliot an engaging thought about the 'metaphysical' poets and their taste of poetry.

Eliot was one of the 20th century poet and critic whose work brought about a significant amount of renewed significance in the study of metaphysical poets. His contribution in reviving metaphysical poets can be cited from his essays like "The Metaphysical Poets" which was originally published as a review to Grierson's *Metaphysical Poets and Lyrics of the 17th century.* Refuting the metaphysical poets, Eliot in his essay declared that these poets do not belong to a different school but are a part of the Elizabethan tradition. He pointed out the 'unified sensibility' evident in the works of the metaphysical poets. They could synthesise their thought and feeling and express varied and often contradictory emotions in a unified way. This characteristic of the metaphysical poets is common to the modern poets who are their direct descendents.



LET US KNOW

Dissociation of sensibility is a term first used by Eliot in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets". It refers to the way in which intellectual thought was separated from the experience of feeling in 17th century poetry. Eliot used the term to describe the manner by which the nature and substance of English poetry changed "between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning." In this essay, Eliot attempts to define the metaphysical poet and in doing so to determine the metaphysical poet's era as well as his discernible qualities:

> "We may express the difference by the following theory: The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, or Cino. In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered;

and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden."

Akin to the metaphysical poets, the poets in the modern age also transforms feelings into disparate images or thoughts. The complexity of thought is an essential feature of poetry common to the metaphysical as well as the modern poets. Apart from the emphasis on the modern lineage of the metaphysical poets, an increasing popularity was also prevalent in the structure of their poems. After Eliot, metaphysical poetry received favour in the hands of the New Critics. The New Critics believed in close reading of poetry as an independent aesthetic entity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Who were the 'three G's generally referred to in relation of the revival of metaphysical poetry?

Q 10: What, according to Eliot, is the common feature of the metaphysical and the modern poet?



6.7 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of this unit, you have gained an idea about the metaphysical school of poetry of the 17th century. As you are aware, the term gained prominence with John Dryden and later on with Samuel Johnson in his "Life of Cowley" in the book called *Lives of the English Poets*. As a matter of fact, the metaphysical poets such as Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, etc. were not much in vogue in the 17th and 18th century. However, their importance was renewed in the 19th and 20th century with the works of many critics including Grierson, T. S. Eliot and the New Critics. The metaphysical poets dealt with issues like religion, science, philosophy, love, nature, etc. However, the term 'metaphysical' is more appropriate in terms of the techniques of these poets. Common features such as use of wit or intelligence, comparisons, use of figures of speech, etc. are prevalent in all

the metaphysical poets. This unit has thus familiarised you with the beginning of the metaphysical school of poetry, and how it dominated literary thinking, though for a short period, in the 17th century. Although the growth of Classicism and Romanticism hindered in the popularity and acceptance of these metaphysical poets in the 17th and 18th century, the modern poets laid much emphasis on them. Metaphysical poetry has carved a niche for itself by its innovative techniques although critics have often pointed to the obscurity in their use of far-fetched images.



6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The poets used poetry as a medium to reflect the richness of their intellect… …it was markedly different from its preceding age (Elizabethan age) in style and form… …they poets made extensive use of their intelligence and presented a new kind of poetry to the readers… …they used 'wit' in exploring philosophical notions about the world and their poetry was religious in tone.

Ans to Q 2: John Dryden first used the term 'metaphysics' to refer to John Donne's poetry in his book called *Discourse Concerning Satire* in 1693. According to Dryden, Donne's poetry "affects the metaphysics".

Ans to Q 3: Johnson stated that the fault of the metaphysical poets was that of pursuing their thoughts to their last ramifications, by which the grandeur of generality got lost… …Thus all the power of description was destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration; and the force of metaphors is lost when the mind by the mention of particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied.

Ans to Q 4: It captures the essence of his bereaved situation having many religious allusions and at the same time reflecting his religious crisis. He renounced Catholicism at that time. This collection contains poems having varied tones, most of which have a dramatic beginning.

Ans to Q 5: His poems were personal in nature and carried an intimate dialogue between him and God. Written in a colloquial manner, his poems were directly addressed to God and are marked for the simplicity and lucidity of tone. This was possible because unlike Donne he never used far-fetched images to describe his point. Rather he drew inspiration from everyday ordinary sources to convey his concerns. Herbert's poems were, however, a reflection of his intellectual sensibility. The dignity of his subject matter was influenced by the metaphysical strain in him.

Ans to Q 6: As an imitator of Italian poetry, his poems were sensuous in tone and use of language.

Ans to Q 7: "The Retreat", "The World", "Departed Friends", "The Hidden Flower", "Regeneration", "The Retreat", "Idle Verse", "The Star", "I Walked the Other Way", "The Waterfall", etc. … … his poems reflected lucidly his own philosophy. He was remembered more for showing excellence in treating themes of childhood and nature.

Ans to Q 8: Abraham Cowley.

Ans to Q 9: Herbert J. C. Grierson, Alexander Grossart and Edmund Gosse.

Ans to Q 10: They could synthesise their thought and feeling and express varied and often contradictory emotions in a unified way. The complexity of thought is an essential feature of poetry common to the metaphysical as well as the modern poets.



6.9 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* 7th Edition. Thomson, Heinle.

2) Duncan, Joseph E. (1953). "The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, 1872-1912" *PMLA*, Vol. 68, No 4, p 658-671.

3) Eliot, T.S. (1921). "The Metaphysical Poets" in *Times Literary Supplement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. http://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/eliot_metaphysical_poets.htm

4) Grierson, Herbert J.C. *Metaphysical Poets and Lyrics of the 17thCentury: Donne to Butler.* https://archive.org/stream/metaphysicallyri00grieuoft/metaphysicallyri00grieuoft_djvu.txt

5) Hayward, John. (1950). *John Donne: A Selection of His Poetry*. England: Penguin.

6) Johnson, Samuel.(1905). *Lives of the English Poets*. Ed. G. B. Hill. Oxford: Clarendon Press. https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/cowley.html



6.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. What do you understand by 'Metaphysical Poetry'? Examine the features of Metaphysical poetry of the 17th century.

Q 2. Write short notes on:

i) John Donne

ii) George Herbert

iii) Richard Crashaw

iv) Abraham Cowley

v) Beginning and Development of Metaphysical Poetry

vi) Critical Reception of Metaphysical Poetry

Q 3. What is unification of sensibility, according to T. S. Eliot? How are the Metaphysical poets received in the 20th century, especially by a poet critic like Eliot?

Q 4. Relate the revival of metaphysical poetry in the latter half of the 19th century with that of its characteristics.

Q 5. Do you find a close affinity between the metaphysical and the modern poets? Explain.

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Unit 7: JOHN DONNE: "THE GOOD MORROW", "DEATH BE NOT PROUD"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 John Donne: The Poet

7.3.1 His Life

7.3.2 His Works

7.4 Reading the Poem: "The Sun Rising"

7.5 Reading the Poem: "Death Be Not Proud"

7.6 Donne's Poetic Style

7.7 Let us Sum up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.10 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of John Donne
- trace briefly the tradition of Metaphysical Poetry
- explain the poems prescribed and its various important aspects
- discuss Donne's poetic style
- assess the significance of John Donne as a 'metaphysical' poet.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to two poems by John Donne viz. 'The Sun Rising' and 'Death, Be Not Proud'. John Donne was the leading English poet of the Metaphysical School of Poetry and is often considered to be one of the greatest love poets in the English language. You will be acquainted with the life of this great poet and his major poetic works in which "wit" is a major component. The poem 'The Sun Rising' is one of Donne's most

charming and successful metaphysical poems. It is essentially a love poem. On the other hand, 'Death, Be Not Proud' is a Holy sonnet, which reveals Donne's defiance of, and an unconventional challenge to, Death. Death is not something to be feared, rather something that can easily be defeated. You will be given an explanation of the ideas contained in these two poems. Finally, you will be acquainted with Donne's poetic style, which is characterised by his use of conceits, paradox and puns. In this unit, an attempt has been made to discuss Metaphysical poetry through a discussion of John Donne's poems.

7.3 JOHN DONNE: THE POET



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

John Donne, often regarded as the foremost of the metaphysical poets, wrote his poetry, which is both intense and riddling. A reading of his poems opens up the generalisation that Donne's love poems and divine poems correspond to his early and later life respectively. This is based on the biographical fact that his youth was spent as a passionate and romantic ladies man, and a debonair man-about-town, but after his wife's death, he mellowed down considerably, and thereafter enjoyed divine love. Let us now delve into this great poet's life.

7.3.1 His Life

John Donne was born in Bread Street, London in a prominent Roman Catholic family. His father was a prosperous London ironmonger merchant who descended from a very ancient family in Wales. His mother was a lineal descendant of Sir Thomas More, and was the daughter of John Heywood, the epigrammatist and playwright. After his father's death, Donne's mother married Dr. John Syminges who raised her children. Donne attended the University of Oxford for three years, but left early because as a Roman Catholic,

he could not swear the oath of allegiance to the Protestant Queen Elizabeth, and acknowledge her supremacy over the Church of England. He then went to the University of Cambridge before leaving the continent and travelling abroad. He returned to London to study law in the early 1590s and entered Lincoln's Inn in 1592. There he dwelt on a comparative examination of Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, and started writing verse and also engaged in womanising. In 1596, Donne sailed on the Earl of Essex's expedition against Cadiz, and in the following year, he joined the inconclusive Islands expedition with Sir Walter Raleigh and Essex, hunting for Spanish treasure ships in the Azores.

On his return to London in 1597, Donne became secretary to one of the most influential men in England, Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and was well launched upon a brilliant career. You will be interested to know that while in Egerton's service, Donne met Anne Moore, the 14-year-old niece of Egerton's second wife and the daughter of Sir George Moore, and fell desperately in love with her so much so that he married her secretly. This betrayal of his employer's trust jeopardised his plans for service as a courtier, and Donne was also briefly imprisoned and dismissed from his post with Egerton. Thus, at 30, Donne found himself married but jobless, and with no adequate funds to support his household. He lived in poverty and on the charity of Anne's cousin and some noble patrons. In the meantime, Donne fathered 12 children, of whom only 7 survived. He was deeply in love with his wife, and was very depressed because he considered himself responsible for her wretched fortune.

Donne's friends had urged him to take up Holy Orders in the Church of England as early as 1607, but he felt unworthy and deferred it. However, when he failed to find employment, Donne decided that the Church looked like the only prospect for professional success, and so he agreed to take Holy Orders. He was ordained on 23rd January 1615, and appointment soon followed. Donne was made a royal chaplain and received the degree of Doctor of Divinity

from Cambridge. He was also made the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, which was an administrative and spiritual occupation, and he carried out his duties with sincerity and integrity.

In spite of his miseries, Donne studied and tirelessly wrote prose pieces on theology, and also composed religious and love lyrics. The literary scene during this time was dominated by sonnet writers who drew inspiration from Petrarch, but Donne carved his own niche by following the Roman poet Ovid. He also found a new patron in Sir Robert Drury, with whom he travelled to Amiens and Paris in 1611-12. Donne and his wife settled in a small house provided by the Drurys on their estate in London, where Donne lived until 1621 after the death of his wife in 1617. He never recovered from this grief and vowed never to marry again, even though he had to raise his children in modest financial circumstances. His bereavement led him to a career in the Anglican Church and his powerful sermons established him as the foremost preacher of the England of his day, and a favourite of both James I and Charles I.

Donne became seriously ill in 1623 during an epidemic of either typhus or relapsing fever, but even in sickness, he began a prose work *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), consisting of prayers, meditations and expostulations. Donne became ill again in 1630, but even then, he insisted on preaching sermon on 25 February, the first Friday in Lent, 1631 at court. The theme was "Death's Duel", and it was to be his final, also considered to be his own funeral sermon. John Donne breathed his last on 31st March 1631, and was buried at St. Paul's. Nicholas Stone constructed a marble effigy of Donne, which survived the Great Fire of 1666, and still stands today in St. Paul's Cathedral.

7.3.2 His Works

As mentioned in the previous section, John Donne was a prolific writer of poetry and prose. However, you will be interested to know that almost none of Donne's poems was published during his

lifetime, so it is difficult to date them accurately. The first two editions of his poetry entitled *Poems* were published posthumously in 1633 and 1635. His poetry is generally divided into the secular lyrics and religious verses, and most of his poems were preserved as manuscript copies. Scholars agree that Donne's *Elegies*, verse letters and satires were written in the 1590s, the *Songs and Sonnets* from the 1590 until 1617, and the *Holy Sonnets* and other religious lyrics from the time of his marriage till he was ordained in 1615. His elegies are colloquial and racy, and are poems of love rather than of mourning. His satires show evidence of his rational strength. Donne's *Anniversaries,* published in 1611-12, were the only important works by him published during his lifetime. His best-known poems like 'The Canonization', 'The Bait', 'The Good Morrow' etc. belong to his pre-marriage period and are frequently erotic. His love lyrics provide in-depth psychological insight about a broad range of lovers and a wide gamut of amorous feelings. Donne's lovers exalt in the compatibility of their sexual and spiritual love, and elevate the emotion to an almost religious dimension. The theme of death is pervasive in Donne's poetry. There is a memorable poem in his *Holy Sonnets* called 'Death, Be Not Proud', which we will discuss in this unit. His religious poems are more difficult than the secular. In these poems, Donne explores his love for God, sometimes through sexual metaphors, and depicts his doubts, fears and sense of spiritual unworthiness. His poems attempt to conquer doubt and achieve faith.

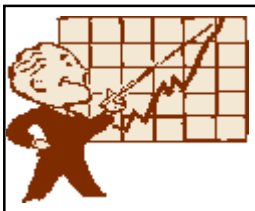
Among Donne's prose works, the earliest include *Paradoxes and Problems*, probably begun during his days in Lincoln's Inn. In 1607, he wrote *Biathanatos*, a scholarly prose work about Christianity and suicide. His most notable prose work was *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), and it was written to persuade the English Roman Catholics to swear the oath of allegiance to the king, which was required after the Gunpowder Plot (1605). He also wrote *Ignatius His Conclave*, a prose satire on the Jesuits, and both the former and the latter met the approval of James I. Donne completed

his *Essays in Divinity* in 1611, and as mentioned earlier, upon recovering from his illness wrote *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* in 1623. The *Devotions* correlate his physical illness with spiritual sickness, and like his poetry, are known for their dramatic immediacy and metaphysical conceits. However, Donne is best known for his *Sermons*, which illustrate his mastery of prose. His sermons are brilliant though severe, and explore the basic principles of Christianity rather than simply indulge in theological disputes. His sermons are at times dramatic, at times candid, and engage us with their intensity, rhythm and use of conceits. At the end of his life, Donne was hailed as the "Monarch of Wit" for his poetic ingenuity and for establishing a powerful new style of his own. With his astute observance of human nature, the broad range of human experience is brought to life vividly, and his verse enthrals us with its dramatic intensity.



LET US KNOW

The *Anniversarie* poems are the most sustained of Donne's poetic efforts. They are written to commemorate the death of Elizabeth Drury, the 14-year-old daughter of his patron and friend Sir Robert Drury, on whose estate he lived. These poems incorporate their perceived subject into a philosophical meditation on the decay of the world. He idealizes Elizabeth Drury as "the Idea of a woman". Through this idealized female figure, he, in *The First Anniversarie: An Anatomie of the World* laments humanity's continuing spiritual death from the loss of Eden to the dissolution of the contemporary world. In *The Second Anniversarie: Of the Progres of the Soule*, Donne finally regains the wisdom that directs him towards an immortal existence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the poets who influenced the literary career of John Donne?

Q 2: Why did Donne take up Holy Orders? What led him to turn to the Anglican Church?

Q 3: List some of the important works written by John Donne.

Q 4: Write a short note on Donne's prose works.

7.4 READING THE POEM: "THE SUN RISING"

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late schoolboys and sour 'prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.
Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long.
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late tell me
Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay."
She's all states, and all princes I;
Nothing else is:
Princes do but play us; compar'd to this,

All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere.

'The Sun Rising' is a typical metaphysical poem by Donne and is characterised by his usual vigour and freshness. Passion and reason are woven together in this poem. You may know that much 16th century poetry were full of praise for the quiet beauty of dawn. However, Donne with his characteristic wit and subtlety of thought subverts the tradition, and chides the rising Sun for disturbing his sleep while lying in bed with his mistress. The poem is an emotional outpouring on the part of the poet-lover in the form of a dramatic monologue. The three stanzas of the poem is a systematic exercise in dwarfing the Sun, which is generally upheld as the Lord of all Heavenly bodies. This can be perceived in the dramatic opening lines where the Sun is rebuked for being an elderly voyeur of sorts:

"Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?"

The poet speaker has realised the essence of a love, which transcends time in the happy and complete possession of his mistress in a solitude that he deems as an inviolable privacy. It is important to remember that the real subject here is not the Sun, which is the universally acknowledged standard of temporal order, regulation and law, but the lady. In addition, it is not the personified Sun who rules and controls the universe, but the lover himself, and his lovemaking with his mistress is the only reality that is not limited by time. In 'The Sun Rising', passion and wit cohere to enact the exaltation of this joyous sensual experience. The lover's argument is at once logical and emotional, serious and light, persuasive and fantastic. The Sun is ridiculed as a "saucy, pedantic wretch" and an interfering "fool".

Donne's purpose in the poem is to argue and prove the exalted

experience of the lovers. The poem is inspired by the poet's undying love and passion for his beloved wife Anne Moore. The metaphysical conceits in the second and third stanzas elevate the mistress to an altogether different level. The poet-lover feels as if he could obliterate the intense brightness of the sun simply by closing his eyes, but he refuses to do so as he does not want to lose sight of his beloved for even one moment. The mistress combines in herself all the fragrance and gold of the East and the West Indies.

"Look, and tomorrow late tell me
Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me."

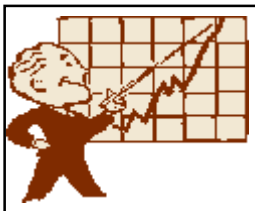
For the poet, the bed is a microcosm of the outside world with all its kings and kingdoms, and the Sun is rhetorically pushed away. The lover and the beloved are compared to all the states and princes of the world, rolled into one. Thus, his mistress rises upon all the earlier Elizabethan sweethearts in as much as she is an exalted being.

"She's all states, and all princes I;
Nothing else is:"

The poet is of the opinion that the Sun need not wander around the world, its sole duty is now to shine upon him, and his beloved as the entire world has contacted into the lovers' bedroom. This is indeed a bold statement and Donne needs to be lauded for his originality of execution. Donne seems to be following the Ptolemaic belief that the Sun moved round the earth when he says that the bed of the lovers is the centre of the Sun i.e. the earth around which it can revolve.

"This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere."

'The Sun Rising' is thus built around a few hyperbolic assertions- that the Sun is a conscious busybody, that love knows "no season" and no "clime", and that the world is literally contained within the bedroom of the lovers. This is one of Donne's most successful and charming metaphysical love poems. The lovers create a microcosmic world within the realm of their bedroom, which is far more important than the larger universe, and their bodies are the gravitational centre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Why is the Sun called a "busy old fool"? What is regarded as more exalted than the Sun?

Q 6: Why, according to the poet, the Sun need not move around the world?

7.5 READING THE POEM: "DEATH BE NOT PROUD"

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so.
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then, from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, ware, and sickness dwell.
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die.

'Death, Be Not Proud' is included as Sonnet X in the *Holy Sonnets*. These *Holy Sonnets* provide a fertile ground for theological speculation. As mentioned earlier, Donne's holy poems correspond to the latter period of his life; his wife's death dramatically reforming his earlier callous and womanising behaviour. He thereby enjoyed divine love, though not without a struggle at times. Anne's death made him lose his "world" and thereafter he yearned for the "other world".

The *Holy Sonnets* may be regarded as poems of repentance, and entreaties for divine grace, without being didactic. The major themes, which encompass the entire gamut of Donne's religious verse, are sin, repentance, death, salvation and the continuing desire to be one with God's love and

mercy in this life in order to enjoy everlasting happiness in the next. The shadow of death is all pervasive, but Donne's references to death do not bespeak any morbid obsession, for he treats death as merely the end of earthly life, and the beginning of the more rewarding "other" life of the soul. For Donne, there is always an intense awareness of the inevitability of death, but no fear or sense of unease is born out of this awareness, as he is besotted with the hope of an after-life and the immortality of the soul. The *Holy Sonnets* reflect and embody his deeply felt emotions in a language, which reveal conscious craftsmanship.

Let us now come to the poem 'Death, Be Not Proud'. In this poem, Donne subverts two accepted notions about death- first, that it is something to be dreaded, and second, that it is mighty. The poem confirms the Christian belief that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross has liberated mankind from the fear of death. The sonnet portrays an unconventional challenge to death. Death is personified and addressed to directly. In a sense, the poem points to Donne's sensibility and brings into focus the consciousness of the age in which he lived and wrote. Donne not only defied death, but also the contemporary man who is so demotivated by the thought of death, that he cannot evoke the strength of spirit to instil hope and confidence in himself.

Donne argues in this poem that death does not deserve to be proud; it only has a certain power over man and gives temporary sleep. Repeated references to death in many of the *Holy Sonnets* do not speak of any morbid obsession, rather it reveals the significance of that vital moment when the soul will be released from the mortal body and will achieve the honour of "meeting" God. Death is rendered inactive by the fact of the immortality of the soul. The might of death is treated in a vein of mockery.

"Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so."

The poem opens with a dramatic demolishing blow hurled upon Death, which rips apart Death's arrogance. Donne asserts the fact that the knowledge of death as a potent horror is a myth created and sustained by some, whereas the real truth is that Death is not the inflated force it is sustained to be. It is not "mighty and dreadful", it has no great power, and it

cannot strike terror in the hearts of the faithful and the fearless. It is not dreadful because those whom Death claims to have "killed" are actually having a long and peaceful sleep.

"For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me."

The perception of Death becomes meaningless and superfluous and it is scaled down to the level of a presumptuous fool. By moving from the general to the particular, Donne vehemently asserts that "nor yet canst thou kill me" and mocks at death by referring to it as "poor Death".

Then, he goes on to explain the fact that death is nothing but an eternal sleep. Just as sleep refreshes a person, death will refresh a person eternally. It brings a calm and peace instead of horror in its wake:

"From rest and sleep which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then, from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery."

Sleep, which invigorates man, is only a reflection of death, so it follows logically that Death would bring more and greater soothing pleasure than its mere images rest and sleep. Therefore, the best and noble men in this world are never afraid to embrace Death. Donne says that the best find ready solace in death which provides rest to the fatigued body and emancipates the soul. The immortality of the soul ensures the survival of man.

Death is reduced to the position of a "slave", and thus there is a complete subversion of death in which the vein of mockery continues: "Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men." The slave-like presence of death is reflected in its servile agents like poison, wars and sickness. Intoxicants like poppy and the charms can also put a man to a restful sleep, which may be even more perfect than Death. Therefore, it only follows that Death has nothing to be proud of; it is a hollow feeling: The faithful and fearless soul will chart its own course and "defeat" Death, which is believed to be the mightiest power of all. As the sonnet ends, there is a direct reference to the victory of Christian resurrection over Death, and the analogy of "rest and sleep" is extended to the point of waking. Donne triumphantly asserts that:

"One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die."

Donne therefore emerges victorious over the insidious power of death. The sonnet ends paradoxically leaving behind a swift and sweeping impression when Donne persuasively tells Death: "Death, thou shalt die."'Death, be not proud' is the revelation of a soul's involvement with God, a relationship that is underscored by what Yeats says a sense of "passionate intensity". Donne is aware of his frailties as a sinner, and he is willing to face God and invoke his sanctifying grace in repentance and redemption. Death therefore does retain its conventional image of being an all-powerful leveller. The physical end of life is not to be dreaded, but welcomed as a higher state of existence in an eternal afterlife.

The octet establishes the fact that Death is neither dreadful nor mighty, and the sestet is more personal as Death is regarded as a "slave", and a passage to an immortal existence. Christian dogma is basis of Donne's iconoclastic attitude towards Death. He remains invincible in his belief in the words of Christ: I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and he who lives and believes in me shall never die."(From the New Testament)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What are the major themes in the *Holy Sonnets*? Which incident prompted him to immerse himself in religious verse?

Q 8: How is Death challenged in the poem?

Q 9: Why do the faithful not fear Death? Identify the paradox at the end of the poem.

7.6 DONNE'S POETIC STYLE

The poetry of John Donne is characterised by a strikingly original departure from the conventions of 16th century English verse, especially that of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. He has made a virtuoso contribution to English poetic diction and versification. His poetic style and

diction is very unconventional. Donne's early satires and elegies, inspired by Latin models, show his experimentation with genre, form and imagery. T. S. Eliot opined that: "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility." Donne's vocabulary and syntax reflect the emotional intensity of a confrontation, and his metrical style and verbal music conform to the needs of a particular dramatic situation. His directness of language has an electrifying effect on the reader. This can be seen in 'The Canonization', which begins: "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love", or as you have seen in 'The Sun Rising': "Busy old fool, unruly Sun". These explosive beginnings develop into closely reasoned arguments or propositions that rely heavily on the use of conceits.

The Elizabethan conceits were ornate and decorative, while the metaphysical conceits were the products of the intellectual process of thinking in figures. Donne used the conceit as a vehicle for transmitting multiple, and sometimes even contradictory feelings and ideas. His imagery is drawn from different fields such as alchemy, astronomy, medicine, politics, philosophy etc. As mentioned earlier, his famous analogy of two parting lovers to a drawing compass is a prime example. The critic Allen Tate has this to say about the nature of Donne's conceits. It is an idea not inherent in this subject, but exactly parallel to it, elaborated beyond the usual stretch of metaphor into a supporting structure for a long passage or even an entire poem. It may be torn away from its original meaning, like the Angels in Donne's Elegie XI, and yet remain the vehicle of 'poetic truth': that is to say, of heightened emotion in the poet's dramatisation of his own personality. The conceit in itself is neither true nor false. From this practice, it is but a step to Dryden and the 18th century, to the rise of the historical consciousness, and to ourselves." Donne's conceits offer brilliant and multiple insights into the subject of the metaphor and help give rise to the ambiguity in his lyrics.

Donne combined the complexity of substance with the simplicity of expression. He uses a rhythm that expresses his passionate argument and his mood, and therefore his verses are as startling as his phrasing. He has infused the English language with energy and a sinewy strength. Due to the invigorating influence of his poetic style, John Donne has brought a new

luster to English literature. Grierson has this to say about the salient characteristics of Donne's style and versification: "Donne's verse has a powerful and haunting harmony of its own…Donne plays with rhythmical effects as with conceits and words and often in much the same way…he writes as one who will say what he has to say without regards to conventions of poetic diction or smooth verse, but what he has to say is subtle and surprising, and so are the metrical effects with which it is presented…Donne is perhaps our first great master of poetic rhetoric…"



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Briefly reflect on Donne's poetic style.

Q 11: What is a conceit? How did Donne use his conceits?



7.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you must have understood the importance of John Donne as a leading English poet of the Metaphysical School of Poetry. You have read about the life of this great poet and the kind of poetry and prose he wrote. 'The Sun Rising' is a systematic exercise in dwarfing the Sun, which is generally upheld as the Lord of all Heavenly bodies. The poet is of the opinion that the Sun need not wander around the world, its sole duty is now to shine upon him, and his beloved as the entire world has contacted into the lovers' bedroom. The lovers create a microcosmic world within the realm of their bedroom, which is far more important than the larger universe, and their bodies are the gravitational centre. While, in 'Death, be not proud', Donne subverts two accepted notions about death- first, that it is something to be dreaded, and second, that it is mighty. The poem confirms the Christian belief that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross has liberated mankind from the fear of death. The sonnet portrays an unconventional challenge to death. You have also learnt about the characteristics of Donne's poetic style, which helped confirm his position as one of the greatest metaphysical poets in English literature.



7.8 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams, M. H. (2005). *A Glossary of Literary Terms. 8th Edition*. New Delhi: Thomson Wadsworth.
2) Cuddon, J. A. (1999). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin.
3) Dickson, Donald R. (ed). (2007).*John Donne's Poetry*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
4) Encyclopedia Brittanica (Vol 4). 2005. New York: Brittanica Educational Publishing.
5) Gardner, Helen. (1957).*Metaphysical Poets.* Penguin Books**.**
6) Ousby, Ian. (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.



7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The Italian poet Petrarch… …the Roman poet Ovid… …Donne's new patron Sir Robert Drury

Ans to Q 2 : Because, he failed to find employment… ...he was bereaved by his wife's death… …such experiences led him to a career in the Anglican Church… …his powerful sermons established him as the foremost preacher of the England of his day.

Ans to Q 3 : For the answer section 7.3.2 may be referred.

Ans to Q 4: *Paradoxes and Problems* was begun in Lincoln's Inn… …he wrote *Biathanatos* which is about Christianity and suicide… …most notable prose work is *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610)… …*Ignatius His Conclave*, a prose satire on the Jesuits… …However, Donne is best known for his *Sermons.*

Ans to Q 5: The Sun peeps into the bedroom… ...disturbs the lover… ...the lady is the main subject and not the Sun.

Ans to Q 6: Donne seems to be following the Ptolemaic belief that the Sun moved round the earth when he says that the bed of the lovers is the centre of the Sun i.e. the earth around which it (the Sun) can revolve.

Ans to Q 7: Sin, repentance, death, salvation… ...desire to be one with God's love and mercy in this life……everlasting happiness in the next life… …death of his wife prompted him.

Ans to Q 8: Reduced to the level of slave… …it is only a short sleep…….similar to rest… …intoxicants can also induce sleep… …death has no power.

Ans to Q 9: It is only a short sleep… ...awaken to eternal life… ...immortality of the soul… the paradox is—death itself will die.

Ans to Q 10: Departure from the conventions of 16th century English verse… …vocabulary and syntax reflecting the emotional intensity of a confrontation… …his metrical style conforms a particular dramatic situation… …his directness of language has an electrifying effect on the reader… …explosive beginnings develop into closely reasoned arguments or propositions.

Ans to Q 11: Conceit is a vehicle for transmitting multiple, contradictory feelings and ideas… …Donne drew his imagery from alchemy, astronomy, medicine, politics, philosophy etc… he made conceits the products of the intellectual processes of thinking in figures.



7.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a comprehensive note on the tradition of Metaphysical Poetry with special reference to John Donne's poetry.

Q 2: Why is Metaphysical Poetry called "the poetry of strong lines"? How did Eliot help bring the poetry of Donne back into favour?

Q 3: Do you think that the poem 'The Sun Rising' is "informal" in any way? Discuss the central philosophy in the poem.

Q 4: How is Death ridiculed in the poem 'Death, be not proud'? How, according to the poet, does Death "die" in the poem?

Q 5: Write a note on Donne's poetic style with examples from his poems.

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UNIT 8: ANDREW MARVELL: "TO HIS COY MISTRESS" & "THE GARDEN"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Andrew Marvell: Life and Works

8.4 Reading the Poems: "To His Coy Mistress" & "The Garden"

8.5 Marvell's Poetic Style

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gather ideas on the life and works of Andrew Marvell
- trace briefly the contributions of Marvell to Metaphysical Poetry
- explain two of his poems namely, "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden"
- analyse critically the thematic concerns in these two poems
- discuss the poetic style of Andrew Marvell.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with two poems namely "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden" by Andrew Marvell who is acclaimed as one of the finest metaphysical poets in the history of English Poetry. Marvel wrote the first poem either during or just before the English Interregnum (1649–60). This poem is considered one of Marvell's finest and is possibly the best-recognised carpe diem poem in English that became popular among the courtier poets of Charles I. The second poem "The Garden", too is often considered to be a famous English poem of the 17th century. This poem

was first published in *Miscellaneous Poems* in 1681. In this poem, the poet's personal emotions and feelings are told throughout the words of nature. The poet explains the value of nature and is explaining it through the poem. One of the last of the 17th century Metaphysical poets, Andrew Marvell is noted for intellectual, allusive poetry that is rich in metaphor and conceit. By the end of this unit, you will find that his work incorporates many of the elements associated with the Metaphysical school: the tension of opposing values, metaphorical complexities, logical and linguistic subtleties, and unexpected twists of thought and argument.

8.3 ANDREW MARVELL: LIFE AND WORKS



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

The son of an Anglican clergyman, Marvell was born in Winestead-in-Holderness, Yorkshire. He received his early education at nearby Hull Grammar School and later attended Trinity College at Cambridge University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1638. Marvell remained at Cambridge until 1641, though he left without taking a master's degree. During the next four years, Marvell travelled in Europe, employed as a tutor. By the early 1650s, he was living at Nunappleton in Yorkshire, where he was tutor to Mary Fairfax, the daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax, retired commander-in-chief of the Commonwealth army under Oliver Cromwell. It was during his stay at Nunappleton that Marvell wrote most of the lyric poems that form the basis of his literary reputation.

Then, he moved to Eton to tutor Cromwell's ward William Dutton. In 1657, he was appointed Assistant Latin Secretary to the Council of State through the influence of his friend John Milton, who then held the post of Latin Secretary. Two years later, Marvell was elected Member of Parliament for Hull; from this point on, he ceased to write lyric poetry, concentrating instead on political satire and polemics in prose. A dedicated, conscientious statesman, Marvell channelled all his energy and talent into his political career, serving in Parliament until his death.

More relevant to the reading of his poetry is the mystery of Marvell's political convictions, more accurate knowledge of which, scholars believe, would do much to clarify obscurities in his work. Marvell lived during a tumultuous period of British history. Although he did not actively participate in the English Civil War, which broke out in 1642 while he was travelling in Europe, Marvell was deeply affected by the bitter fighting between the **Royalists** (primarily supporters of Anglicanism) and **Parliamentarians** (primarily supporters of Puritanism) and later by Charles I's execution and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate. Scholars have often attempted to determine where Marvell's sympathies lay. But, they have been unable to definitively place the poet in either camp. Some suggest that this political inconclusiveness mirrors the indecision found in Marvell's poems. Regardless, critics have emphasised that an understanding of Marvell's life and poetry, particularly ''An Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland,'' requires some comprehension of this politically volatile time.

Works in Literary Context:

Duality: Marvell directly addressed the theme of the duality of spirituality and temporality in many of his overtly religious poems, including ''A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure'' and ''A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body.'' As their titles indicate, both these poems are discussions between the body and its pleasures on the one hand and the soul and its spirituality on the other, yet critics have remarked on an important distinction between the two works. In ''A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure,'' Marvell uncharacteristically and, many commentators believe, unsatisfactorily, resolves the conflict.

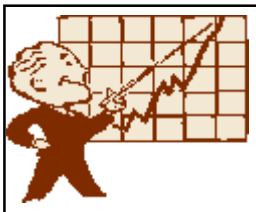
Ambiguity: Political poems, such as ''An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland'' and ''Upon Appleton House,'' have prompted much critical debate due to their ambiguity. ''An Horatian Ode'' in particular has invited biographical interpretation as commentators have attempted to clarify Marvell's real attitude toward the political and social upheavals of the Civil War and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate. Ostensibly, a paean to Cromwell's military and political victories, ''An Horatian Ode'' includes a moving and sympathetic description of Charles I's execution that

commentators have found disconcerting. An additional critical dilemma has been raised by subtle hints in the poem that indicate the poet's belief that Cromwell's base of power, founded as it was on usurpation and bloodshed, may have been inevitable but can hardly be praiseworthy. Ambiguities also abound in ''Upon Appleton House,'' outwardly a poem in praise of the retirement of Marvell's benefactor Fairfax from the political arena. The extent to which this praise may be regarded as sincere has long been a critical obstacle, as the rest of the poem seems to endorse the course of action and movement.

During his lifetime and for generations after his death, Marvell was known primarily for his political career; he was lauded as an upright, incorruptible statesman, his name becoming synonymous with disinterested patriotism. Consequently, his prose satires and polemics, controversial and often severe attacks on government policy, were highly praised. As you know, the crowning of King Charles II marked the beginning of the Restoration period, so named for the restoration of the English monarchy after its abolition by Oliver Cromwell and the execution of Charles's father, King Charles I, in the wake of the English Civil War. While his poetry, when it was considered at all, was judged to be clever and talented, but of secondary importance; throughout the 17th and 18th centuries Marvell's reputation was that of a major statesman but a minor poet. In the 19th century, critical opinion began to shift: critics of Marvell, though few in number, assigned his poetry a greater importance, while his prose works suffered a corresponding decline in popularity. William Hazlitt praised the ''elegance and tenderness in his descriptive poems,'' while decrying Marvell's ''forced, far-fetched method of treating his subject'' in the political satires. 19th century commentators emphasised what they deemed his ''Romantic'' attributes: the theme of the mutability of earthly life in ''To His Coy Mistress,'' the description of nature and solitude in ''The Garden,'' and the sensitive portrayal of human emotion in ''The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Faun.''

In the 20th century, critical appraisal of Marvell's work has undergone a still more radical metamorphosis. Although the satires continue to be generally censured for their heavy-handedness and crudity—considered of

some historical interest, perhaps, but of negligible literary importance—the lyric poetry has come to be seen in an entirely new light, largely due to T. S. Eliot's pivotal essay of 1921. Eliot emphasised for the first time Marvell's Metaphysical wit, the recognition of which has both enlarged and redefined subsequent critical thought. As Marvell is now seen to be closely allied to the Metaphysical school, so also is he viewed as a much more complex and rewarding poet, both thematically and stylistically, than had been previously assumed. ''To His Coy Mistress''.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the ode by Andrew Marvell that he wrote for the Lord Protector of England.

Q 2: How was John Milton associated with Andrew Marvell?

Q 3: Comment on Marvell's political commitment.

Q 4: Which are the two most dominant literary contexts of Marvell?

8.4 READING THE POEMS: "TO HIS COY MISTRESS" & "THE GARDEN"

"To His Coy Mistress"

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble **vault**, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your **quaint** honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul **transpires**
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like **amorous** birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than **languish** in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Thine: yours.
Vault: a burial chamber underground.
Quaint: strange in a pleasant way.
Transpires: exude water vapour.
Amorous: displaying or related to sexual desire.
Languish: lose vigour.

Explanation:

The speaker of the poem is a lover who addresses his lady love about the limitations of time in human life. He intends to convince the modest lady of letting her 'coyness' go so that the two of them can pass their time together by loving one another. He wants the lady to surrender herself to him because he wants to show his extravagant admiration towards her while there is time enough. Her 'coyness' would not have been a 'crime' if 'time' was not a deciding factor for fulfilling his desire. The speaker's ardent wish to establish intimacy with the lady is quite evident from the poem.

The speaker reveals that if the two of them are given time and space, they would "sit down, and think which way/ To walk, and pass our long love's day". He fantasises how she would collect rubies by the side of the Indian Ganges. He, on the other hand, would complain of the distance between them by the tides of the Humber River.

In the above lines, Biblical allusions are used by the speaker to refer to the ever-lasting love he has for his 'coy mistress'. He travels back in time and convinces her that he will keep waiting for her. The metaphor of 'vegetable love' might be an indication to eroticism. However, the poet uses nature and makes a point to refer to the steady growth of vegetables in relation to human feeling or desire. Although the metaphor appears to be somewhat obscure, the speaker expresses that adoring the beauty of the lady, part by part, would take him over thousands of years. That way his love is compared to the natural growth of vegetables that too takes time to grow and attain full maturity. As evident, 'time' is an important element in the poem. The lady deserves such attention and limited time (one human span) would be less to praise her beauty. The speaker desperately wants to please his lady and to achieve her.

The poem abruptly changes the tone. The lover now warns the lady about the limitations of Time. The "deserts of vast eternity" lies open to her where her beauty will no longer be valued. The image of death is starkly drawn where the lady's pride and beauty loses their charm. Even the speaker is aware that his lust for the lady will also turn into 'ashes' with Time. Death/ Time will terminate everything, be it material or otherwise. In one way or the

other, the speaker urges his mistress that while there is time, they should take the opportunity of the moment and live it to the fullest. The emphasis on the word 'now' in the last stanza is in connection to the 'carpe diem' theme of the poem. The speaker offers a resolution by asking his mistress to gather strength and courage so that they could make their way through the 'iron gates of life'. The poem concludes with the argument of the speaker who persuades his mistress about the idea of how lovemaking can enable them to defy the restrictions of Time. As the poem is addressed by an impatient lover, it ends on a note of persuasion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Who is the speaker of the poem "To His Coy Mistress"?

Q 6: Explain the metaphor 'vegetable love'.

Let us read the second prescribed poem entitled "The Garden".

"The Garden"

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their uncessantlabours see
Crown'd from some single herb or tree,
Whose short and narrow verged shade
Does **prudently** their toils upbraid;
While all flow'rs and all trees do close
To weave the garlands of repose.



Prudently: in a careful and sensible way.

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence, thy sister dear!
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busy companies of men;
Your sacred plants, if here below,
Only among the plants will grow.

Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen
So am'rous as this lovely green.
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;
Little, alas, they know or heed
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our passion's heat,
Love hither makes his best retreat.
The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
Still in a tree did end their race:
Apollo hunted Daphne so,
Only that she might **laurel** grow;
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a **nymph**, but for a reed.

What wond'rous life in this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The **luscious** clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The **nectarine** and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons as I pass,
Ensnar'dwith flow'rs, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;
The mind, that ocean where each kind



Laurel: aromatic trees of the laurel family with dark green glossy leaves, in particular.
Nymph: refers to a beautiful maiden of mythological nature who is believed to inhabit rivers and woods.
Luscious: extremely pleasing in taste.
Nectarine: a variety of peach with smooth skin and firm yellow flesh.
Ensnar'd: catch in or as if in a trap.
Annihilating: destroying.

Does straight its own resemblance find,
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide;
There like a bird it sits and sings,
Then **whets**, and combs its silver wings;
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,
Waves in its **plumes** the various light.



Whets: sharpen by rubbing.
Plumes: the light horny waterproof structure forming the external covering of birds.

Such was that happy garden-state,
While man there walk'd without a mate;
After a place so pure and sweet,
What other help could yet be meet!
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two paradises 'twere in one
To live in paradise alone.

How well the skillfulgard'ner drew
Of flow'rs and herbs this dial new,
Where from above the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And as it works, th' industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

Explanation:

"The Garden" is a beautiful lyric poem by Andrew Marvell where he invokes Nature and praises the blessings of nature. The poem begins on an assertive note on Marvell's inclination towards the rawness of nature and how the poet builds his Garden of Eden. The poet or the speaker's search for spiritual bliss in the garden of nature is evidently portrayed throughout the poem. Compared to the serenity that the speaker finds in his solitude amidst nature, earthly praises and appreciation are transitory. The poem emphasises man's struggle for power and fame by working endlessly for hours without noticing the beauty and serenity that their soul may find in mingling with the nature. The poem opens by reflecting upon this very idea of man ignoring the nature for fulfilment of their material happiness.

However, in the second stanza, the speaker expresses his contentment by living in the garden, far away from the worries and struggles that is prevalent in the society. To the speaker, the society cannot provide him with inner spiritual harmony and oneness with his own soul, which he finds in the garden. Addressing the society as rude, the speaker feels secured among the plants of the garden and enjoys being freed of all humanly associations. He prefers 'delicious solitude' that the garden provides.

Contemplating the beauty of the garden that is green and soothing which also depicts a peaceful state of mind, the speaker reflects on how the 'fond lovers', that is, the couples who are very much engulfed in their romantic disposition tends to overlook the beauty of nature. Metaphorically, this is implied by the line 'cut in these tress their mistress' name'. According to the speaker, this act of the lovers cannot be justified and hence points out them to be 'cruel' lovers. These trees surpass humanly beauty according to the speaker. The speaker also points out how he would have preserved and protected it.

The garden provides the best retreat to the lovers whose passion has fade away. By this, the speaker perhaps refers to the fading away of physical pleasures or intimacy of the ones in love. If we carefully read the stanza, we tend to understand the personification of "Love". From a mere feeling, love is equalled to a person and the garden is 'his best retreat'.

Referring to Greek mythology, the poet explains how even the Gods, Apollo and Pan, ended up in loving trees. Marvell very wittily cites the examples of Apollo and Pan, the Gods and their love for the nymphs Daphne and Syrinx respectively. Mythically seen, the two nymphs are turned into plants by river gods when they were being chased by Apollo and Pan. Hence, it conveys meaning when the speaker relates the stories of the Gods to their love for 'laurel' and 'reed'.

All this while, the speaker talked about his preference for a life in the garden rather than in the society. In this stanza, we are exposed to the wonderful life that the garden offers to the speaker. The tone is pastoral as it describes the richness of nature with its 'ripe apples', 'luscious vine', 'nectarine peach', etc. Here, the poet speaker busily falls for the objects of nature that makes him lively and energetic. He indulges himself by playing and enjoying the richness bestowed upon by the nature. 'Ensnared with flowers', the speaker falls cosily on the grass. This is the amount of luxury that the dwellers indulge in at the garden.

The speaker not only finds pleasure amidst nature, his mind also takes recourse into its own. The speaker's mind attains a state of happiness. The poet describes the mind as an ocean where every object has its own significance and resemblance. The capability of the mind is stressed further to be holding not only the images of objects that exist in the real world but also of objects, which do not exist or are imaginary things. The speaker emphasises on the mind's ability to surpass all worldly ideas by creating its own source of happiness with objects of its imagination, which can better take place in the garden surrounded by the greenery of nature.

Shifting the idea from the body to the soul, the speaker compares his soul to that of a bird. His soul glides effortlessly into the branches of trees and rests there. The commonplace activities of a bird are well captured in this stanza. Like the bird, the speaker's soul rests and sings, combing its 'silver wings' and prepares itself for a longer flight. This is symbolic of the soul's journey from one world to the other.

Akin to the Garden of Eden, when untouched by 'Eve', this garden was also pure. He exclaimed that it would have been better if man could get

solitude in this garden. However, it was beyond a human being's fate to wander freely in such a solitary and peaceful atmosphere. Had the garden been available to man alone, he could get two paradises in one, that is, the garden. It implies that solitariness is in itself a paradise. By double paradise, the poet refers to the life in the garden with oneself.

Praising the gardener for his skill, the poet talked about the flowers and herbs and their part in keeping track of time. The poet described that as the different positions of the sun symbolise different zodiac symbols, so does the fragrance of the flowers stand for 'fragrant zodiac run' implying the seasonal blooming of different flowers at different times in a year. Spiritually considered, the gardener may be the God and the 'zodiac run' may be compared to the different phases of a man's life. The bees are like the people who are busy in their lives and 'computes its time'. Just as the bees in the garden, the speaker wishes to live amidst nature in the garden. However, he could still keep track of the time through the 'fragrant' flowers of the garden.



LET US KNOW

As we summarise the poem, it becomes clear that the emphasis is on the wilderness of nature, its exotic life and the peaceful boon it provides to mankind. The garden symbolises nature as well as the Garden of Eden. It is interesting to note that these two poems contradict one another on a point, that is, the emphasis on woman's presence. While Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" explores the intense passion of a lover towards his lady love, his poem "The Garden" dwells upon the idea of a life adrift from woman in particular and society in general. Markedly different in tone and themes, both the poems reveal Marvell's genius as a poet and his poetic brilliance. Poems like these have established Marvell's reputation as one of the greatest among the metaphysical poets.

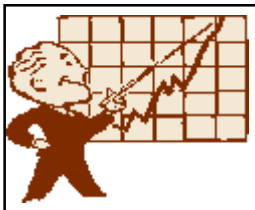
8.5 MARVEL'S POETIC STYLE

Marvell's genius as a satirist was well known and evident from the influence he had on his contemporaries like John Dryden and later on Alexander Pope. During his own time, Marvell's reputation as a political satirist was immense. He was able to establish himself as a leading satirist with political inclinations and was noted for his patriotism. He favoured the Parliament, and raised his voice against courtly corruptions. However, the lyric poems by Marvell were not popularised until the 19th century with the revival of metaphysical poetry.

As a metaphysical poet, Andrew Marvell employed conceits widely in his poems. With reference to the two poems that we have discussed, Marvell's poetic style is vibrant and lively. Marvell designed "To His Coy Mistress" in the 'carpe diem' style, that is, the poet speaker fully took hold of the particular situation or the moment where he argued against the coyness of his lady by asking her to fulfil his sensual regards for her. 'Carpe diem' is a term borrowed from Horace, the great Roman poet which meant "seize the day". In this poem, a contrast pervaded on the one hand there was the lover's desire for his lady and on the other hand, the limitations of Time. Fluctuating in between two contrasting states of mind, the lover however emphasised on living the present moment to the fullest. As Eliot pointed out in his essay "Andrew Marvell", the "high speed, the succession of concentrated images, each magnifying the original fancy" of this poem brings about the 'poetic effect'. Along with Marvell, all the metaphysical poets belonging to the 17th century had a 'unified sensibility' that enabled them to juxtapose thought and feelings into a single whole, as stated by Eliot in his essay titled "The Metaphysical Poetry". "The Garden" is set in a meditative tradition with a dismissing attitude towards the outer world. His use of figures of speech like hyperboles is evident as in, for example, "short and narrow verged Shade", "While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close / To weave the Garlands of repose", etc. Marvell's "The Garden" also has a pastoral quality that brings it in close proximity to the Romantic poets.

It is important to note that Andrew Marvell is perhaps the finest of the Metaphysical Poets after John Donne. He mingles the polish of Jonson with

the wit of Donne, and the subtlety with which he deploys his knowledge of Latin poetry embeds his work profoundly in tradition without lessening its originality. Marvell wrote mostly in tetrameter couplets, and his command of this meter is so complete that it yields a complete command over meaning too-or rather, his poems show how intimately the two skills are connected: a slight metrical nuance or semantic ambiguity, can turn a very ordinary and traditional line into one of striking profundity. T.S. Eliot's famous phrase, "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace," applies better to Marvell than to anyone else. Marvell's poem "To his Coy Mistress" is certainly the finest carpe diem poem in English, while "The Garden" sums up all the ambivalences of the pastoral tradition in its polished couplets. "No white nor red was ever seen / So amorous as this lovely green" both asserts and smiles at the view that retreat from the world gives us the essence of the experiences we are avoiding. (Source: *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics)*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: In what way, does the poem "The Garden" provide the best retreat to the lovers?

Q 8: How does Marvell begin the poem "The Garden"?

Q 9: What do you understand by 'carpe diem'?

Q 10: Comment on Marvell's Poetic Style.



8.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Andrew Marvell is one of the most noted poets of the last of the 17th century Metaphysical poets. His work incorporates many of the elements associated with the Metaphysical school: The tension of opposing values, metaphorical complexities, logical and linguistic subtleties, and unexpected twists of thoughts and arguments as reflected in the poems about which you have read in the above sections. You have learnt that "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden"—both first

published in *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681)—are characterised by complexity and ambiguous morality, which critics believe both define his talent and account for his appeal. The poems that we have discussed in this unit have helped you to gain a critical insight into the poems of Marvell inculcating in you a fair idea about Marvell's use of conceits, wit, use of literary allusions, etc.



8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" in 1650.

Ans to Q 2: John Milton helped Marvell in securing the post of an Assistant Latin Secretary and became his friend… …Andrew Marvell saved John Milton from a possible execution by the monarchical government with the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660.

Ans to Q 3: Marvell lived during a tumultuous period of British history… …was deeply affected by the bitter fighting between the Royalists and Parliamentarians and later by Charles I's execution and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate… …some comment that the political inconclusiveness mirrors the indecision found in his poems.

Ans to Q 4: Duality of spirituality and temporality as reflected in poems like "A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure" and "A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body."… …Ambiguity regarding Marvell's real attitude toward the political and social upheavals of the Civil War and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate.

Ans to Q 5: An impatient lover is the speaker of the poem who puts argument against the coyness of his lady by emphasising to live in the present moment and engage in the glory of physical intimacy.

Ans to Q 6: The metaphor of 'vegetable love' might be an indication to eroticism. However, the poet uses nature and makes a point to refer to the steady growth of vegetables in relation to human feeling or desire. Although the metaphor appears to be somewhat obscure, the speaker

expresses that adoring the beauty of the lady, part by part, would take him over thousands of years. That way his love is compared to the natural growth of vegetables that too takes time to grow and attain full maturity.

Ans to Q 7: The garden provides the best retreat to the lovers whose passion has fade away. By this, the speaker perhaps refers to the fading away of physical pleasures or intimacy of the ones in love.

Ans to Q 8: The poem begins on an assertive note on Marvell's inclination towards the rawness of nature and how the poet builds his Garden of Eden. The poet or the speaker's search for spiritual bliss in the garden of nature is evidently portrayed throughout the poem.

Ans to Q 9: 'Carpe diem' is a term borrowed from Horace- the great Roman poet which meant "seize the day". Marvell designed "To His Coy Mistress" in the 'carpe diem' style, that is, the poet speaker fully took hold of the particular situation or the moment where he argued against the coyness of his lady by asking her to fulfil his sensual regards for her.

Ans to Q 10: Marvell's use of tetrameter couplets… …his command of this meter is so complete that it yields a complete command over meaning… …his poems show how intimately a slight metrical nuance or semantic ambiguity, can turn a very ordinary and traditional line into one of striking profundity.



8.8 FURTHER READING

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6) Moldenhauer, Joseph J. (1968). "The Voices of Seduction in "To His Coy Mistress": A Rhetorical Analysis". *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 189-206.

7) *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton University Press, 1993.



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. Write a note on Andrew Marvell as a metaphysical poet.

Q 2. Attempt a critical analysis of the poem "The Garden" by Andrew Marvell.

Q 3. Discuss Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" as a love poem.

Q 4. Discuss the significance of Andrew Marvell in the 17th century poetic tradition by reflecting upon his poetic style and techniques.

Q 5. Analyse the themes of the two poems "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Garden" by Andrew Marvell.

Q 6. Summarise Marvell's views on tyranny and oppression. Whom does he view as the oppressor? Are these political tracts as ambiguous as Marvell's poems?

Q 7. Contrast ''To His Coy Mistress'' with some of William Shakespeare's love lyrics. Identify how both authors utilise or reject irony in their works.

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UNIT 9: JOHN MILTON: PARADISE LOST "BOOK I" (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 John Milton: Life and Works

9.4 Context of the Poem

9.5 Extracts from *Paradise Lost* (Book I)

9.6 Let Us Sum Up

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.8 Possible Questions

9.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of John Milton
- locate the proper context in which Milton wrote this poem
- relate the poem to Milton's life and the events of his age
- place the poet in the English poetic tradition
- appreciate the range of issues raised by Milton in the poem.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is based on the life and works of John Milton, and his epic poem *Paradise Lost.* Milton was a controversial writer of his time. Being a strict Puritan, he openly challenged some of the very basic biblical doctrines, particularly Preordination and Free will, which he deals with in *Paradise Lost*. It is a long poem, which elaborately tells the Biblical story of Satan's expulsion from Heaven, his tempting of Eve, and the subsequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. Thus, this poem deals with "Man's first disobedience" and the awful consequences of tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree. By his treatment of the subject, Milton wishes to 'assert' 'Eternal Providence' and 'justify the ways of God to men'. By the time you finish reading this unit, you will not only get to know about the life history of Milton,

but will also be able to discuss the various issues raised in this poem by Milton.

9.3 JOHN MILTON: LIFE AND WORKS



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Born in London on December 9, 1608, into an upper middle class and deeply religious Puritan family, John Milton is one of the most significant early 17th century poets. His father was a well-to-do scrivener who had also keen interest in literature and music. He had inherited from his father puritanical and republican tendencies. In Milton's time, London was a city of narrow lanes and muddy streets. However, soon London became a leading trading centre of the world. At some point, in *Paradise Lost,* when Satan has a glimpse of Eve, Milton very artistically diverts the attention of the readers from the action in the epic and compares Satan's pleasure in Paradise with the pleasure of walking out of the city of London in a summer morning.

Milton was educated at home and at Saint Paul's school which was perhaps the best school during that time for humanistic studies of Latin and Greek. Later he received education from Christ's College, Cambridge. By the time, he went to Cambridge at the age of 17. Milton had already consumed an impressive range of ancient authors and was an expert in Latin composition in prose and verse. His father, in addition to sending his son to an expensive school, hired private tutors to instruct him in subjects like modern languages like French and Italian which were not taught at Saint Paul's. By the time he went to Cambridge, he was proficient in at least three languages—English, Latin and Greek. One significant information is that Milton read voraciously and he always used to burn midnight's oil. While at Cambridge, Milton wrote several Latin Poems including the significant "Ode on the Morning of Christ Nativity". After taking his B.A. in March 1630, Milton took his M.A. in July 1632 and then embarked on another six years of voracious private study first at Hammersmith, upstream from London on

the Thames, and then at Horton, in Buckinghamshire. Milton's parents wanted him to become a priest in the Anglican Church. However, the corruption, conservatism, worldliness and authoritarianism of the Church made him abandon the decision. Milton instead concentrated more on poetry and learning. At the university, Milton was noted for his personal beauty and the strictness of life. After 1638, Milton travelled extensively and spent many months in Italy. He saw himself the scenes which he had read in the ancient poets, and got a chance to converse with scholars. But, he got the news of political troubles in England and he felt it to be his duty to return. Back in London, he undertook the education of two nephews and married the young daughter of a Cavalier Squire. In addition, he kept his eyes on the public affairs of his contemporary London.

You should be interested to know that by the time he became 31 year old, Milton could befriend many intellectuals from Florence, Rome and Naples. During his visit to Florence, he even visited Galileo, the most important scientist in Europe at that time. Milton recalls Galileo with admiration in his *Aeropagitica* and mentions him in *Paradise Lost* every time references to the idea of the Cosmos are made. In Naples, Milton met Giovanni Manso who also happened to be the patron and biographer of the famous Italian epic poet Torquato Tasso whose poem *Jerusalem Liberated* demonstrated things that were very important for Milton. From Tasso, Milton realised that an epic poem in the tradition of Homer and Virgil could be written even in the modern age and that the convention of the epic poem like battles and combats, noble speeches and debates, epic similes, supernatural interventions and invocation of the muse could be adapted even to a Christian subject.

In 1643, he married Mary Powell, the daughter of a Royal family. Soon, Mary found Milton's Puritan austerity and intellectual stature too much for her. A few weeks later, she left him although later, he was reconciled with his wife. Early in 1652, Milton's eyesight weakened and he became totally blind. After few months, his wife Mary Powell too died leaving him three daughters to raise, the oldest of whom was only six. For a devoted teacher and scholar, one who had worked all his life with his eyes, Milton might have

thought that his education and talents were now useless without eyesight. You should note that his sonnet 19 entitled "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" is a response to this anxiety only.

Milton married Katherine Woodcock in 1656. Both she and the child she bore to him died in 1658. As some scholars think that Milton's sonnet 23 entitled "Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint" might have been addressed to Katherine whom Milton never saw. It is both pathetic and interesting to read that Milton 'saw' his wife come back to him in dream. With the death of Katherine, the catastrophes of Milton's middle years were far from over. Living more in relative obscurity Milton gave his nights and mornings to the composition of *Paradise Lost* his magnum opus. In 1663, he married Elizabeth Minshull, who survived him and by 1665, before retiring to the country during the Great Plague of 1665-66, he completed *Paradise Lost*.



LET US KNOW

You should note that after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, James I was on the English throne. Soon the tension between the King and the Parliament, and between the Anglican Church and the Puritans, grew so intense that it finally led to the Civil War and the execution of James's son Charles I. What is also interesting to note is the fact that this troubling time in England produced excellent pieces of literature one of which is undoubtedly the *Paradise Lost*. This period is also famous for the publication of the *Authorised Version* of the Bible, Shakespeare's last plays, John Donne's Metaphysical Poetry and Ben Johnson's plays.

The Civil War ended with the victory of the Parliament and the execution of the king. When the Commonwealth was established, Milton became Latin Secretary with the official title of 'Secretary for Foreign Tongues'. His main role was to write pamphlets justifying government policies. With the fall of the Commonwealth and the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, he went into retirement. He was living quietly in the outskirts of London. He dedicated to his daughters his great epic *Paradise Lost* and *Samson*

Agonistics. He died in 1674. He was buried beside his father in the London church of Saint Giles, Cripplegate.

Critic Throndike states that Milton had great virtues. His life was pure, honest, upright, and independent. With humour, he had intended bitter irony. You should realise that perhaps no other English poet has been so closely involved in the events of his time than John Milton has. Before the publication of his *Paradise Lost* Milton was hardly known as a great poet. He was known more as a political controversialist, as a disestablishmentarian, as a proponent of divorce, as a defender of regicide and a great propagandist under the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell. Today, Milton's significance as a writer lies in the *Paradise Lost* if not in anything else.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Briefly reflect on Milton's educational background.

Q 2: Whom did Milton meet in Florence and Naples and what did he learn from them?

Q 3: What did Milton write to address his blindness?

Milton's Works:

Milton's work can be divided into three periods. The first period covers his poetry up to 1640. In his period, he wrote various short poems. His first important work in English is "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity". The poems "On Shakespeare" and "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty three" also came out during this period." Ode on Christ's Nativity" is a dignified lyric. It celebrates the birth of Christ. This poem shows Milton's lifelong preoccupation with the Christian vision of history. Here, Milton uses classical poetic forms to express Christian forms and ideas. The poem indicates the influence of Spenser on Milton. When Milton left Cambridge, went to Horton, and spent six years in study, during this period the companion poems "L'Allegro" (The Happy Man) and "II Penseroso" (The Serious Man), the masque *Comus*, the pastoral elegy "Lycidas", and a number of sonnets

including the famous autobiographical sonnet "Twenty Third Birthday" were written. In this poem, Milton expresses his concerns that even at the age of twenty-four he has achieved very little. The lyrics of *L'Allegro* and *II Penseroso* deal with the delightful sights and sounds of the English countryside. They give the impressions of the poet, first in joyful mood and again, in a mood of thoughtful melancholy. While *Comus* marks an important stage in the development of Milton's thoughts.

Milton's second period, which begins from 1638 to 1660, is a period of prose writing. In this period political writing in prose in the form of pamphlets attacking the existing political social and religious systems were prominent. *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Areopagitica* or *A speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing, The Image Breaker, First Defence of the English People (written in Latin), The Second Defence of the People of England* came out in the second period. This is an important period in Milton's literary career as being the Latin secretary under Cromwell he was compelled to justify certain policies of the Government but at the same time, some of his pamphlets are also inspired by the exiled Royalists. Therefore, Milton in these works, mainly in the *The Second Defence* seeks to defend his position as a writer with many autobiographical information as we get to know that his liking for studies finally damaged his eyesight.

Milton's third period significantly, coincides with the 14 years of the Restoration from 1660 to 1674. Milton completed *Paradise Lost* in this period. Around the year 1658, he began the composition of the great epic *Paradise Lost*. As you have read in the previous subsection, at the time of writing it Milton was totally blind. The failure of the English people to understand the meaning of history and liberty, made Milton begin this poem with a Fall with the loss of liberty by Adam and Eve. Milton claimed that he sacrificed his eyes in the service of liberty and Cromwell's government. Milton's two other works, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together in 1671, i.e. three years before the poet's death.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the three periods in Milton's literary career?

Q 5: What connection can you make between the Restoration and the writing of *Paradise Lost*?

9.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

There are at least two possible contexts in which the poem *Paradise Lost* has been written— one is the **religious context**, and the other is the **political context**. The Fall of Man is envisaged as the one central issues inspiring John Milton to write *Paradise Lost*. The whole of the epic opens with the direct reference to the Fall of Man caused by "First disobedience." The consequence of this historic action is a tragic act, resulting in man's loss of eternal grace, bliss and liberty. On the surface level, Eve plucked and ate the fruit of the Forbidden Tree and faced eternal damnation after being seduced and tempted by Satan disguised as a serpent. However, in religious connotation it is a transgression of God's divine order and justice, of man taking the law into his own hands instead of testifying to the supreme and unquestioned power of the Almighty. The Fall of Man does not merely mean triumph of Satan, but it is Milton's objective in *Paradise Lost* to trace the history of man's salvation and redemption, which were important theological issues during his days. Man will be redeemed by the supreme sacrificial act of Christ, the son of God, by his life, actions, suffering and death on earth. Milton's treatment of the Fall yields the obvious Puritanical meaning and warning to Man to understand the basic issues of life, and to pay heed to every action, however trivial it may seem.

However, you must also be aware of the Restoration politics of the 17th century to understand the context of the *Paradise Lost.* Milton lived through a period of politically turmoil and violent change. After the death of Elizabeth I, King James of Scotland became then King of England. However, even after 5 years of reign till 1608, James lacked popularity. It was believed

that James had been called to rule by God's command rather than by the will of the people. Subsequently, James indulged in frequent clashes with Parliament over the control of the Government. James also thought that he should control the church through the Bishops. Gradually, there also emerged a group of people called the Puritans who favoured a more austere and purer form of worship of Church organisation rather than the Pope who held more than one living backed by the king. Puritanism soon became an attitude of mind and along with Parliamentarianism it sought to resist royal absolutism first by constitutional means and then from 1642, by forces of arms. James I's son Charles I quarrelled bitterly with the Parliament until 1629 as he was determined to rule without a Parliament at all. In 1642, he even used forces to crush down the Puritan rebellion under the brilliant leadership of Oliver Cromwell. Subsequently, in 1649 Charles I was beheaded and Cromwell became the ruler of England as the Lord Protector until his death in 1658. However, the Commonwealth became increasingly unpopular, as there was none to replace Cromwell. Therefore, in 1660, the Stuart monarchy had to be restored to the English throne in the person of Charles II. When Milton died in 1674, Charles II was still on the English throne. However, England was moving towards a second revolution after a few years to secure Parliamentary rule in England and making its monarchy more constitutional. Critics would like to make connections with Satan's rebellion against God in *Paradise Lost* with Cromwell's rebellion against the King Charles I.

Epic:

You have already read about epic as a literary form in Course II. This is just a recapitulation of what you already know. An epic is a long narrative poem that presents heroic characters who take part in heroic actions over an extended period. It is centred on a grand and serious subject, is related in a lofty style and has as its protagonist a heroic or divine figure on whose actions depend the fate of a tribe, a nation or the entire human race. The traditional epics also called the Primary epics were written from historical and legendry material which has developed first in the oral tradition of a nation during a period of expansion and warfare. To this group are ascribed

the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer and the Anglo Saxon *Beowulf*. The Literary or Secondary epics were composed by sophisticated craftsmen in deliberate imitation of the traditional form. Of this kind, Virgil's Latin epic *Aeniad*, served as the chief model for Milton's *Paradise Lost* which in turn became the inspiration for Keats' fragmentary epic *Hyperion* and *Jerusalem*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is an epic?

Q 7: Which are the two contexts of the poem *Paradise Lost*?

9.5 EXTRACTS FROM *PARADISE LOST* (BOOK I)

[Lines quoted from the Oxford Edition of *Paradise Lost*]

In 1667, *Paradise Lost: A Poem Written in Ten Books by John Milton* appeared in quarto. *Book* I of *Paradise Lost* consists of 798 lines. For the convenience of discussion, we have quoted only lines 1-282 of Book I. However, we insist that you read the entire Book I in the Norton Critical edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heavenly muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of chaos: or if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
And chiefly thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

Say first, for heaven hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause
Moved our grand parents in that happy state,

Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off
From their creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the world besides?
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?
The infernal serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out from heaven, with all his host
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equalled the most high,
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God
Raised impious war in heaven and battle proud
With vain attempt. Him the almighty power
Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy the omnipotent to arms.
Nine times the space that measures day and night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
Confounded though immortal: but his doom
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay
Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate:
At once as far as angels' ken he views
The dismal situation waste and wild,
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed:
Such place eternal justice had prepared

For those rebellious, here their prison ordained
In utter darkness, and their portion set
As far removed from God and light of heaven
As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed
With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
He soon discerns, and weltering by his side
One next himself in power, and next in crime,
Long after known in Palestine, and named
Beelzebub. To whom the arch-enemy,
And thence in heaven called Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence thus began.

If thou beest he; but O how fallen! how changed
From him, who in the happy realms of light
Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
Myriads though bright: if he whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the glorious enterprise,
Joined with me once, now misery hath joined
In equal ruin: into what pit thou seest
From what height fallen, so much the stronger proved
He with his thunder: and till then who knew
The force of those dire arms?yet not for those,
Nor what the potent victor in his rage
Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
Though changed in outward lustre; that fixed mind
And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,
That with the mightiest raised me to contend,

And to the fierce contention brought along
Innumerable force of spirits armed
That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
His utmost power with adverse power opposed
In dubious battle on the plains of heaven,
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deify his power,
Who from the terror of this arm so late
Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall; since by fate the strength of gods
And this empyreal substance cannot fail,
Since through experience of this great event
In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war
Irreconcilable, to our grand foe,
Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven.

So spake the apostate angel, though in pain,
Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair:
And him thus answered soon his bold compeer.

O prince, O chief of many thronèd powers,
That led the embattled seraphim to war
Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endangered heaven's perpetual king;
And put to proof his high supremacy,
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate,
Too well I see and rue the dire event,
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath lost us heaven, and all this mighty host
In horrible destruction laid thus low,
As far as gods and heavenly essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallowed up in endless misery.
But what if he our conqueror (whom I now
Of force believe almighty, since no less
Than such could have o'erpowered such force as ours)
Have left us this our spirit and strength entire
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
Or do him mightier service as his thralls
By right of war, whate'er his business be
Here in the heart of hell to work in fire,
Or do his errands in the gloomy deep;
What can it then avail though yet we feel
Strength undiminished, or eternal being
To undergo eternal punishment?
Whereto with speedy words the arch-fiend replied.

Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,
To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which oft-times may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.

But see the angry victor hath recalled
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit
Back to the gates of heaven: the sulphurous hail
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid
The fiery surge, that from the precipice
Of heaven received us falling, and the thunder,
Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.
Let us not slip the occasion, whether scorn,
Or satiate fury yield it from our foe.
Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
From off the tossing of these fiery waves,
There rest, if any rest can harbour there,
And reassembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
How overcome this dire calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not what resolution from despair.

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate
With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
That sparkling blazed, his other parts besides
Prone on the flood, extended long and large
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream:
Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays:
So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay
Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence
Had risen or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enraged might see
How all his malice served but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
On man by him seduced, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance poured.
Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air
That felt unusual weight, till on dry land
He lights, if it were land that ever burned
With solid, as the lake with liquid fire;
And such appeared in hue, as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible
And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singèd bottom all involved
With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole
Of unblessed feet.Him followed his next mate,
Both glorying to have scaped the Stygian flood

As gods, and by their own recovered strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal power.

Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
That we must change for heaven, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
What shall be right: furthest from him is best
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields
Where joy forever dwells: hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest hell
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; the almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition though in hell:
Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
The associates and copartners of our loss
Lie thus astonished on the oblivious pool,
And call them not to share with us their part
In this unhappy mansion, or once more
With rallied arms to try what may be yet
Regained in heaven, or what more lost in hell?

So Satan spake, and him Beelzebub
Thus answered. Leader of those armies bright,
Which but the omnipotent none could have foiled,
If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge
Of battle when it raged, in all assaults
Their surest signal, they will soon resume
New courage and revive, though now they lie
Grovelling and prostrate on yon lake of fire,
As we erewhile, astounded and amazed,
No wonder, fallen such a pernicious height.



9.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that John Milton was an English poet, polemicist, man of letters, and a civil servant for the Commonwealth Regime under Oliver Cromwell. He wrote at a time of religious flux and political upheaval, and he is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* which is written in blank verse and which tells the Biblical story of human being's 'Fall'. You have learnt that Milton's poetry and prose reflect deep personal convictions, a passion for freedom and self-determination, and the urgent issues and political turbulence of his day.



9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Milton was educated at home and at Saint Paul's school… …he also went to Christ's College, Cambridge… …privately he also learnt modern languages like French and Italian… …after receiving B.A. and M.A. degrees, Milton embarked on voracious private study and concentrated more on poetry and learning.

Ans to Q 2: In Florence Milton met Galileo… …Galileo influenced Milton's ideas of the Cosmos which are noticable available in *Paradise Lost*… …In Naples, Milton met Giovanni Manso, the patron and biographer of the famous Italian epic poet Torquato Tasso… …From Tasso, Milton revived the idea of writing one epic.

Ans to Q 3: He wrote a sonnet entitled "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent"… …By 1652, Milton's eyesight weakened and he became totally blind… …After few months, his wife Mary Powell too died… …Milton thought that his education and talents were now useless without eyesight… …subsequently, he tells about his anxiety through this poem.

Ans to Q 4: First period upto 1640… …second period begins from 1638 to 1660… …third period starts from 1660 to 1674.

Ans to Q 5: Milton contextualises his *Paradise Lost* in the experiences of the Restoration… …he addresses why the revolution failed… …Milton could easily understand the failure of the English people to understand the meaning of history and liberty… …Milton began his poem with the idea of a Fall with the loss of liberty by Adam and Eve.

Ans to Q 6: An epic is a long narrative poem… …it presents heroic characters… …it is centred on a grand and serious subject… …is related in a lofty style… …its protagonist is a heroic or divine figure on whose actions depend the fate of a tribe, a nation or the entire human race.

Ans to Q 7: One is the **religious context**, and the other is the political context… …Religious context is rooted in Milton's objective to trace the history of man's salvation and redemption… … political context can be explained in terms of Restoration politics of the 17th century England based on Oliver Cromwell's rejection of Charles I.



9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. How do you think the Restoration politics influenced John Milton's poetic self? Give reasons for your answer.

Q 2. Discuss the significance of Milton as a 17th century poet with particular reference to his poem *The Paradise Lost*.

Q 3. Provide a detailed sketch of the religious and political contexts of the poem *Paradise Lost*.

Q 4. Discuss the life and works of Milton.

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UNIT 10: JOHN MILTON: *PARADISE LOST* "BOOK I " (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 The Plot of *Paradise Lost*

10.4 Reading *Paradise Lost* (Book I)

10.5 Milton's Poetic Style

10.6 Let Us Sum Up

10.7 Further Reading

10.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.9 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- retell the Biblical story implicit in the poem *Paradise Lost*
- identify the different aspects of BOOK I of the poem on the basis of your reading
- discuss Milton's Poetic style used in the poem

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit needs to be read in connection with the previous unit. In 1667, *Paradise Lost: A Poem written in Ten Books* by John Milton appeared in quarto without either the "arguments" or the poet's note on the verse. Although, the poem was divided into 10 books, it was substantially complete, only a handful of verses shorter than the later twelve–book version. The second edition of twelve book version which reads *Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books* was published in 1674. What is so interesting is the fact that the whole work cannot be considered a continuous narrative as the main story begins in the middle (In Medias Res) and earlier events are presented in terms of dreams, reminiscences and conversations. Milton starts the poem stating

his general purpose to tell the story of men's fall and the consequences that stemmed from it. Let us, in this unit, have a look at the plot of this great epic, its various aspects and Milton's poetic style. However, for our discussion, we shall stick to Book I of the poem as our prescribed text.

10.3 THE PLOT OF *PARADISE LOST*

In 1667, *Paradise Lost: A Poem written in Ten Books* by John Milton appeared in quarto without either the "arguments" or the poet's note on the verse. Although, the poem was divided into ten books, it was substantially complete, only a handful of verses shorter than the later twelve–book version. The second edition of twelve book version which reads *Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books* was published in 1674. What is so interesting is the fact that the whole work cannot be considered a continuous narrative as the main story begins in the middle (In Medias Res) and earlier events are presented in terms of dreams, reminiscences and conversations. Milton starts the poem stating his general purpose to tell the story of men's fall and the consequences that stemmed from it. Let us have a look at the plot of this great epic.



LET US KNOW

In Medias Res: It is the practice of beginning an epic or other narrative by plunging into a crucial situation, in the middle of things, that is part of a related chain of events; the situation is an extension of previous events and will be developed in later action. The principle of in medias res is based on the practice of Homer in the Iliad and the Odyssey. The *Iliad*, for example, begins dramatically with the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon during the Trojan War. Though its roots are in ancient epic poems, in medias res can be found today across numerous fiction and nonfiction narrative forms

The scene of action is Hell and the time is nine days after the expulsion of Satan and his followers from Heaven. Stupefied, they lie on the burning lake. Actually, they have been hurled into hell following their defeat in the war

in heaven. Satan addresses his comrades and urges them to rise on the wings and get ready for a battle. They may still regain heaven or there may be other worlds to conquer in particular 'Eden' a newly created place for newly created creatures. Subsequently, 'Pandemonium' is created where a council will be held to discuss the future course of action. It is also agreed that Satan will fly off to the new world of men to see if he can somehow strike at God through his new creation—'man'. Satan escapes from Hell, meets 'Sin' and 'Death', voyages through 'Chaos' and finally comes within sight of the Universe hung in space. In Heaven where God deliberates on man's freedom to choose between good and evil and on the complicated philosophical considerations of free will and predestination. Meanwhile Satan reaches the outer surface of the Universe, wanders through various regions, and finally finds his way in. Adam and Eve are enjoying marital happiness in Eden. Satan overhears their discussion on the Tree of Knowledge and perceives the means to compass their Fall. Uriel, the regent of the Sun, who had shown Satan the way, observes his behaviour and reports back to Heaven. God sends Gabriel to defend man. Satan is frustrated in his first attempt to tempt Eve in dream and finally gets expelled from Eden.

God sends Raphael to Eden to enlighten and warn Adam, to tell him about the revolt of Satan against God and how, inspired by pride, ambition, and envy, he persuaded one-tenth of the angelic host into following him, how Satan was defeated by God's Son in a terrible war in Heaven. Raphael informs Adam, how the universe was created, culminating in the creation of man himself. Adam, having asked some questions on astronomy, reveals Milton's knowledge of Galileo's discoveries and proceeds to give his own version of his creation and that of Eve. Raphael departs once again warning Adam. However, the warning goes in vain, as God already knew that it would not be like this.

Eve falls prey to the temptation of Satan now disguised as a serpent. She eats the fruit and induces Adam to do the same. Adam also eats as he is determined to share Eve's fate. They suddenly become intemperate through lust and anger, and blame each other bitterly. The Son of God comes down to Eden to pronounce God's order of expulsion, hard labour and mortality. Both Adam and Eve are reconciled to accept their fate. Meanwhile,

triumphal Satan returns to Pandemonium and is welcomed by a universal hiss in Hell, as all his followers have now become serpents. The last two Books of *Paradise Lost* recounts another epic tradition, that of looking into the future. For example, in **Book XI** God sends Michael to Eden to reveal the future of Adam and his hope of redemption by Christ on the cross. Michael takes Adam to a high mountain and unfolds a vision of the world's history until the flood. While in **Book XII** reconciled to his fate by a promise of ultimate redemption, Adam takes Eve by hand and they pass out of Eden to face the hardships of the outside world of affairs.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What happens in the first few lines of the poem *Paradise Lost*?

Q 2: What happens after Satan tempts Eve?

10.4 READING *PARADISE LOST* (BOOK I)

In this section, we shall try to discuss Book I of *Paradise Lost* line by line. However, we strongly advise that you read all the 12 Books of epic poem from a standard edition like the Oxford Edition of the Book, and enjoy Milton's art of narrating the story of 'Man's Fall'.

Lines 1-26

Milton begins Book I by affirming his general purpose of 'justifying the ways of God to men' and by stating how benevolently, God dealt with men before and after his Fall. To follow the epic convention, he invokes the heavenly muse for assistance in writing his epic in a style that should match the greatness of his grand design. Milton describes his ambition to tell

"Of Man's First disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose moral taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe…" (lines 1-3)

This way from line 1-16, Milton states his epic purpose. He begs the 'Heavenly Muse' to aid his 'adventurous song' while it pursues things 'unattempted yet in prose or rhyme'. In the invocation of the Muse, Milton

follows a poetic tradition adopted from antiquity. But, that poetic tradition has also been given significance. The Heavenly Muse (that is, Urania, originally the Muse of astronomy) is in reality that divine inspiration which revealed the truths of religion to Moses. Milton also refers to Biblical mountains in preference to Olympus, Helicon, Horeb where Moses saw the burning bush, and Sinae where God gave him the Ten Commandments. It is also the spirit of God which dwells in the heart of every believer. Milton's invocations are, therefore, really part of Christian prayers.

Lines 27-298

These lines opens with the scene of a fiery lake in Hell, in which lie, stunned and shocked, Satan and all rebellious angels who, with their leader Satan, have been hurled there from high Heaven by the wrath of God. Milton describes Satan's appearance and reveals his character through his dialogue with Beelzebub or 'Lord of the Flies', his chief lieutenant. Most interestingly, Satan's pride and pre-eminence, even in defeat, are stressed. Milton's own passion for liberty finds expression in Satan's speech–"Here at least we shall be free". Although he is beaten fiercely in the battle with God, his determination to take revenge is so strong that he rouses himself and makes his way to the burning lake. Like a true epic hero, he rallies his broken legion. In line 74, the distance between Hell and Heaven is also stressed. This distance is three times the distance from earth the centre of the Universe. In the address to the multitude of angels in Book I, he assumes the role of an inspiring leader rousing his troops from a state of lethargy by stinging words and filling them with his own great spirit. You can see that even in this moment of defeat and humiliation, the defiant Satan, in his fury, thinks of new war and revenge:

"…What though the field be lost /

All is not lost: the unconquerable will." (lines 105-6)

He gathers his strength to rise from the lake of fire. The rebels must make the most of the dreadful place where they find themselves:

"The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven…

…To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:

Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven." (lines 254-263)

Finally, Satan recognizes the supremacy of Fate and not God who according to him is a tyrant as we find in line 123-24— "Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy / Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven." In line 133, Beelzebub also satisfies Satan's pride by denying that God is the ultimate source of authority. Satan speaks for himself by saying that by right, he is equal with God but superior strength has made God victorious and thus powerful enough to impose His will on others. However, in Hell Satan is the king and God will not envy him for his new and horrible kingdom in Hell.

Lines 299-587

The Fallen Angels are listed and equated with the false Gods of the scriptures and the classics. This helps the readers to comprehend them in human terms. In lines 351-5, the Fallen Angels are compared to a carpet of leaves. This is an example of epic simile. They have lost their original names by which they were known in Heaven and are now given new names by which they would be known on earth as pagan Gods, and Idols of the Old Testament and Pagan Deities of Egypt, Greece and Rome. Milton states that even God also allowed the worship of the Fallen Angels as heathen deities as part of his plan to taste mankind and to retain his superior status.

"Then were they known to man by various names,

And various idols through the heathen world." (**l**ines 374-5)

Then, there is a reference to the Pagan Gods who seduced the Israelites from the worship of Jehovah. Line 384, tells that Manasseh set up alters to Heathen Gods in the Temple. Thus, there are references to the biblical places and people to describe how the Fallen Angels were so dominant in society—they had the ability to take any shape of either sex, for their essence is unmixed with any other element in a way the human spirit is contained in a body. This is very interesting. However, in the poem, Satan too assumes many different shapes.

Lines 588-798

To this end, Satan will mobilise his disordered army and established a dark, evil kingdom of his own. His pre-eminence is once again stressed. He urges his comrades to remain determined to unitedly resist God. To his

prostrate followers "He called so loud that all the hollow deep/Off Hell resounded" issuing the challenge to take up once more the fight, and assert their strength and courage. He further encourages them like this: "Awake, arise, or be for even fallen!" They rise promptly in answer to this call of Satan and respond positively to his purpose to attempt further mischief:

"…out-flew/Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumined Hell..."(lines 664-66)

With mighty labours, they speedily build the huge palace called Pandemonium, Hell's capital, under Mammon's direction. And, this is how, Book I comes to an end. The Fallen Angels hold a conference to plan some vast revenge. In this parliament of Fallen Angels and evil spirits, some urge open warfare, to invade Heaven once again. Others remembering the defeat they have suffered are for building and maintaining their own kingdom in Hell. Milton portrays Satan not as a horrible figure of the medieval imagination, damned in Hell. Instead, we experience the darkened splendour and the exploitative power of a Fallen archangel like Satan as Milton writes: "he above the rest/In shape and gesture proudly eminent/Stood like a tower" (lines 589-91)

The question of Free Will is one of the most vexed and theological issues that directed Milton's own course of thinking. Milton was perhaps obsessed with to what extent a man or a Fallen Angel is free to choose his own course of action. Milton remains very firm when he insists that man's power of reason gives him the freedom to choose between good and evil. However, this insistence also brought Milton into conflict with the Presbyterian faction of the Republican party. The Fallen Angels also think about their freedom. They are free to chose their own destiny and Satan upholds leadership not only by heavenly decree but by his own merit, pre-eminence in battle and by free election. A fervent lover of liberty and individual freedom, Milton for a time allied himself with the Presbyterians who condemned Free Will and despised basic equality of all men. His portrayal of Satan as the grand rebel against imposed authority, divine and benevolent though that authority may be, has encouraged the poet, P.B. Shelly to very famously mention that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it. This makes

one think seriously about the character of Satan. Satan represents a character with whom the reader most readily identifies or sympathises, and Milton makes Satan hold the centre stage in Book I of *Paradise Lost.* We should not make any mistake in understanding that Satan has many admirable characteristics like courage, leadership, dare devil spirit, imagination to realise the enemy's weakness and the courage to exploit that. He never gives up. He has fought and failed but never stops at anything, he continues to fight through other means. This liking for Satan is called by many as 'antinomism' which means working towards an evil end in a manner worthy of good one.

Critics still debate on Milton's use of two cosmologies, the Ptolemic and the Copernican, in *Paradise Lost.* The changeover from the first to the other affected the whole of Western world an echo of which can be found in John Donne's poems like "First Anniversary" and "And New Philosophy Calls All in Doubt." In the Middle Ages, under the Ptolemic system, it was accepted that man was the centre of the universe and earth as the hub of the entire planetary system. It was also believed that a kind of Devine Love made the world go round. However, the most important aspect of Milton's Cosmology is that he seems to have known the discoveries Galileo had made with his telescope and the validity of the Copernican Cosmology which recognises that the Sun and not the earth as the centre around which the entire planetary system revolves. But, Milton derived literary advantages from the older but erroneous system because the Ptolemic system was more orderly. Milton found it easier to work with, and it made God and man the two ends of a "Great Chain" that also showed that Man could ascend to union with the divinity which was almost impossible in the Copernican system.



LET US KNOW

Milton's universe contains Heaven (also called 'Empyream'), Chaos, Earth or the World, and Hell. Heaven in *Paradise Lost* is vast, but not infinite. It has battlements, long unbroken walls, and doors that open into Chaos. Before the Fall of Satan, there were only Heaven and Chaos described as "a dark illimitable ocean, without bound".

If you read all the 12 Books of the poem, you will find that it sets out to justify God's ways to mankind and through Jesus Christ, we find an answer to the problems Milton was dealing with. However, some critics also tend to suggest the poem finally ends up justifying men's ways to God. This idea has been represented through Adam who is also rebellious yet loyal to Eve. Satan is an evil figure, yet his human qualities and energy are really so impressive. Finally, the redemption of the human kind through Christ, the son of God, is foretold to immortalise the connection between God and man.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Why is it that Milton's invocations can be considered part of Christian prayers?

Q 4: What is 'Free Will' in the Miltonic sense?

Q 5: How does Milton portray the character of Satan?

Q 6: How did the idea of cosmology influence Milton while writing the poem?

10.5 MILTON'S POETIC STYLE

Different stylistic features characterise Book I of *Paradise Lost*. One of them is the abundance of similes, allusions, references and proper names. They help create an impression of an encyclopaedic sweep, a quality integral to any epic narrative. Consistency is another feature of Book I of the poem. It is at work in the description of different locations, in the portraitures of the Devils, in the speeches of Satan, and over all, in the debate in Hell. More than anything else, Book I has a lot of contemporary significance, a fact that can be immensely helpful in placing the text in its context. Stopford A. Brooke commented on Milton's style like this: "To the greatness of the artist Milton joined the majesty of a clear and lofty character. His poetic style was as stately as his character, and proceeded from it."

You perhaps have noted that *Paradise Lost* is a Literary epic, but the conscious grandeur of the style in which this epic is written gains the status of a Primary epic. Milton in *Paradise Lost* employs a specific language

remarkable for sustained dignity. The theme of *Paradise Lost* is lofty and elevated. The first full stop after 16 long lines is not without significance. The other most significant characteristic of the epic style is the use of Epic Similes, which pervade the whole of Book I. These similes also contain other stylistic elements like Biblical references or classical allusions, and single sentence paragraphs. Here are a few examples although there are many. In lines 351-384, the long list of the devil's leaders is presented in the epic manner and it parallels the list of Homer's warriors and their ships in the *Iliad.* In lines 594-96, the newly risen sun's losing its beams while shining horizontally is compared to Satan's losing his halo. Similarly, in lines 351-5, the Fallen Angels have been compared to a carpet of leaves while lying down and a swarm of locusts when in flight are likened to the barbarian hordes invading Rome. Milton himself insisted that Biblical form and content were superior to classical literature. Although you find that references from the Old Testament predominate in Book I, the prevailing stylistic influence in Book I is Latin vocabulary and grammatical constructions.

However, if you read the other Books of *Paradise Lost* you will notice that within the epic framework, Milton also uses other poetic style-like his argument in long verse, his logical, progressive and convincing changeover from one point of view to the other. Book I contains the poetry of invocation and the poetry of polemic both of which are primarily rhetorical. He intends the poem to have sublimity of subject and grandeur of style. Milton also explores the idea of a long narrative in occasional portraits of his characters. He creates a language and diction, which is quite appropriate to his theme. Let me tell you in this respect, that he is quite different from Wordsworth who was of the opinion that there is no essential difference between the language of the prose and the language of poetry. Milton did not use natural and everyday language even for describing simple and natural objects. His diction is, at all times, the language of a special art, and not of natural expression of feeling. Milton's style consists in the excellence of the similes by which he conveys his meaning in the *Paradise Lost.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is an Epic Simile? Give some examples from Paradise Lost Book I.

Q 8: What is the difference between Milton and Wordsworth?



10.6 LET US SUM UP

You must have realised by now that Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a landmark text of the 17th century English poetry. From the sections and subsections, you have read in this unit, you must be in a position to connect the life of the poet John Milton to the poem prescribed for you. You have seen how the political and religious concerns of his time found a way into the poem. If Milton is placed in his proper historical period and context, your reading of the text becomes more meaningful. You have also read about the major literary preoccupations and the contradictions of a 17th century poet like Milton. This also helps in comprehending many of his other poems whose contexts are based on specific issues of Milton's society. We have the section "Reading the Text" tried to discuss the poem in terms of the different possible aspects, and you should now be in a position to comment on the range of meanings available in the text of the poem. However, in order to appreciate the poem in its totality, we advise you to read the whole poem and read the important issues addressed by Milton.



10.7 FURTHER READING

1) Bowra, C. M. (1963). *From Virgil to Milton*. London: MacMillan.

2) Daiches, David. (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature.* Vol II. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

3) Danielson, Dennis.(1999). *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

4) Hill, Christopher. (1979).*Milton and the English Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

5) Jeffares, A.N. & Suheil Bushrui. (1980).*John Milton Paradise Lost Books I & II.* Longman York Press.

6) Milton, John. (2005). *Paradise Lost*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. W.W. Norton & Company.

7) William, Zunder. (1999). *Paradise Lost: New Casebooks.* Macmillan: London.



10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The scene of action is Hell and the time is nine days after the expulsion of Satan and his followers from Heaven… …Satan urges his comrades to get ready for a battle… …They may still regain heaven or 'Eden' a newly created place for newly created creatures… … 'Pandemonium' is created where a council will be held to discuss the future course of action.

Ans to Q 2: Eve falls prey to the temptation of Satan disguised as a serpent… …eats the fruit and induces Adam to do the same… …Adam also eats as he is determined to share Eve's fate… …become intemperate through lust and anger.

Ans to Q 3: The Heavenly Muse (that is, Urania, originally the Muse of astronomy) is in reality that divine inspiration which revealed the truths of religion to Moses. Milton also refers to Biblical mountains in preference to Olympus, Helicon, Horeb where Moses saw the burning bush, and Sinae where God gave him the Ten Commandments.

Ans to Q 4: Free Will is a theological issue… …Milton was obsessed with to what extent to which a man or a Fallen Angel is free to choose his own course of action… …Milton remains very firm when he insists that man's power of reason gives him the freedom to choose between good and evil.

Ans to Q 5: Milton makes Satan hold the centre stage in Book I of *Paradise Lost…. …* Satan has many admirable characteristics like courage, leadership, dare devil spirit, imagination… …he never gives up… …he continues to fight through other means.

Ans to Q 6: Milton was influenced by the Ptolemic and the Copernican views of cosmology in *Paradise Lost*… …the Ptolemic system accepted man as the centre of the universe… …the most important aspect of Milton's Cosmology is that he seems to have known the discoveries Galileo, and the validity of the Copernican Cosmology that recognises that the Sun and not the earth as the centre… …but for Milton, the Ptolemic system was more orderly.

Ans to Q 7: Epic simile refers to an extended simile often running to several lines, to intensify the heroic stature of the subject and to serve as decoration… …in lines 351-5, the Fallen Angels have been compared to a carpet of leaves while lying down and a swarm of locusts when in flight are likened to the barbarian hordes invading Rome… …in lines 351-384, the long list of the devil's leaders is presented in the epic manner and it parallels the list of Homer's warriors and their ships in the *Iliad.*

Ans to Q 8: Wordsworth believed that there is no essential difference between the language of the prose and the language of poetry… …Milton did not use natural and everyday language… …his language was always of a special art, and not of natural expression of feeling.



10.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on Milton's choice of the Biblical theme for his epic.

Q 2: How would you relate Milton's *Paradise Lost* with the English political scene of the 17th century?

Q 3: Bring out the significance of Milton's description of Hell in the poem. Outline the cosmology, which underlies the poem.

Q 4: Explore the functions of the epic similes and allusions used by Milton

in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. .

Q 5: Comment on the character of Satan as revealed in Book I of *Paradise Lost.*

Q 6: Milton was of the Devil's Party without knowing it. Justify your views.

Q 7: Briefly comment on Milton's poetic style as found in the poem?

Q 8: Explain how John Milton infuses political history with the religious history of the 17th century. Can we say that Satan's revolt replicates Cromwell's against Charles I?

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UNIT 11: INTRODUCING NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 The Tradition of Neoclassical Poetry

11.4 Important Poets and Their Works

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

11.6 Further Reading

11.7 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- make a list of the characteristics of the Neoclassical poetry
- note down the names of the important Neo classical poets and appreciate their contributions
- explain the reasons behind the underlying satiric tone in many Neo-classical poems.
- discuss the relative significance of Neoclassical Poetry in the history of English literature.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

In this introductory unit, we shall limit our discussion to Neoclassical Poetry and its characteristics with particular reference to the important poets like Dryden and Pope. Viewed as a whole, the Neoclassical period is one of transition. Yet, the time is important in the development of literary forms and style. In case of poetry, the form of the lyric showed little change. Other than Dryden, who is the best of the lyrical poets of the age, we also meet the Earl of Dorset (16S8-1706), the Earl of Rochester (1648-80), and Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701). However, several circumstances combined to make this age abound in satirical writing. It was a period of bitter political and personal contention, of easy morals and subdued enthusiasms, of sharp

wit and acute discrimination. For these reasons, you will learn that satire acquired a new importance and a sharper edge. Its effect is immensely more incisive, and it obtains a new freshness and point by the use of the heroic couplet, in which it is almost wholly written. Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* is an excellent example of the political satire. Butler's *Hudibras* is a satire on the Puritans. But, by the time of Alexander Pope, the *lyric* almost disappears. Pope wrote a few with poor success, one of them being *On St Cecilia's Day,* in imitation of Dryden's ode. But, the tradition of the *satiric poem* once again, attained another height with Pope's *Dunciad.* While Pope's translation of Homer is a good example of narrative poetry. We have also to notice a slight revival of the ballad, which was imitated by Gay and Prior. Thus, this unit shall help you to learn about Neoclassical Poetry in general.

11.3 THE TRADITION OF NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

Neoclassicism refers to the habit of imitating the great authors of antiquity (notably its poets and dramatists) as a matter of aesthetic principle; and the acceptance of the critical precepts, which emerged to guide that imitation. Medieval writers had often used classical works for models, but Petrarch in the 14th century, was the first to do so because he considered it the only way to produce great literature. Thus, literary genres like epic, eclogue, elegy, ode, satire, tragedy, comedy, epigram etc. of ancient times all found imitators, first in Latin, then in the vernaculars. At the beginning of the 16th cent, the recovery of the previously neglected *Poetics* of Aristotle provoked an attempt to establish rules for the use of the ancient genres. Theoreticians like **Castelvetro** and **Scaliger** imprisoned the notion of 'imitation' within a rigid framework of rules, for which the flexibility of ancient practice offered little precedent. The most famous of their inventions was the observance of the dramatic unities of time, place, and action, which won great support in France where a new generation of playwrights in the 1620s and 1630s was eager to attract a more educated public.

Up to the last quarter of the 17th century, neo-classicism had little influence in England. Except for Samuel Johnson, no important writer paid

strict attention to the rules humanist critics had formulated. Dryden also produced *All for Love* (1677), which has been called the only correct neo-classical tragedy in English; but the fashion was outdated. The usual excuse for the rules was that they helped writers to be true to nature. Alexander Pope wrote, "Those RULES of old *discover'd,* not *devis'd,* Are *Nature* still, but *Nature methodiz'd,* and implicit in his view was the assumption that 'nature' consisted in what was generally true. But, this assumption, advanced first by Scaliger and echoed much later by Dr. Johnson, had never commanded unquestioning support. What is natural came to be seen no longer as an absolute, but as historically conditioned. What undermined neo-classicism most decisively however in the 18th century, was the changing view of the goal of literary creation provoked by Boileau's translation (1674) of the Longinian treatise of the Sublime. It is interesting to note that A cult of sublimity—greatness of conception and emotion—replaced the wish to produce a just representation of general reality, and the way to Romanticism lay open.

However, the following list of ideas and characteristics, as mentioned by M H Abrams, were shared, between 1660 and the late 1700s, by authors such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Edmund Burke. These may serve as an introductory sketch of some prominent features of **neoclassic** literature:

(1) These authors exhibited a strong traditionalism, which was often joined to a distrust of radical innovation and was evidenced above all in their great respect for **classical** writers—especially from ancient Greece and Rome—who were thought to have achieved excellence, and established the enduring models, in all the major literary *genres.*

(2) Literature was conceived to be primarily an 'art'; that is, a set of skills, which, though it requires innate talents, must be perfected by long study and practice, and consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of known and tested means to the achievement of foreseen ends upon the audience of readers. The representative neoclassic writer commonly strove, therefore, for "correctness," was careful to observe the complex demands of stylistic *decorum,* and for the most part respected the established "rules" of his art.

The neoclassic **rules of poetry** were, in theory, the essential properties of the various *genres* (such as epic, tragedy, comedy, and pastoral) that have been abstracted from classical works whose long survival has proved their excellence. Such properties, many critics believed, must be embodied in modern works if these too are to be excellent and to survive. In England, however, many critics were dubious about some of the rules accepted by Italian and French critics, and opposed the strict application of rules such as the *three unities* in drama.

(3) Human beings as an integral part of a social organisation were regarded as the primary subject matter of literature. Poetry was held to be an *imitation* of human life—in a common phrase, "a mirror held up to nature." And, by the human actions, it imitates, and the artistic form it gives to the imitation, poetry is designed to yield both instruction and aesthetic pleasure to the people who read it. Not art for art's sake, but art for humanity's sake, was a central ideal of neoclassic *humanism.*

(4) Both in the subject matter and the appeal of art, emphasis was placed on what human beings possess in common—representative characteristics and widely shared experiences, thoughts, feelings, and tastes. "True wit" Pope said in a much-quoted passage of his *Essay on Criticism,* is "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." That is, a primary aim of poetry is to give new and consummate expression to the great commonplaces of human wisdom, whose prevalence and durability are the best warrant of their importance and truth.

(5) Neoclassic writers viewed human beings as limited agents who ought to set themselves only accessible goals. Many of the great works of the period, satiric and didactic, attack human "pride", or presumption beyond the natural limits of the species, and enforce the lesson of the golden mean (the avoidance of extremes) and of humanity's need to submit to its restricted position in the cosmic order—an order sometimes envisioned as a natural hierarchy, or *Great Chain of Being.*

So, while discussing and analysing Neoclassical Poetry, you should always keep these above-mentioned characteristics in mind.

11.4 IMPORTANT POETS AND THEIR WORKS

In this section, you will be introduced to some of the important Neo classical poets.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Dryden is often regarded as one of the most important writers of the Neo-classical Period. For forty years, he continued to produce an abundance of literary works of every kind—**poetry, plays,** and **prose works**.

Dryden began his work with poetry; he concluded it with poetry. His first published poem of any consequence was a series of **heroic** stanzas on the death of the Protector Oliver Cromwell (1659). It consists of thirty-seven quatrains of no particular merit. In 1660, Dryden published *Astrcea Redux,* in celebration of Charles I's return. Dryden's early poetical work concludes with *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), which gives a spirited account of the Great Fire and the war with the Dutch in the previous year.

Then for more than fifteen years, Dryden devoted himself almost entirely to the writing of plays. Then, about 1680, events both political and personal drove him back to the poetical medium, with results both splendid and astonishing. Political passions over the Exclusion Bills were at their height, and Dryden appeared as the chief literary champion of the monarchy in the famous satirical allegory *Absalom and Achitophel* (1691). Next year he produced another political poem, *The Medal,* which called forth an answer from an old friend of Dryden's, Shadwell. A new poetical development was manifest in *Religio Laid* (1682) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). The first poem is a thesis in support of the English Church; the second, written after the accession of James, is an allegorical defence of the Roman Catholic faith.

Though it is small in bulk, Dryden's lyrical poetry is of much importance. The longest and the best-known pieces of this class are his *Song for St Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast,* written for the same anniversary in 1697. Both show Dryden as a master of melodious verse and of a varied and powerful style. His numerous prologues and epilogues, written in couplets, show abundant wit and vivacity, yet they

habitually appeal to the worst instincts of his audiences, being very often coarse and unmannerly.

Samuel Butler (1612-80):

Another considerable poet of the period is Samuel Butler whose fame rests on one work, *Hudibras.* Born in Worcestershire, the son of a farmer, Butler was educated at the cathedral School at Worcester. He held a number of clerical appointments in important households, and was, for a time, clerk to Sir Samuel (Luke one of Cromwell's officers for Bedfordshire, in whose service probably obtained that experience of the Puritans, which form the basis of *Hudibras.* Although he was at one time the steward of Ludlow Castle, he spent the last years of his life in obscure penury in London. In 1663, he published *Hudibras,* which was at once a success. Two other parts followed in 1664 and 1678 respectively.

Hudibras was topical, for it was a biting satire on the Puritans. In general outline, it is modelled upon the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who find their respective parallels in Sir Hudibras and his squire Ralpho. Sir Hudibras is a Puritan knight who undergoes many absurd adventures with Ralpho, his Independent squire; but the poem lacks the real pathos and genuine insight of its great Spanish original. It is wholly satirical.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Pope is best known for his satirical verse, as well as for his translation of Homer. Famous for his use of the heroic couplet, he is one of the most frequently quoted writers after Shakespeare. Pope's earliest important work was his *Pastorals.* Written before he was eighteen, these poems were published in 1709. By that time, Pope established himself as a poet who used heroic couplet so beautifully. In 1711, appeared his *An Essay on Criticism,* also written in heroic couplets. In 1712, was published the first version of *The Rape of the Lock,* one of the most brilliant poems in the English language. In this poem, Pope tried to laugh back into good humour two families who had been estranged when Lord Petrie cut off a lock of hair from the head of Miss Arabella Fermor. It is in the mock-heroic strain. The poem combines with its humorous, epic treatment of the trivial

theme a delicate fancy and a good deal of satire on the weaknesses of the fair sex and on society manners in general. After that, Pope was well known, and he set about his ambitious scheme of translating the *Iliad.* He completed the task in 1720. The *Iliad* was followed, in 1725 and 1726, by the *Odyssey.* Both works were so successful as to make Pope a wealthy man, but brought upon him jealousy and criticism, and led to many quarrels, notably with Addison. Criticism was evoked by his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1725. This was a task for which he lacked the necessary Elizabethan scholarship, but he prefaced the work with a fine appreciation. He was vehemently criticised by Theobald, in *Shakespeare Restored (1726).* Theobald's criticism gained him the throne of dullness in *The Dunciad,* which appeared anonymously in 1728, and again in 1742, with the addition of a forth book and the dethronement of Theobald in favour of Colley Cibber. In this poem, modelled on Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe,* Pope turns to rend the host of minor writers whose attacks had been making his life a misery.

In between 1731 and 1735, Pope published a series of philosophical poems, including *To Lord Bathurst, Of the Use of Riches, Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men, Of the Characters of Women,* and, most famous of all, *An Essay on Man,* in which he discussed Man's place in the universe. The years 1733 to 1737 mark Pope's last important period of production. In these periods appeared his *Imitations of Horace,* in which, using the Latin satirist as his model, Pope launched his attacks in a series of poetical epistles on the greed and corruption of his day, and especially of the Whig party then in power. His famous *Prologue to the Satires,* better known by its other title, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735), contains some of his most brilliant and finished work.

Matthew Prior (1664-1721).

Born in Dorsetshire, Prior studied at Cambridge, and was early engaged in writing on behalf of the Tories, from whom he received several valuable appointments. In 1701, he entered the House of Commons; and in 1715, becoming involved in Jacobite intrigues, he was imprisoned. He was liberated in 1717, and died in 1721. His first long work is *The Hind and the Panther Transver'd to the Story of the Country and the City Mouse* (1687),

written in collaboration with Charles Montagu, and ridiculing *The Hind and the Panther.* Other longer works are *Alma: or the Progress of the Mind* (1718) and *Solomon on the Vanity of the World* (1718). The first imitates Butler in *Hudibras,* and with fair success; the second, written in the heroic couplet, aims at being a serious poem, but its seriousness is often marred with levity, and it shows no wisdom or insight. Prior's chief distinction lies in his miscellaneous verse, which is varied, bulky, and of a high quality. In some respects, it resembles the verses of Swift, for much of it is composed in the octosyllabic couplet, and it has a fair amount of Swift's force and dexterity. Prior lacks Swift's deadly power and passion, but he surpasses the Dean in versatility, in an easy wit and impudence, and in sentimentality. In this pleasant ease of verse and sentiment, he is rarely approached. Some of the best of his shorter pieces are *The Chameleon, The Thief and the Cordelier,* and a number of poems, *To Chloe.*

John Gay (1685-1732).

Gay was born in humble circumstances, and was apprenticed to a silk-mercer; but, being ambitious, he entered the service of the Duchess of Queensberry (1712). His poems having brought him some fame, he sought a public appointment. He was only moderately successful in this search, and his lazy and indifferent habits spoiled the chances that came in his way. He died in London, an amiable and shiftless idler. His chief works are *The Rural Sports* (1713), written in the heroic couplet, and resembling Pope's *Pastorals, The Shepherd's Week* (1714), and *The What d 'Ye Call It* (1715), a pastoral farce. *Trivia, or The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) is a witty parody of the heroic style, and it contains bright descriptions of London streets. He is, however, best remembered for his *Fables* (1727), which are in colloquial, easy octosyllabics, though only a few of them are really of permanent interest, and *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). This last play had a great success, which has lasted to the present day. It became the rage, and ran for sixty-two performances. It deserved its success, for it contains some pretty songs and much genuine though boisterous humour. It is also of importance as the beginning of the tradition of comic opera, which culminates in the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. Gay had the real lyrical

gift, which was even more valuable considering the age he lived in. His ballad *Black-eyed Susan* is still popular.

Edward Young (1683-1765):

Young had a long life, and produced a large amount of literary work of variable quality. He was born in Hampshire, went to Oxford, and late in life (about 1730), entered the Church. He lived much in retirement, though in his later years he received a public appointment. His major works are *The Last Day* (1714) and *The Force of Religion* (1714), which are moralising written in the heroic couplet; *The Love of Fame* (1725-28), which shows an advance in the use of the couplet; and a poem in blank verse, *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742). This last poem, which was inspired by the death of his wife, had a great and long-enduring popularity, which has now vanished. Like Young's other poems, it shows some power of expression and a sombre satisfaction at his own misery. In the history of literature, it is of some consequence, for the blank verse is of considerable strength, and as a reaction against the dominance of the couplet its value is undeniable.



11.5 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading this short unit, you must have gained some ideas on Neoclassical Poetry with particular reference to the important poets like Dryden and Pope. Several circumstances combined to make this age abound in satirical writing. It was a period of bitter political and personal contention, of easy morals and subdued enthusiasms, of sharp wit and acute discrimination. For these reasons, you have learnt that satire acquired a new importance and a sharper edge. Its effect is immensely more incisive, and it obtains a new freshness and point by the use of the heroic couplet, in which it is almost wholly written. Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel,* Butler's *Hudibras,* Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and *Dunciad* are some of the most significant examples of Neo-classical poetry.



11.6 FURTHER READING

1) *Abrams, M. H.* (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (Seventh Edition). Thomson Learning.

2) Albert, Edward. (1979). *History of English Literature*. (Fifth Edition), Oxford University Press.

3) Daiches, David. (1979). *A Critical History of English Literature.* Vol 3. Allied Publishers Limited.



11.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on Neoclassical Poetry with special emphasis on its characteristics.

Q 2: Who are the most important Neoclassical poets? Discuss their contributions to English Literature.

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UNIT 12: JOHN DRYDEN: *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 John Dryden: The Poet

12.3.1 His Life

12.3.2 His Poetic Works

12.4 Context of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel*

12.5 Dryden as a Satirist

12.6 Let Us Sum Up

12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.8 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- connect the life of the poet with the poem prescribed
- place the prescribed poem in the proper historical age and 'context'
- trace the nature of Dryden's literary preoccupations and the contradictions that enriched his 'oeuvre'.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall familiarise you with the noted 18th century poet John Dryden and his poem *Absalom and Achitophel*. Besides being a poet, a dramatist, a translator and a prose-writer, Dryden's creative energy is seen through his ability to rise above his contemporaries in writing satires. However, Dryden and his works must be considered in the context of the Restoration. The Restoration of Charles II brought about a revolution in the literary field of the 17th century. The collapse of the Puritan Government that insisted on gravity and decorum, led to a new kind of writing. You can best examine this change in writing in the works of John Milton, about whom you

have already studied in the previous unit, and John Dryden about whom you are going to read in this unit. As critics have remarked, Milton and Dryden represent the two literary tendencies of the period—Milton preserving the legacies of the humanist intellect, while Dryden sustaining the new realistic, sceptical and critical perspective that had newly emerged. Dryden believed that "delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights." With such a belief in place, instruction in the form of poetic satire, often sounding like a statement of the wise, became almost the means to an end for Dryden. In this unit, we shall try to discuss the life and works of Dryden with special reference to his verse satire *Absalom and Achitophel*.

12.3 JOHN DRYDEN: THE POET

Dryden was one of the most promising figures of the later 17th century as every important aspect of his contemporary life– political, religious, philosophical, artistic, found expression in his writings. From this point of view, he was a poet of the public world commenting publicly on public concerns. Let us now briefly reflect on Dryden's life and works in the following subsections.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

12.3.1 His Life

Dryden was born at the vicarage of Aldwinkle-All Saints, Northamptonshire, London, on 9th August, 1631. He comes from a family of Parliamentary supporters with Puritanical inclinations. He received his education at Westminster school under the formidable Dr. Richard Busby who made him read voraciously the classical poets. In 1949, while still at school, he published an elegy "Upon the Death of Lord Hastings". In 1650, he went to Trinity College, Cambridge and completed his B.A. Although he inherited a small estate, his only support was the earning he gathered through writing.

In 1654, he was employed in a secretarial post with Milton and Marvell, possibly hack-writing for Herry Herringman, who had been Dryden's publisher until 1678, and who the published of Shadwell's plays. The Restoration finally brought him Royal favour and a fashionable public. His service to the Commonwealth and his loyalty to Charles II finally made him the Poet Laureate in 1668 and Historiographer Royal in 1670.

Dryden, without any doubt, represents his age though it is also said that the personal details of his private life are not easily available. One major charge brought against him is that he adapted himself to the changing fortunes of his time and tried to fulfil his personal interests. Perhaps, this is not wrong. If you read about Dryden in detail, you will find that he passed his boyhood in an uneasy period of the Civil War. Having grown to manhood, he was employed in the service of the Commonwealth Regime. His earliest important works are the pre-Restoration works, of around 1659, which consist panegyric of the recently dead Oliver Cromwell. After the Restoration, he changed his views, attached himself to the fortunes of Charles II and to the Church of England. This loyalty brought him honours and pensions. On the accession of James II to the English throne in 1685, Dryden again changed his faith and political persuasions, by becoming a Roman Catholic. However, most surprisingly, the 1688 Revolution brought certain disaster to all those who adhered to Catholicism. Dryden lost his posts of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. Instead, the Laureateship was conferred upon Shadwell, Dryden's most unforgiving literary rival. All these vividly got reflected in the kind of writing which Dryden started with. It was however, more rewarding than his early poetic attempts as it brought refinements into his writings which is reflected in the sound critical principles of what is fitting and right for his contemporary society. Moreover, with the Restoration, Charles II and his followers brought back from exile an admiration of French literature and fashions and the 'correctness' of writers like Pierre Corneille, Rene Rapin, Nicholas

Boileau, etc. Naturally, this effort to formulate 'good writing' appealed to Dryden more.

Dryden died in London on the May Day in 1700. He lies buried in Westminster Abbey. He was such a self-critical writer whose style influenced many of the 18th century neoclassical poets including Alexander Pope. Although he is admired, he is not quite enjoyed today. In the preface to the play *Evening's Love* he summarises his poetic sensibility like this: "The employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith, or watchmaker: the iron or silver is not his own; but they are the least part of that which gives the value: the prize lies wholly in the workmanship." This statement helps his readers understand the meaning of Dryden's purpose of writing to a considerable extent.



LET US KNOW

Augustan Age: Originally refers to the brilliant literary period of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid under the Roman Emperor Augustus (17 BC-AD 14). In the 18th century it was applied to the literary period of England from 1700-1745. It was a period when England had recovered from the Civil Wars of 1642 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The political stability led to a resurgence of aid for all kinds of arts. Following the neoclassical ideals the 18th century, English writers valued poetry as the outcome of the learned minds. The literature they wrote turned satirical with moral and political implications.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did the 17th century English politics affect Dryden's writing?

Q 2: How does Dryden summarise his poetic sensibility in the preface to the play *Evening's Love*?

12.3.2 His Poetic Works

In this sub section, you will be introduced to some of the major works of Dryden. Since, it is not possible to include almost all the works of Dryden for reasons of space, the references to certain lesser-known works have been left out. Although scholars tend to opine that the young Dryden was not that promising, we find from available records that Dryden was an unrelenting writer putting his talent to the great variety of turns followed by the Restoration politics. While still at school, he saw his first verse published in the form of an elegy entitled “Upon the Death of Lord Hastings” (1649). The poem began with a ‘typical public theme’, showing how literature could be used as a vehicle of political expression. Then, in 1659, Dryden wrote his impressive *Heroique Stanzas Consecrated to the Glorious Memory of his most Serene and Renowned Highnesse Oliver Late Lord Protector* (1658) on the death of the Puritan leader and the later Lord Protector of England Oliver Cromwell. But, immediately after this, he celebrated the Restoration of Charles II with *Astrea Redux* (1660). This shift in political allegiance from Cromwell’s side to the Royalists was later used by his enemies as evidence of Dryden’s prompt changing over from one set of principles to the other. However, in terms of poetic technique, Dryden’s use of the heroic couplets in *Astrea Redux* shows his development as a poet.

You should note that many of Dryden’s Restoration poems are tuned towards specific public occasions. However, after 1662, he started writing plays just to draw attention of the fashionable public who were heavily influenced by the imported French culture. Among such plays, mention must be made of *The Wild Gallant* (1663) and *The Rival Ladies* (1664). But, it was with *The Indian Emperor* that his reputation as a dramatist was finally established. Then, he came to his first considerable undertaking in non-dramatic poetry with *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), a poem that represented his efficient public mode and which secured him the position of the Poet Laureate in

1668. Being a historical poem, it described two events of 1066,—the English defeat of the Dutch naval fleet and the Great Fire in London. *Annus Mirabilis* is considered an important achievement of the early phase of Dryden's poetic career.

Dryden wrote many plays between 1663 and 1681. He also kept himself busy with other dramatic and satirical writings. Some of his plays include *Secret Love* (1667), *The Conquest of Granada* (1668) and *Tyrannic Love* (1669). You should be interested to know how Dryden depicts contemporary events in a 'Heroic' strain. It was the 'Heroic' plays through which the couplet took 'possession of the theatre', to use Dryden's words in his preface to *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). By the time of the closing of the theatre in 1642, the blank-verse drama of the Elizabethans and the Jacobeans had lost its early grandeur. In this context, the heroic couplets proved successful in conferring on these plays something of the vitality, which they lacked. Dryden returned to drama in 1677 with *All For Love* or *The World Well Lost*, a retelling of the story of Antony and Cleopatra and a grand success in blank-verse drama. To have laid aside the heroic couplet and produced such blank verse drama can be regarded as his considerable achievement on the part of Dryden. The play *Marriage a la Mode* (1672) is the most durable of his earlier comedy. It was however with *Aureng Zebe* (1676) and *All For Love* (1778) that Dryden turned towards real drama.

The years from 1681-87 saw Dryden directing his interests towards politics and satire, as these were the years of political and religious controversy ending with the expulsion of the Catholic King James II in 1688. In a letter to the Earl of Abingdon in his later life, Dryden wrote: "They say my talent is satire: and if it be so 'tis a fruitful age, and there is an extraordinary crop to gather". This remark characterises Dryden's opinions against Shaftesbury and the Whigs, in one of his mostly anthologized poems *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) written at the request of Charles II. Along with *The Medal* (1682), a badly partisan attack on Shaftesbury and his supporters,

Dryden also wrote *Mac Flecknoe* (written around 1678 but published in 1684), a great satirical poem deeply involved in contemporary politics of exclusion of Catholics from the line of Royal succession.

Dryden's major works recall their "occasional" nature so thoroughly that when we consider his two other major poems *Religio Laici* or *ALayman's Faith* (1682) and *The Hind and The Panther* (1687), we are led to focus on their argumentative tone. In the Preface to the former he remarked on his style by saying— "The expression of a poem design'd purely for instruction ought to be plain and natural, and yet majestic…the florid, elevated and figurative way is for the passions…a man is to be cheated into passion but to be reason'd into truth." This is perhaps an apt beginning for the 'Age of Reason' whereas the other poem, *The Hind and The Panther* helped the Catholic Dryden alter his views by means of a beast fable, the Hind representing Dryden's inclination towards the new Catholic Church, and the Panther, his old Anglican one. We may also add that *Religio Laici* was in response to the controversial attack on the textual integrity of the Scriptures as he examined with seriousness the squabbling history of religious factions. This was also the time in which the Catholic James II ascended the throne and Dryden was attacked as a turncoat. With the Revolution of 1688 taking place, and William and Mary accessing the throne in 1688, Dryden lost his pension and the Laureateship to Tom Shadwell. He once again returned to the theatre, but being tired of it and having lost a proper touch with the audience, he turned to the politically less compromising work of translating. Most significant among them is his commercially profitable edition of Virgil (1697). However, his other achievements in this field include translations of pieces from Theocritus and Horace, and passages from Homer, Lucretius, Persius, Juvenal, Ovid and others.It is said that Dryden modernised English prose. His participation in contemporary issues and debates was the basis of his perception that the poetic form was important for the participation of the public. During these years, Dryden wrote a few Odes including

A Song For St. Cecilia's Day (1687). His last major achievement was *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700), paraphrases of Ovid and Boccaccio. His *Preface to Chaucer* is another excellent example of his prose work.



LET US KNOW

Whig and Tory:

Whig and Tory are the labels for the two political parties functioning in England since around 1681. As political labels, the terms are derived from the conflict of the Exclusion Crisis (1679-81), Whigs being supporters of Exclusion of the Catholic James, Duke of York, brother of the king and next in line for the English throne, and Tories being their Royalist opponents. By extension, then, the Whigs were seen as asserting the primacy of the Parliament over the monarch, while the Tories were seen as asserting the inverse. This clearly echoed the divisions between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists in the era of the Civil Wars.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Name some of Dryden's poems, which are directly related to 17th century politics?

Q 4: How many categories do you find in Dryden's works?

Q 5: Write a brief note on Dryden's satire?

12.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL*

The original poem begins with an appeal to his readers, which clarifies the context and the purpose of the poem. Dryden says:

"It is not my intention to make an apology for my poem: some will think it needs no excuse, and others will receive none. The design, I am sure, is honest; but he who draws his pen for one party must expect to make enemies of the other. For wit and fool are consequents of Whig and Tory; and every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side."

Then again, Dryden explains his situation like this: "I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices; and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes. And now, if you are a malicious reader, I expect you should return upon me that I affect to be thought more impartial than I am; but if men are not to be judged by their professions, God forgive you commonwealth's-men for professing so plausibly for the government." In order to satirise contemporary politics of England, Dryden in this poem adapts the main story element and the characters from the Old Testament. Through these excellent verse portraits, Dryden has targeted Lord Shaftbury who favoured the succession of Charles II's bustard son—the duke of Monmouth to the English throne in place of the Catholic James II. You will find that Absalom in this poem represents Monmouth; Achitophel represents his evil counsellor Shaftsbury, Zimri the Duke of Buckingham and David Charles II. The Biblical narratives would have been very familiar to Dryden's contemporary audience. Subsequently, he frames these contemporary events in terms of the biblical story of King David and his rebellious son Absalom to relate to his experiences of the contemporary socio-political upheavals during the English Civil War.



LET US KNOW

The period from the 1640s to first half of the 18th century should be of special interest to you as it is with the literary historians. In this period, literature is embroiled in politics and the authors made their writings an important instrument for the shaping of public opinion, for celebrating the institutions and members of the civic society, for partisan polemics and for the formation of political consciousness. This reminds us of the period from the end of the Civil War and the execution of Charles I in 1649 to the Restoration of the Stuart Monarchy under Charles II in 1660. Between the Civil War and 1727, when George II began his reign, English social, religious and political life was greatly transformed. Augustan England was marked by the paradoxes of being an "ugly, violent age."

12.5 DRYDEN AS A SATIRIST

As you all know that Satire can be seen as the art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire uses laughter as a weapon. In his Introduction to the book *18th Century Satire* Howard D. Weinbrot writes:

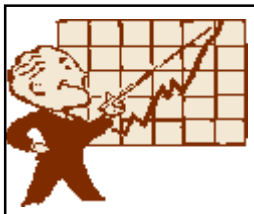
"Whether through native gift, experience with dramatic dialogue, breadth of classical and modern reading, or all of the above, Dryden could give satire shape, variety, and appealing public urgency for private concerns. Both in the largely punitive *Mac Flecknoe* (1682, 1684) and the corrective heroic satire *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), Dryden offers unity of plot, diversity of voice, and community of response between satirist and audience, and at times even between the satirist and the satirized."

Dryden also claims in the preface to *Absalom and Achitophel,* those who wrongly "imagine I have done my worst, may be convinc'd, at their own cost that I can write severely, with more ease, than I can gently." Those who have read Dryden comprehensively would readily agree that this is a poetic technique that has been abundantly used in his other poems like the "Epistle to the Whigs" and *The Medall.*

Before the poem *Absalom and Achitophel* begins, we find Dryden making yet another clear statement on his role as a poet as well as a social critic. He says:

"Yet if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception in the world; for there is a sweetness in good verse, which tickles even while it hurts; and no man can be heartily angry with him who pleases him against his will. The commendation of adversaries is the greatest triumph of a writer, because it never comes unless extorted. However, I can be satisfied on more easy terms: if I happen to please the more moderate sort, I shall be sure of an honest party and, in all probability, of the best judges; for the least concerned are commonly the least corrupt. And I confess I have laid in for those, by rebating the satire, where justice would allow it, from carrying too sharp an edge."

Then we find the most famous explanation of the satirist Dryden: "The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease." Such clear and frank deliberation on his own art of writing makes his role as a social critic much more convincing.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What does Howard D. Weinbrot tell about the satirist Dryden?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you should be able to assess the significance of Dryden by referring to his specific qualities as a satiric poet and the various influences that might have moulded his poetic sensibilities. In surveying the main facts of his life and works, attention has been given on his gradual encounter with the social world filled with the levity of immorality and indecency that helped him gain a wide range of experiences. Descending from a Puritan background and moving from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, Dryden dedicated his works to the search for truth which occupied him mentally and spiritually throughout his lifetime. Perhaps this is what you have discovered from the reading of this unit. You have seen that the poem *Absalom and Achitophel* can be placed in its proper background in order to find out the preoccupations lying behind Dryden's writing. This way you will also be able to connect the life of the poet with the work you are reading. And finally, you must also have seen how Dryden emerged as a great satirist of the 17th century English poetic tradition. Such experiences must have helped you to understand the poem *Absalom and Achitophel* in its nuanced totality.

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Dryden belonged to the time of the Civil War… …he was committed to Cromwell… …but later changed his allegiances to Charles II after the Restoration… …after the 1688 Revolution Dryden lost his titles… …These experiences enriched his writings.

Ans to Q 2 : "The employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith, or watchmaker: the iron or silver is not his own; but they are the least part of that which gives the value: the prize lies wholly in the workmanship."

Ans to Q 3: *Upon the Death of Losrd Hastings*… …*Heroique Stanzas*… …*Astrea Redux*.

Ans to Q 4: Plays like *The Wild Gallant*, *The Rival Ladies*, *Indian Emperor*, *All for Love*… …Satires like *Absalom and Achitophel*… …Odes like *A Song For St. Cecilia's Death*

Ans to Q 5: Dryden's satires arise from his experiences of political and religious controversy during 1788… …they are also derived from Dryden's opinions against the Whigs.

Ans to Q 6: "…Dryden could give satire shape, variety, and appealing public urgency for private concerns… …Both *Mac Flecknoe* (1682, 1684) and *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), offer unity of plot, diversity of voice, and community of response between satirist and audience, and at times even between the satirist and the satirized."

12.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the political upheavals of the 17th century affect Dryden's life and writing?

Q 2: Elaborate on the context of the poem *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Q 3: How does Dryden connect the political theme with that of the stories of the Old Testament.

Q 4: Write a note on Dryden as a satirist as reflected through the poem *Absalom and Achitophel.*

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UNIT 13: JOHN DRYDEN: *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Extracts of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel*

13.4 Summary of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel*

13.5 Reading the Poem

13.6 Dryden's Poetic Style

13.7 Let Us Sum Up

13.8 Further Reading

13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.10 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make a short summary of the substantially long poem
- read the poem *Absalom and Achitophel* in terms of some other important aspects
- enlist the range of meanings available in the text of the poem
- examine Dryden's poetic style
- appreciate the poem in its totality.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit follows the previous unit. This unit shall mostly provide a discussion of the poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* and the various important aspects related to the poem. This unit shall not only provide you a short summary of the poem, but will also help you to examine Dryden's poetic style. Published in 1681, this verse satire has actually been a contribution to the debate on public affairs of the 17th century.

13.3 EXTRACTS OF THE POEM *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL*

Absalom and Achitophel is a considerably very long poem consisting of total 1031 lines. Although a discussion of the whole poem is intended, for our convenience, we shall have a look at the first 179 lines so that you can have an idea of Dryden's art of writing. However, we insist that you read the entire poem in original to have a clear approach to Dryden's achievement as a satirist.

***Absalom and Achitophel* (Lines 1-179)**

[Lines taken from the 1911 Clarendon Press edition of the text edited by W. D. Christie]

In pious times, ere priest craft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin,
When man on many multiplied his kind,
Ere one to one was cursedly confined,
When nature prompted and no law denied
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride,
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart
His vigorous warmth did variously impart
To wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.
Michal, of royal blood, the crown did wear,
A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care:
Not so the rest; for several mothers bore
To god-like David several sons before.
But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,
No true succession could their seed attend.
Of all this numerous progeny was none
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalon :
Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,
His father got him with a greater gust,
Or that his conscious destiny made way
By manly beauty to imperial sway.
Early in foreign fields he won renown
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown;

In peace the thoughts of war he could remove
And seemed as he were only born for love.
Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone 'twas natural to please;
His motions all accompanied with grace,
And Paradise was opened in his face.
With secret joy indulgent David viewed
His youthful image in his son renewed;
To all his wishes nothing he denied
And made the charming Annabel his bride.
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)
His father could not or he would not see.
Some warm excesses, which the law forbore,
Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er;
And Amnon's murder by a specious name
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.
Thus praised and loved, the noble youth remained,
While David undisturbed in Sion reigned.
But life can never be sincerely blest;
Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best.
The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race

As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with case,
No king could govern nor no God could please;
Gods they had tried of every shape and size
That godsmiths could produce or priests devise;
These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,
Began to dream they wanted liberty;
And when no rule, no precedent was found
Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,
They led their wild desires to woods and caves
And thought that all but savages were slaves.
They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow
Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forego;
Who banished David did from Hebron bring,
And with a general shout proclaimed him King;
Those very Jews who at their very best
Their humour more than loyalty exprest,
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed
An idol monarch which their hands had made;
Thought they might ruin him they could create
Or melt him to that golden calf, a State.
But these were random bolts; no formed design
Nor interest made the factious crowd to join:
The sober part of Israel, free from stain,
Well knew the value of a peaceful reign;
And looking backward with a wise affright
Saw seams of wounds dishonest to the sight,
In contemplation of whose ugly scars
They cursed the memory of civil wars.
The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,
Inclined the balance to the better side;
And David's mildness managed it so well,
The bad found no occasion to rebel.
But when to sin our biassed nature leans,
The careful Devil is still at hand with means
And providently pimps for ill desires;
The good old cause, revived, a plot requires.
Plots true or false are necessary things,
To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.
The inhabitants of old Jerusalem
Were Jebusites; the town so called from them,
And theirs the native right.
But when the chosen people grew more strong,
The rightful cause at length became the wrong;
And every loss the men of Jebus bore,
They still were thought God's enemies the more.
Thus worn and weakened, well or ill content,
Submit they must to David's government :
Impoverished and deprived of all command,
Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;
And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.
This set the heathen priesthood in a flame,
For priests of all religions are the same.
Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
In his defence his servants are as bold,
As if he had been born of beaten gold.
The Jewish Rabbins though their enemies,
In this conclude them honest men and wise:
For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,
To espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink.
From hence began that Plot, the nation's curse,
Bad in itself, but represented worse,
Raised in extremes, and in extremes decried,
With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied,
Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude,
But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.

Some truth there was, but dashed and brewed with lies
To please the fools and puzzle all the wise:
Succeeding times did equal folly call
Believing nothing or believing all.
The Egyptian rites the Jebusites embraced,
Where gods were recommended by their taste;
Such savoury deities must needs be good
As served at once for worship and for food.
By force they could not introduce these gods,
For ten to one in former days was odds:
So fraud was used, the sacrificer's trade;
Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.
Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews
And raked for converts even the court and stews:
Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,
Because the fleece accompanies the flock.
Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay
By guns, invented since full many a day:
Our author swears it not; but who can know
How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?
This plot, which failed for want of common sense,
Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence;
For as, when raging fevers boil the blood,
The standing lake soon floats into a flood,
And every hostile humour which before
Slept quiet in its -channels bubbles o'er;
So several factions from this first ferment
Work up to foam and threat the government.
Some by their friends, more by themselves thought wise,
Opposed the power to which they could not rise.
Some had in courts been great and, thrown from thence,
Like fiends were hardened in impenitence.
Some by their Monarch's fatal mercy grown
From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne
Were raised in power and public office high;
Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.

Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages curst :
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.
A daring pilot in extremity,
Pleased with the danger, when the waves
went high,
He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,
Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.
Great wits are sure to madness near allied
And thin partitions do their bounds divide;
Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?
Punish a body which he could not please,
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?
And all to leave what with his toil he won
To that unfeathered two-legged thing, a son,
Got, while his soul did huddled notions try,
And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.
In friendship false, implacable in hate,
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state ;
To compass this the triple bond he broke
The pillars of the public safety shook,
And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke;
Then, seized with fear, yet still affecting fame,
Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.

13.4 SUMMARY OF THE POEM *ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL*

The story of Absalom's revolt against his father David is told in the Second Book of Samuel in the Old Testament. The handsome Absalom is distinguished by extraordinarily abundant hair, which symbolises his pride. When David's renowned advisor, Ahitophel joins Absalom's rebellion, another advisor, Hushai also joins hands. The result was that Absalom takes the advice of the double agent Hushai over the good advice of Ahitophel, who realising that the rebellion is doomed to failure, goes home and hangs himself. Absalom is killed, against David's commands. The death of his son causes David enormous personal grief. Taking this as the background, Dryden makes Monmouth represent Absalom, Charles represent David, and Shaftesbury represent Achitophel. It also paints Buckingham, an old enemy of Dryden's into Zimri, the unfaithful servant. The poem places most of the blame for the rebellion on Shaftesbury and makes Charles a very reluctant and loving man who has to be the king. The poem also refers to some of the Popish Plot. The poem is an allegory that uses the story of the rebellion of Absalom against King David as the basis for discussion of the background to the Monmouth Rebellion (1685), the Popish Plot (1678) and the Exclusion Crisis. So, the two stories run parallelly.

England under the reign of Charles II was a place of corruption and immorality. He had had a number of mistresses and produced a number of illegitimate children. One of these was James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, who was very popular, both for his personal charisma and his fervour for the Protestant cause. Charles had no legitimate heirs, and his brother, the future James II of England was suspected of being a Roman Catholic. When Charles's health suffered, there was a panic in the House of Commons over the potential for the nation being ruled by a Roman Catholic king. The Earl of Shaftesbury had sponsored and advocated the Exclusion Bill, but this bill was blocked by the House of Lords on two occasions. In the Spring of 1681, at the Oxford Parliament, Shaftesbury appealed to Charles II to legitimate Monmouth. Monmouth was caught

preparing to rebel and seek the throne, and Shaftesbury was suspected of fostering this rebellion. The poem was written, possibly at Charles's behest, and published in early November of 1681. On November 24, 1681, Shaftesbury was seized and charged with high treason. A trial before a jury picked by Whig sheriffs acquitted him. Later, after the death of his father and unwilling to see his uncle James II become King, the Duke of Monmouth executed his plans and went into full revolt. The Monmouth Rebellion was put down, and in 1685 the Duke was executed. What is so significant is the fact that Dryden transformed these incidents into a very powerful verse-satire.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Recall the Biblical story on which Dryden models his poem.

Q 2: What do you mean by the term 'mock-heroic'?

13.5 READING THE POEM

Absalom and Achitophel is a contribution to the debate on public affairs in the form of verse satire. You have already read that Dryden had been the Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal since 1670. The Whig raised agitation against the accession of Charles II's heir James to the throne because he was a Roman Catholic. While Charles' illegitimate son the Duke of Monmouth asserting his claims found Dryden on the Tory side as he always supported legality and true inheritance. The Whig agitation was led by the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Duke of Buckingham. When he wrote the poem, the parallels between certain incidents of the Old Testament and contemporary English politics had already been recognised by all. In this sense, Dryden, like Shakespeare, was only writing stories which were already well-known among the common masses.

You can see that from the very first line, Dryden uses 'satire' as the chosen mode of presenting his theme. But, the tone of such satire is more often amused than outraged.

"In pious times, ere priest-craft did begin,
Before polygamy was made a sin;
When man, on many, multipli'd his kind,
Ere one to one was cursedly confin'd:
When Nature prompted, and no Law deni'd
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
Then, **Israel's monarch**, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did variously impart
To wives and slaves: and, wide as his command,
Scatter'd his Maker's image through the land." (Lines 1-10)

These lines makes the context of the poem quite clear to readers and it is not difficult to understand that **Israel's monarch** is none but Charles himself. England under the reign of Charles II was a place of corruption and immorality. He had had a number of mistresses and produced a number of illegitimate children. One of these was James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, who was very popular, both for his personal charisma and his fervour for the Protestant cause. In Dryden's verse, the description of Absalom provides yet another semblance of his art of writing. For example, consider the following:

"No true succession could their seed attend.
Of all this numerous progeny was none
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalon:……
With secret joy indulgent David viewed
His youthful image in his son renewed;" (Lines 16-20)

The parallelism between the events during the Civil War and the aftermath is best explained in terms of the banishment of king David?

"Who banished David did from Hebron bring,
And with a general shout proclaimed him King;
Those very Jews who at their very best…….
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed
An idol monarch which their hands had made;"(Lines 59-63)

As I have already mentioned, Dryden excelled in verse portraits. Some famous verse portraits in the poem are that of Shafestebury, Zimri and Monmouth. Although in the quoted text only one portrait is available,

you are advised to read the whole poem in order to get an idea of the Dryden's art in handling the language for such portraits. Take for example, the famous portrait of Shafestesbury as Achitophel.

"Of these the false Achitophel was first:
A name to all succeeding ages curst.
For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;
Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit:
Restless, unfixt in principles and place;
In pow'r unpleas'd, impatient of disgrace…." (Lines 150-55)

The portrait of Achitophel is one of a tortured character and the impression is that a genius like his has gone wrong. However, Dryden's capacity to judge his fellow human being is apparent from the following lines.

"Oh, had he been content to serve the crown,
With virtues only proper to the gown;" (Lines 192-193)

This quotation gives an idea of Dryden's judgment on Achitophel that his virtue was wasted and distorted. One can also find a resemblance between Milton's Satan and Achitophel. This is yet another interesting phase of this poem as Achitophel persuades Absalom to rebellion. Such persuasions which only enrich the quality of Dryden as a poet makes this poem an interesting reading. This persuasive tone is seen in the following two lines.

"How long wilt thou the general joy detain;
Starve, and defraud the people of thy reign?" (Lines 224-245)

The other verse portraits of the Duke of Buckingham as Zimri and Monmouth as Absalom are striking examples of Dryden's verse portraits. We find that the portrait Zimri is much briefer than that of Shafetesbury. We find Dryden going down heavily on Zimri as the epitome of stiff opinion but always in the wrong. Dryden, after all, illustrates his point with the character of the traitor Zimri, the Buckingham in this poem.

"In the first rank of these did Zimri stand:
A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome.
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;" (Lines 544-547)

While the description of Monmouth as Absalom is done with a characteristic mixture of admiration for the virtuosity displayed and

contempt for the actual deed.

"Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,
Deluded Absalom forsakes the court:
Impatient of high hopes, urg'd with renown,
And fir'd with near possession of a crown: ...
Thus, form'd by Nature, furnish'd out with arts,
He glides unfelt into their secret hearts:" (Lines 682-693)

Such argumentative verse helps readers to get important insights not only into the character but also into the nature of the political debate that was going on during the late 1670s and early 1680s. The narrative is rudimentary. It is filled with speeches and portraits, both standing out in their own right and reacting on each other, that make the poem what it is. This poem is genuinely heroic as part of his attempt to write epic poetry. The zest of the poem surely owes much to the concurrence of his long developing weariness with the theatre and his sense of a waiting public thirsty for political literature, which was denied to them by the licensing authority. The reminiscences of *Paradise Lost* are not without significance. The reference to Adam and the Temptation in the Preface and the resemblance of Achitophel with Satan are clear examples of that.



LET US KNOW

The Mock Heroic Tradition:

The Neoclassical age placed the epic at the top of the hierarchy of the various poetic compositions. This led many poets of the late 17th and the early 18th century to attempt to write epic poetry. Dryden instead, chose the mock-heroic trend as a means of representing and satirising the essentially different socio-political age. A mock epic or the mock-heroic poem imitates the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but usually applies them to a commonplace or trivial subject matter. For example, in a poem like *Mac Flecknoe*, the aim of the mock-heroic is not to crush his enemies but to call into question their literary principles and practices, their

manners and morals. Similarly, in the poem *The Dunciad*, Alexander Pope presents the dunces taking over the English culture. A poem like this makes us confront the imbalance between disorder and order in an extreme form and how close society was to chaos during Pope's time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Identify some of the famous verse portraits of John Dryden.

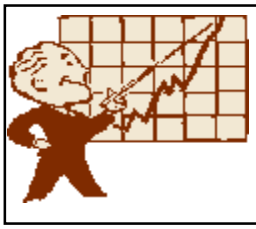
Q 4: In what ways, can the poem, be called a Satire?

Q 5: What is 'mock heroic' poetry?

13.6 DRYDEN'S POETIC STYLE

Dryden wrote this poem in an eloquent, flexible, cogent yet controversial poetic style. According to David Daiches, Dryden built on the 'reform of our numbers' to perfect his poetic style. Dr. Johnson hailed Dryden and said that Dryden was the founder of the "new versification" and with him, "it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness". Johnson also remarked that before Dryden no poetical diction, no refined use of words was appropriated to arts. However, he did not demonstrate from the beginning that ease and control in the use of the heroic couplet was to characterise his best writings. Critics have stated that it was in his prologues and epilogues to plays that he achieved that great strength. This was a kind of 'occasional' poetry that he found congenial. He could be ironical, critical, apologetic, humorous, indecent, or topical in a variety of ways. These verses also show that Dryden was operating in the midst of a society, which he knew well. The extracted lines of the poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* which you have already gone through, is a famous example of Dryden's clear, summative statement and telling exposition. And we can say that it is the greatest achievement of his satirical and argumentative verse. The style of the poem is essentially heroic which means that the plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions are all exalted above the level of common converse as high as the imagination of the poet Dryden

can carry them. This style is best adapted to the Biblical allegory and to a narrative of great political upheavals during the 17th century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How did Dr. Johnson judge Dryden's poetic style?



13.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you must have learnt that Dryden for the poem *Absalom and Achitophel*, takes the story of Absalom's revolt against his father David in the Second Book of Samuel in the Old Testament. Thus, the poem is an allegory that uses the story of the rebellion of Absalom against King David as the basis for discussion of the background to the Monmouth Rebellion (1685), the Popish Plot (1678) and the Exclusion Crisis. So, the two stories run parallelly in this poem. However, you must also have noted that England under the reign of Charles II was a place of corruption and immorality. Charles had no legitimate heirs. When Charles's health suffered, there was a panic in the House of Commons over the potential heir of the throne. What is so significant is the fact that Dryden transformed these problems into a very powerful verse-satire in the poem *Absalom and Achitophel* that you have just finished reading.



13.8 FURTHER READING

1) Christie W. D. (ed). (1911). *Dryden Absalom and Achitophel.* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.

2) Daiches David. (1979). *A Critical History of English Literature.* Vol 3. Allied Publishers Limited.

3) Ford, Boris. (ed). (1975). *From Dryden to Johnson* (The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. IV), Penguin.

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5) Jack, Ian. (1978). *Augustan Satire*. Oxford University Press.

6) Kingsley, James and Helen. (ed). (1961). *Absalom and Achitophel*. Oxford University Press.

7) Sutherland, James. (1948). *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry.* Oxford, At the Clarendon Press.

8) Weinbrot, Howard D. (1988). *Eighteenth Century Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Absalom's revolt against David is found Book II of Samuel in the Old Testament… … David's renowned advisor, Ahitophel joins Absalom's rebellion… …Hushai also joins hands. Absalom takes the advice of Hushai over the good advice of Ahitophel… …Absalom is killed causing enormous personal grief to King David… …Dryden makes Monmouth represent Absalom, Charles represent David, and Shaftesbury represent Achitophel.

Ans to Q 2: A mock-heroic poem imitates the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre… …usually applied to a commonplace or trivial subject matter… …Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, does not crush his enemies but calls into question their literary principles and practices, their manners and morals… …Pope's *The Dunciad*, mock-heroically presents the dunces taking over the English culture.

Ans to Q 3: Some famous verse portraits in the poem are that of Shafestebury, Zimri and Monmouth…. …Shafestesbury as Achitophel… ...the Duke of Buckingham as Zimri… … Monmouth as Absalom.

Ans to Q 4: Because, the zest of the poem surely owes much to the

concurrence of his long developing weariness with the theatre and his sense of a waiting public thirsty for political literature which was denied to them by the licensing authority.

Ans to Q 5: A mock-epic or the mock-heroic poem imitates the elaborate form and the ceremonious style of the epic genre, but usually applies them to a commonplace or trivial subject matter.

Ans to Q 6: Dr. Johnson hailed Dryden and said that Dryden was the founder of the "new versification" and with him "it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness". Johnson also remarked that before Dryden no poetical diction, no refined use of words was appropriated to arts.



13.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on Dryden's role as a satirist. Would you like to call *Absalom and Achitophel* a satiric poem?

Q 2: Discuss Dryden's poetic style as reflected in the poem *Absalom and Achitophel.*

Q 3: Do you consider *Absalom and Achitophel* a 'mock-heroic' poem? What are the 'mock-heroic' elements present in the poem?

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UNIT 14: ALEXANDER POPE: "THE RAPE OF THE LOCK" (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE:

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Alexander Pope: The Poet

14.3.1 His Life

14.3.2 His Poetic Works

14.4 Context of the Poem

14.5 Pope as a Social Critic

14.6 Let Us Sum Up

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.8 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of the poet Alexander Pope
- place the poem in its proper historical context
- connect the life of Pope to the poem you are reading
- discuss the nature of Pope's social concerns that enriched his writing
- explore the range of meanings available in the poem.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the poet Alexander Pope and his poem *The Rape of the Lock* an important 17th century addition to English poetry. So, attempts have been made to familiarise you with the poet's background, some of his personal details, the period he lived in, and the various literary and socio-cultural concerns that transformed his life. Keeping all these in view, the unit is designed to help you to read his poem *The Rape of the Lock* in a meaningful way. The poem subjects this event to an extended mock-heroic treatment playing upon the gender conflict and the superficial concerns of the society-women while still celebrating their womanly qualities and beauty.

14.3 ALEXANDER POPE: THE POET

Pope was a Catholic at a time when the Roman Catholics in England suffered social persecution. He was also sickly and malformed since childhood. These two facts explain most of the individual qualities of Pope as a writer. In the following subsections, you will get some necessary information regarding Pope's life and poetic works.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

14.3.1 His Life

Alexander Pope was born in London in 1688. He was the only son of moderately well to do Catholic parents, (his father being a linen merchant) and spent his childhood in London in much comfortable circumstances. This was also a time, when the Glorious Revolution broke out and the Catholic King James II was deposed in favour of the Protestant William III and Mary II. For being the son of a Roman Catholic, Pope underwent the constraints of England's Anti-Catholic laws. You should note that during that time, various restrictions were imposed on the Catholics, as they were not allowed to practise their relationships freely, to join any of the universities, to vote or hold any possible offices or seats in the Parliaments. Subsequently, in 1711, when Pope was only 12 years old, his family moved to Binfield in Windsor Forest. He was educated partly by priests at home, and then at a Catholic school in Twyford near Winchester, and subsequently under the tutelage of a former fellow of University College, Oxford, who had set up a school near Marylebone. During that time, Pope also learnt French and Italian for a short period in London. Pope's father encouraged him to write verse insisting on perfections in rhyme.

So, encouraged by his father and influential friends, Pope started his first youthful literary endeavours which can be traced in

the publications like *The Pastorals* in 1709, *An Essay on Criticism* in 1711 and the first version of *The Rape of the Lock* in 1712, which most surprisingly brought him immediate fame and success. This was also a period of endearing friendship with leading literary figures like the satirist Jonathan Swift, John Gay, the author of *The Beggar's Opera,* Thomas Parnell, the poet who later gave him scholarly help with his *Homer*, and Dr. John Arbuthnot, a man of letters and the Queen's physician. Pope's early poetry brought him to the attention of the contemporary literary men, with whom he began to be associated in the world of coffeehouses and taverns, where he liked to play the rake. Between the years 1706-1711, he came to be associated with William Congreve, William Walsh, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison among others, most of whom were Whigs. But after the fall of the Whigs in 1710, and the formation of the Tory Government under Robert Harley, Pope had made access to another group of writers, all Tories including Jonathan Swift, Dr. John Arbuthnot, and John Gay. In 1714, this group, at the instigation of Pope, formed the **Scriblerus Club**, for satirising all sorts of false learning. You should note that the Scriblerus Club was formed by a group of friends that included Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John and Thomas Parnell in 1712. Among the members, Pope and Swift were perhaps the most prominent as authors. The club in Pope's words was designed to ridicule 'all the false tastes in learning under the character of Martinus Scriblerus that dipped into every art and science but injudiciously in each. Later, Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728) and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) doubtless owe much to this association with the club.

Since his boyhood, Pope had contracted a form of tuberculosis, which resulted incurvature of the spine that stunted growth so that he could never grow more than 4 feet 6 inches. This condition worsened with age and entailed physical pain and dependence on others. In the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" he speaks of it – "this long disease, my life". (1. 132). Pope used **fictional or**

type-names, although he most often had an individual in mind, like 'Sappho', 'Atossa', 'Atticus', or 'Sporus'. His purpose was to raise his victims as symbols of folly and vice. These semi-fictional figures appeared as 'detached observers', somewhat removed from the city, town and court which were the centres of corruption. They were fond of peace, country life, the arts, morality and truth. This way Pope got an opportunity to address the major religious, political and intellectual problems of his time. He developed the heroic couplet beyond the achievement of any previous poet.

Pope conceived poetry, criticism, and moral sense as being internally related. True wit, true judgment and true taste are only possible when literary endeavours are fully integrated with the rest of life. The *Essays* offer a useful introduction to Pope as a poet, but its real importance lies in the fact that it challenges us as readers to examine both the grounds of our taste, and the criteria we apply in making our judgments. In the *Essays*, Pope writes that the decaying state of criticism reflects a broad historical decline since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans—the golden age of art, when critics generously sought to advise authors and to instruct readers on how to appreciate them. The best work of art, as Pope observes, draws the raw materials from a deeply felt, well-reasoned study of nature, and the study of the best works of the past leads one to see their reliance on their principles of harmony and order that nature itself teaches. Perhaps, this is what can be read as Pope's 'Neoclassicism' –to imitate the ancient authors and to adopt the critical precepts that these authors and their texts embody. Reading Homer and Virgil, Pope believed sharpened taste and enabled readers to perceive the immediate relationship between art and nature.

Following the earning from his literary/poetic activities, and the death of his father, Pope moved to an elegant country house at Twickenham in 1718. He lived there with his mother until her death in 1733 and then his own. Pope never married and he died in Twickenham, near London on 30th May 1744. A collection of letters

extending to four large volumes, some of which he published in his own lifetime, provides a useful record of his poetic style and his various interests and social relationships. Although poetry was his main preoccupation, he was also found composing and revising a final edition of his poems in the last months of his life. Records tell that three weeks before he died, he was sorting out presentation copies of the first volume of letters for his friends with the comment: "Here am I, like Socrates, distributing my morality among my friends just as I am dying."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What constraints did Pope face as a Roman Catholic?

Q 2: Name some of the famous poems of Pope's early phase as a poet.

Q 3: Comment on Pope's association with the Scribelrus Club.

Q 4: Why did Pope use fictional type names?

Q 5: What is the significance of Pope's *Essays*?

14.3.2 His Poetic Works

One can easily identify a chronological shift in Pope's poetic works. For instance, his earlier poems showed more urbanity and optimism, while the later displayed contempt for his fellow writers. You know that in the earlier part of his career, he was a member of an intimate circle of writers, which included Jonathan Swift, John Arbuthnot, John Gay and Bolingbroke. However, with the fall of the Tory Government along with the death of Queen Anne in 1714, Pope was left in the midst of loneliness. Such experiences affected most of Pope's writings in the subsequent periods. His first success as a poet was *An Essay On Criticism* (1711), which was written when he was only 23, and which brought him Joseph Addision's approval and an intemperate personal attack from the critic John Dennis, who

was enraged by a casual reference to himself in the poem. It was actually published anonymously on May 15th, 1711. Pope in this poem, sought to clarify the principles necessary for the formation of good judgment and the spirit in which the true critic should play his role in a society. He also explored, in contemporary terms, the traditional humanist ideas about art and its relation to the nature of things. This is just the beginning of his critical attacks on false learning, improper study, short views, narrow interests, and bad taste as reflected in his later poems *The Moral Essays, An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* and *The Dunciad*. Most importantly, Pope in these poems asserted his principle by which he sought to guide his own life, that criticism and poetry should serve human ends in the widest sense.



LET US KNOW

Robin Sowerby in his book on the works of Pope writes: "If we are to judge the spirit of Pope's *Essay* then we must have a sympathetic understanding of the terms in which Pope discusses literature, both in the more general sense and also literally in giving back to words like 'wit' and 'judgment' (which may roughly be translated as the creative and the critical faculty respectively) the richer meaning they had in his time. In passing it may be noted that Pope allows no simple distinction between them for judgment is necessary to the poet just as true taste in the critic is an inner light derived from heaven."(P-12)

These poems were followed by *The Rape of the Lock* (published in 1712, and revised in 1714) the most popular poem of his whole career. By making a trivial episode, a part of the structure of an epic Pope showed his exemplary reputation in handing the mock-heroic themes. In 1717, Pope published a collection, which included poems like "Eloisa to Abelard" and "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" the first modelled on the Heroic Epistles of Ovid, and the second being a melodramatic treatment of a ghost of an unfortunate beautiful woman who killed herself. It was however

with the translation and publication of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from 1714 to 1726, that Pope became financially secure. He now became independent of aristocratic patronage and could shape his literary career according to his own plans. Pope opined that Homer had enabled them to see clearly how man stood in relation to nature, to things as they were. If we take Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad,* we find that the main plot revolves around the anger of Achilles. However, Homer does not waste time telling about inessential aspects of Achilles' life and character, nor does he tell us about the siege of Troy from the beginning. He simply begins in the middle of things diverting attention only to those aspects related to his central theme. This selectivity of Pope enables us to see Achilles' behaviour in a vivid manner. It is in this light that Pope's famous lines defining true wit are to be understood: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed;/ What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;/Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,/That gives us back the image of our mind. (Il. 297–300) Pope's line 'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed' actually implies that it is through poetry that the elegant and polished expression of commonplace notions can be best expressed. In Pope, we also find echoes of his belief that the sacred function of art is to throw the universal into a clear radiant light, and the sacred duty of the artist is to render and express his vision with emphatic clarity.

Pope also brought out an edition of Shakespeare, which silently 'regularised' his meter as he rewrote his verse in several places. Lewis Theobald and other scholars attacked Pope's edition, which incurred his wrath and inspired the first version of his satire *The Dunciad* (1728), the first of the moral and satiric poems of his last period. His other major poems of this period were *Moral Essays* (1731-1735), *Imitations of Horace* (1733-1738), *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), *Essay on Man* (1734), and an expanded edition of *The Dunciad* (1742), in which Colly Cibber took Theobald's place as the 'hero'. *The Dunciad*, a mock-heroic poem, was designed originally as a contribution to the war against dullness and pedantry

carried on by Pope's fellow members of the "Scriblerus Club". The poem *Essay on Man,* on the other hand marked the arrival of Pope at maturity as he could combine moral seriousness with satiric wit.

In addition to the rewards of recognition, Pope also had to endure critical attacks from the beginning of his literary career. In the preface to an edition of his *Works* in 1717, he declared: 'The life of a wit is a warfare upon earth', and in the early 18th century this warfare was often prosecuted with a ferocity that may surprise and shock us in our present century. Pope used his lively heroic couplets to remind readers of principles they should know. Like his contemporaries, he judged literature as being crippled by ill-informed, careless, proud, and pompous critics, whose mistaken evaluations of the texts misled authors as well as readers. He had the support of friends, but was always a controversial figure in the literary life of his times. Even the translation of *Homer* invited controversy when he quarrelled with the more genial figure of Joseph Addison over the latter's promotion of a rival (and inferior) version of the first book of the *Iliad.* His private response to this incident was to compose the portrait of 'Atticus' included in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735). However, it was not until Lewis Theobald in his edition of Shakespeare of1726 pointed out the deficiencies of Pope's own Shakespearian venture, published in the previous year, that Pope entered the warfare of the wits with a vengeance that delighted his supporters and dismayed his enemies.



LET US KNOW

Pope's works are considered part of the mental furniture of the educated. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* includes around 212 quotations from Pope. Some of them are "*A little learning is a dang'rous thing",* "*To err is human, to forgive, divine*", "*For fools rush in where angels fear to tread* "and "*The proper study of mankind is man.*"



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Mention some mature poetic works of Alexander Pope.

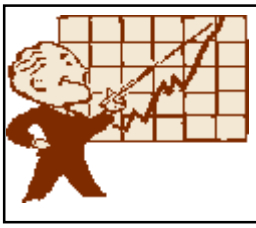
Q 7: What, according to Pope, is true wit?

14.4 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

At some date in 1711, at Hampton Court, the young Lord Petre cut a lock of hair from the head of his distant relative Arabella Fermor, a young lady renowned for her beauty. This incident and its repercussions among the Roman Catholic families, Pope was later to recount for the benefit of his friend Joseph Spence. Pope recounts the birth of the poem like this: "The stealing of Miss Belle Fermor's hair, was taken too seriously, and caused an estrangement between the two families, though they had lived so long in great friendship before. A common acquaintance and well-wisher to both i.e., John Caryll, Pope's friend and patron, desired me to write a poem to make a jest of it, and laugh them together again. It was with this view that I wrote the Rape of the Lock." You are already informed that this poem was published in 1712 and was expanded in 1714. The actual poem begins with a letter to Mrs Arabella Fermor. After dedicating the poem to Mrs Fermor for whom Pope has "some regards", he clarifies the point that it was intended only "to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humour enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But, as it was communicated with the air of a secret, it soon found its way into the world." Then Pope makes a clear reference to the epic conventions by implicitly referring to its design and explicating the term Machinery. This helps us to understand how certain elements in the poem are ingrained in the epic traditions.

Pope explains the idea of the epic Machinery like this: "The machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics to signify that part which the deities, angels, or daemons are made to act in a poem: for the ancient poets are in one respect like many modern ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These machines

I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the **Rosicrucian doctrine** of spirits." Pope further clarifies the Rosicrucian doctrine by mentioning the four elements inhabited by it— sylphs, gnomes, nymphs and salamanders. Pope explains: "The gnomes, or daemons of earth, delight in mischief; but the sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable. For they say any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy to all…The human persons are as fictitious as the airy ones; and the character of Belinda, as it is now managed, resembles you in nothing but in beauty." I hope this revelation made by Pope himself makes the context of the poem look so convincing and interesting to you.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is the Rosicrucian doctrine as described by Pope in this poem?

14.5 POPE AS A SOCIAL CRITIC

Pope's active involvement with his age helped him show a concern for everything that happened in his own society and among the people, he knew very intimately. This involvement resulted in a poetry that was thoroughly topical and social. During his career as a writer, Pope advanced no claims for originality of the views he presented and in the final analysis, his poems are memorable perhaps less for the doctrine than for the brilliance of style, which is intended. They delightfully illustrate Pope's own views of literary borrowings that "poets, like the merchants, should pay with something of their own what they take from others, not like pirates making prize of all they meet". He had his own justifying arguments in satirising the follies and corruptions of his age and in defending his own life and art. In order to do this, he constructed an image of himself as a morally, intellectually and artistically superior agent justifying his relentless criticism.

Pope's success as a poet invited his enemies to criticise him in pamphlets, verse-satires, and squibs in various journals. Very often, he was

attacked for his writings, his religion, and his physical deformities. In 1730, Pope moved on to philosophical, ethical and political subjects in works like *An Essay on Man*, the *Epistles* to 'Several Persons', and the *Imitations of Horace* etc. The reigns of George I and George II appeared to him to be a period of rapid moral, political, and cultural deterioration. Pope assumed the role of the champion of traditional values: of right reason, humanistic learning, sound art, good taste, and public virtue. Being a satirist, Pope dealt with the generally prevalent evils and the human types, and not with any particular individual. Hence, his satires can also be read without much biographical information.

Temperamentally, Pope was a perfectionist. As a poet, his method was perpetually to refine his first thoughts and as a professional man of letters, he had an intense concern for his reputation. In his last years of his declining health, Pope fell under the influence of William Warburton, who forced him to make changes in some of his texts and whom Pope made his literary executor. After his death, Warburton published an influential edition of Pope's *Works* in 1751. The influence of Warburton on his poetic texts, which we read today, has only recently been deciphered by the editors of the Twickenham edition, which must be regarded as the standard modern edition of Pope's poems. The Twickenham editors have retained the typography, spelling, and punctuation of the 18th century.

T. S. Eliot in an essay entitled "Poetry in the Eighteenth Century" argued that it is dangerous to generalise about the poetry of the eighteenth century as about that of any other age; for it was, like any other age, an age of transition. However, what really happened is that after Pope there was no one to think and feel like Pope and to be able to use language quite successfully. Although a good many inferior writers tried to write something like Pope, they were unaware of the fact that the change of sensibility demanded a sense of idiom too.



14.6 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you have found how Pope used the mock-heroic convention to suit the purpose of his satire. You have also understood the fact that Pope knew his contemporary society very well. This has been best reflected in the concerns that inform most of his poetic works. The various difficulties in Pope's life history had a direct bearing on the type of works that Pope intended to write. You have seen that Pope has justified the use of the 'mock-epical tradition' by artistically referring to a very ordinary incident causing problems in a foppish society. From this unit, you have also learnt to examine Pope as a social critic whose style of writing added more flavour to his social criticism through the medium of poetry.



14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: They were not allowed to practise their relationships freely… …they could not join any of the universities… …they could not vote or hold any possible offices or seats in Parliaments.

Ans to Q 2: *Homer… …An Essay on Criticism… …The Rape of the Lock… …The Beggar's Opera… …The Pastorals* and so on

Ans to Q 3: The Scriblerus Club was formed in 1712... ... this club included Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John and Thomas Parnell … … Pope and Swift were prominent as authors… …the club intended to ridicule 'all the false tastes in learning under the character of Martinus Scriblerus… …Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728) recalls the author's association with the club.

Ans to Q 4: To address major religious, political and moral issues… …to raise his victims as symbols of folly and vice… …these type names appeared as 'detached observers', somewhat removed from the city, town and court which were the centres of corruption… …they were

fond of peace, country life, the arts, morality and truth.

Ans to Q 5: It offers useful introduction to Pope as a poet… …but it also challenges the criteria we apply in making our judgments… …it basically meant that the decaying state of criticism also reflected a broad historical decline and critics like Pope sought to advise authors and readers how to appreciate them.

Ans to Q 6: *The Dunciad* (1728)… …*Moral Essays* (1731-1735)… …*Imitations of Horace* (1733-1738)… …*Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735)… …*Essay on Man* (1734) and so on.

Ans to Q 7: Pope poetically defines true wit like this: "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed;/What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;/ Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,/That gives us back the image of our mind."… …"what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" actually implies that it is through poetry that the elegant and polished expression of commonplace notions can be best expressed.

Ans to Q 8: Pope clarifies the Rosicrucian doctrine by mentioning the four elements— sylphs, gnomes, nymphs and salamanders… …the gnomes, or daemons of earth, delight in mischief… …the airy sylphs, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable and so on.



14.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: To what extent, can Pope be considered the representative poet of the age?

Q 2: What makes Pope's poetry 'topical'? Discuss with reference to the poem *The Rape of The Lock.*

Q 3: How does Pope's poetry portray London? To what extent does the socio-political scenario of contemporary London inform Pope's writing?

Q 4: Discuss the role of Alexander Pope as a social critic.

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Unit 15: ALEXANDER POPE: *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 The Text of Canto I

15.4 Summary of the Whole Poem

15.5 Reading the Poem (Canto 1)

15.6 Pope's Poetic Style

15.7 Let Us Sum Up

15.8 Further Reading

15.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.10 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make a summary of the poem *The Rape of the Lock*
- read Canto I of the poem in terms of its various important and related issues
- examine Pope's poetic style
- explore the range of meaning available in the poem
- appreciate the poem in its nuanced totality.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have read in some detail about the life and works of Alexander Pope with special reference to his poem *The Rape of the Lock.* This unit however, takes you directly to the reading of the poem. This poem was first published in 1712 in two Cantos, but was later expanded into five Cantos in 1714. This poem traces the various events of a fateful day on which Belinda, a beautiful lady, who often glorified her beauty at a dressing table, played cards, flirted with gentlemen, drank coffee and finally

had her hair cut. Often considered Pope's masterpiece, this mock-heroic poem is based on an actual incident of Lord Petre's cutting off a lock of hair from Arabella Fermor's head. This poem had been written to satirise how this apparently trivial event caused disturbances in two aristocratic families. Like Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel*, this poem too is quite longer consisting of total five Cantos. For the convenience of our discussion, we have kept Canto I as our text although you are advised to read the whole poem from any standard anthology on poetry. This unit shall also help you to discuss the poem and its different aspects besides providing some ideas on the style of Alexander Pope as a poet.

15.3 THE TEXT OF CANTO I

What dire offence from amorous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing—This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due;
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view;
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
If she inspire, and he approve my lays.

Say what strange motive, goddess! could compel
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?
O say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?
In tasks so bold, can little men engage,
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?

Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day:
Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,
And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the ground,
And the pressed watch returned a silver sound.
Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,
Her guardian sylph prolonged the balmy rest:
'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed
The morning-dream that hovered o'er her head.
A youth more glittering than a birth-night beau,
(That even in slumber caused her cheek to glow)
Seemed to her ear his winning lips to lay,
And thus in whispers said, or seemed to say:
'Fairest of mortals, thou distinguished care
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!
If e'er one vision touched thy infant thought,
Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,
Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,
The silver token, and the circled green,
Or virgins visited by angel powers,
With golden crowns and wreaths of heavenly flowers;
Hear and believe! thy own importance know,
Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.
Some secret truths, from learned pride concealed,
To maids alone and children are revealed:
What though no credit doubting wits may give?
The fair and innocent shall still believe.

Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,
The light militia of the lower sky:
These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,
Hang o'er the box, and hover round the Ring.
Think what an equipage thou hast in air,
And view with scorn two pages and a chair.
As now your own, our beings were of old,
And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mould;
Thence, by a soft transition, we repair
From earthly vehicles to these of air.
Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,
That all her vanities at once are dead;
Succeeding vanities she still regards,
And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,
And love of ombre, after death survive.
For when the fair in all their pride expire,
To their first elements their souls retire:
The sprites of fiery termagants in flame
Mount up, and take a salamander's name.
Soft yielding minds to water glide away,
And sip, with nymphs, their elemental tea.
The graver prude sinks downward to a gnome,
In search of mischief still on earth to roam.
The light coquettes in sylphs aloft repair,
And sport and flutter in the fields of air.

'Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste
Rejects mankind, is by some sylph embraced:
For spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease
Assume what sexes and what shapes they please.
What guards the purity of melting maids,
In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,
Safe from the treacherous friend, the daring spark,
The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,
When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,
When music softens, and when dancing fires?
'Tis but their sylph, the wise celestials know,
Though honour is the word with men below.

'Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face,
For life predestined to the gnomes' embrace.
These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,
When offers are disdained and love denied:
Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,
And garters, stars, and coronets appear,
And in soft sounds, "Your Grace" salutes their ear.
'Tis these that early taint the female soul,
Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,
Teach infant cheeks a bidden blush to know,
And little hearts to flutter at a beau.

'Oft when the world imagine women stray,
The sylphs through mystic mazes guide their way,
Through all the giddy circle they pursue,
And old impertinence expel by new.
What tender maid but must a victim fall
To one man's treat, but for another's ball?
When Florio speaks, what virgin could withstand,
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?
With varying vanities, from every part,
They shift the moving toy-shop of their heart;
Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive,
Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.
This erring mortals levity may call,
Oh, blind to truth! the sylphs contrive it all.

Of these am I, who thy protection claim,
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.
Late, as I ranged the crystal wilds of air,
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star
I saw, alas! some dread event impend,
Ere to the main this morning Sun descend
But heaven reveals not what, or how, or where:
Warned by the sylph, oh, pious maid, beware!
This to disclose is all thy guardian can:
Beware of all, but most beware of man!'

He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
Leaped up, and waked his mistress with his tongue.
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,
Thy eyes first opened on a billet-doux;
Wounds, charms, and ardours, were no sooner read,
But all the vision vanished from thy head.

And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,
With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers.
A heavenly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling, begins the sacred rites of pride.
Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here
The various offerings of the world appear;
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.
This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux.

Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face:
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy sylphs surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, while others plait the gown;
And Betty's praised for labours not her own.

15.4 SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE POEM

The poem begins with a letter to Mrs Arabella Fermor and followed by an invocation of the muse. Belinda is still asleep and is sent a 'dream' by Ariel 'her guardian Sylph'. In her dream, a handsome youth tells her that she is protected by 'unnumber'd Spirits' who would also guard her chastity. Of these Spirits, the airy Sylphs, devoted to any woman that 'rejects mankind', serve and flatter the graceful but frivolous lady Belinda. Ariel warns Belinda that 'some dread event' is going to befall her that day. When Belinda awakes,

she forgets all about the dream after receiving "bille-doux" (love-letters). She then goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing in her dressing room in which her own image in the mirror resembles a 'heavenly image' or a 'goddess'. Unseen, the Sylphs get ready as she prepares for the day's activities. Belinda sets out by boat on the river Thames for Hampton Court Palace. She is accompanied by some showy ladies called "Nymphs" and gentlemen. One of the young gentlemen, the Baron, who admires Belinda's lock of hair, is determined to steal them for himself.

On board the boat, everyone is carefree except Ariel who remembers that something bad is imminent to happen. Ariel summons a troop of Sylphs and reminds them that one of their duties, other than regulating celestial bodies and the weather and guarding the British monarch, is also 'to tend the Fair', to keep watch over ladies' powders, perfumes, curls, and clothing, and to 'assist their blushes, and inspire their airs.' Subsequently, Ariel briefs each of them about their job—Brillante is to guard her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. Ariel himself will protect Shock, the lapdog while a band of fifty Sylphs will guard the all-important petticoat. Ariel pronounces that any sylph who neglects the assigned duty will be severely punished. So prepared all wait for the boat to reach Hampton Court Palace.

When the boat arrives, the gathering embarks on a pleasant round of chatting and gossip. Belinda sits down with two men for a game of cards. This has been described most strikingly by Pope in terms of a "heroic battle". The next ritual amusement is the serving of coffee. The vapours of the steaming coffee remind the Baron of his determination to cut Belinda's lock. Clarissa, as the lady arming a knight in a medieval Romance, draws out her scissors for his use. The Baron makes three attempts to cut her hair but in vein. The Sylphs endeavours to intervene first blowing the hair towards another side and tweaking her diamond earring to make her turn around. Ariel, finally gains access to her brain where he is surprised to find 'an earthly lover lurking at her heart.' Finally, the lock of hair is cut; the Baron exults in triumph while Belinda screams furiously.

After this the disappointed Sylphs withdraws and an earthy

mischievous gnome called Umbriel flies down to the 'Cave of Spleen'—spleen being an organ that removes disease-causing agents from the bloodstream was traditionally associated with the passions like malaise and ill temper. He unleashes the first bag on Belinda, fuelling her ire and despair. Belinda's friend Thalestris further foments Belinda's indignation and urges her to avenge herself. She then goes to Sir Plume, "her beau", to ask him to demand that the Baron return the hair. However, the Baron disdainfully refuses to acquiesce. With "beauteous grief", Belinda regrets not having heeded the dream warning and laments for her sole remaining curl. Clarissa, who had aided the Baron in his crime, now urges Belinda to give up her anger in favour of good humour, good sense and moral qualities, which will outlast her vanities. However, Clarissa's moralising is nullified by Belinda. She instead initiates a brawl between the ladies and the gentlemen through which she attempts to recover her lost curl of hair. However, the lock is lost in the confusion of this mock battle, and the poet consoles the bereft Belinda with the suggestion that it has been taken up into the heavens and is immortalised as a constellation.



LET US KNOW

Belinda: A beautiful young lady with amazing hair locks which hang gracefully in curls. Belinda is based on the historical Arabella Fermor, a member of Pope's circle of prominent Roman Catholics. Lord Petre (the Baron in the poem) had precipitated a rift between their two families by intentionally cutting off a lock of her hair.

The Baron: This is the pseudonym for the historical Lord Petre—a young gentleman in Pope's social circle who offended Arabella Fermor and her family by cutting off a lock of her hair. In the poem's description of events, Arabella is known as Belinda.

15.5 READING THE POEM (CANTO 1)

From the very beginning of the poem, you will notice that Pope has introduced the conventional epic subjects of love and war and includes an

invocation to the Muse and a dedication to the man, the historical John Caryll, who commissioned the poem. You read it in the first four lines of the poem:

"What dire offence from amorous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing—This verse to Caryll, Muse! is due;
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view;" (Lines 1-4)

Pope in these lines also presents the beginning of a story of towering anger and conflict, 'dire Offence' and 'mighty Contests', and an account springing from what the modern world has agreed to think the most interesting of motives, 'am'rous Causes'. Then again, most interestingly, the poem is 'occasioned' by actual persons, whom the poet thinks well of, who are intimately concerned with the poem's inception: "… This Verse to *Caryll,* Muse! is due", and in its reception: "This, ev'n *Belinda* may vouchsafe to view". With "I sing", Pope exclaims that unlike Homer's wrath of Achilles, or Virgil's arms and the man, or Milton's justifying of God's ways to man, he is getting ready for something so ordinary as the cutting off of a girl's hair. The poem, therefore, begins with a mockery. The tone of the poem further indicates that the high seriousness of the traditional topics has suffered a diminishment. The second line confirms what the first line already suggests: the "am'rous causes" the poem describes are not comparable to the grand love of Greek heroes but rather represent a trivialised version of that emotion.

With Belinda's dream, Pope introduces the "machinery" of the poem—the supernatural powers that influence human actions. Here, the sprites that watch over Belinda are meant to mimic the gods of the Greek and Roman traditions, who are sometimes benevolent and sometimes malicious, but always intimately involved in earthly events.

"Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,
Her guardian sylph prolonged the balmy rest:
'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed
The morning-dream that hovered o'er her head." (Lines 19-22)

The scheme also makes use of other ancient hierarchies and systems of order. Ariel explains that women's spirits, when they die, return "to their first

Elements." Each female personality type (these types correspond to the four humours) is converted into a particular kind of spirit. These are gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and nymphs, which in turn, are associated with the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The airy sylphs are those who in their lifetimes were "light Coquettes"; they have a particular concern for Belinda because she is of this type, and this will be the aspect of feminine nature with which the poem is most concerned. Their priorities reveal that the central concerns of womanhood, at least for women of Belinda's class, are social ones. Woman's "joy in gilded Chariots" indicates an obsession with pomp and superficial splendour, while "love of Ombre," a fashionable card game, suggests frivolity.

The erotic charge of this social world in turn prompts another central concern: the protection of chastity. These are women who value above all the prospect marrying for advantages, and they have learned at an early age how to promote themselves and manipulate their suitors without compromising themselves. Most importantly, the Sylphs become an allegory for the mannered conventions that govern female social behaviour. Principles like honour and chastity have become no more than another part of conventional interaction. Pope makes it clear that these women are not conducting themselves on the basis of abstract moral principles, but are governed by an elaborate social mechanism—of which the Sylphs cut a fitting caricature.

Pope's portrayal of Belinda at her dressing table introduces the mock-heroic motifs that will run through the whole poem. The scene of her toilette is rendered first as a religious sacrament, in which Belinda herself is the priestess and her image in the looking glass is the Goddess she serves. This parody of the religious rites before a battle gives way, then, to another kind of mock-epic scene, that of the ritualised arming of the hero. Combs, pins, and cosmetics take the place of weapons as "awful Beauty puts on all its arms."

"And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores,

With head uncovered, the cosmetic powers." (Lines, 120-124)

The Rape of the Lock is a poem in which every element of the contemporary scene calls up some image from epic tradition or the classical world-view. Pope's manipulations of words and events are numerous, striking, and loaded with moral implications. The great battles of epic become bouts of gambling and flirtatious tiffs. The great, if capricious, Greek and Roman gods are converted into a relatively undifferentiated army of basically ineffectual spirits. We as readers, then, are prepared quite early in the poem for literary and moral satires. We readily come to note that the moral satire is demanded of Pope by the incident which suggested the poem—Lord Petre's cutting a lock of hair from his distant relative Arabella Fermor, a young lady renowned for her beauty.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss two mock-heroic elements of the poem.

15.6 POPE'S POETIC STYLE

This poem bears testimony of Pope's use of delicate imagination, subtle and ironic wit, and mock-heroic extravagance with affectionate humour. Thus, his poetic style is more attuned towards the melancholic strain resulting out of disparity between human professions and the realities of social life. Literary historians like David Daiches, very aptly, discusses the style of Pope's writing like this:

"Delicate imagination, subtly ironic wit, mock heroic extravagance, the most perfect control over cunningly manipulated verse—this qualities go together with an almost tenderly affectionate humour, a criticism of female (and male) vanity, at once indulgent and penetrating, and the faintest breadth of underlying melancholy at the inevitable disparity between human professions and the realities of social life." (Daiches, 628)

He further writes that "To make a trivial drawing-room episode into an epic theme and to treat the social customs of the Age of Queen Anne with an assumed seriousness, was to set going certain tensions and ironies

which the early 18th century was especially fitted to appreciate. A looser, more individualistic, romantic theory and practice of poetry would have made this kind of poetic jest impossible. However, *The Rape of the Lock* is more than a jest, it is in Arnold's phrase, a criticism of life, "under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth poetic beauty" (Daiches, 629). According to another critic Robin Sowerby Pope unites the style and conventions of epic with the incongruous subject-matter of *The Rape of the Lock,* not of course to mock epic, but to bring to bear upon the trivial social behaviour of the fashionable class the serious perspective afforded by Homer in his great epics that portrayed different societies of heroes. Yet, though this incongruity between present and past is central to the design and effect of the poem, we are also made subtly aware of the occult resemblances between things apparently unlike, between polite society and the world of epic.

Pope wrote poem in heroic couplets. You must know that a heroic couplet is a unit of two rhyming lines in iambic pentameter. The entire poem consists of one heroic couplet followed by another, as demonstrated in the first four lines of the poem: "What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, /what mighty contests rise from trivial things. (In this first couplet: springs and things rhyme). Then in the second couplet: "I sing–This verse to Caryl, Muse! is due:/This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view, due and view rhyme. You should also notice that each of the lines has 10 syllables in Iambic Pentameter, a succession of accented and unaccented pairs. Other than these, Pope has made an extensive use of hyperbole to exaggerate the ordinary and the commonplace, making them look extraordinary and spectacular. Take for example the following lines: "Sol through white Curtains shot a tim'rous Ray,/And ope'd those Eyes that must eclipse the Day." The hyperbolic use of language is seen through the description of Belinda's eyes as so bright that they outshine a ray of Sunlight.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: How does the historian Daiches reflect on Pope's poetic style?

Q 3: How does Pope express his concerns for the society?



15.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have noticed that Pope in the poem *Rape of the Lock* has introduced the conventional epic subjects of love and war and includes an invocation to the Muse and a dedication to the man, the historical John Caryll, who commissioned the poem. Then again, following the mock epic tradition, the poem is 'occasioned' by actual persons and by very trivial incidents. Pope exclaims that unlike Homer's wrath of Achilles, or Virgil's arms and the man, or Milton's justification of God's ways to man, he is getting ready for something so ordinary as the cutting off a girl's hair. The poem, therefore, begins with a mockery, although the tone of the poem further indicates that the high seriousness of the traditional topics has suffered a diminishment. You have also seen that this poem bears testimony of Pope's use of delicate imagination, subtle and ironic wit, and mock-heroic extravagance with affectionate humour. Thus, from this unit, you must also have experienced Pope's poetic style, which is more attuned towards the melancholic strain resulting out of disparity between human professions and the realities of social life



15.8 FURTHER READING

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15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Invocation of the Muse ... Belinda's cosmetics are compared to weapons in heroic battles ... ... Belinda's toilet is compared to a religious sacrament etc:

Ans to Q 2: David Daiches praises Pope for his delicate imagination, subtly ironic wit, mock heroic extravagance… …he also writes that to make a trivial drawing-room episode into an epic theme and to treat the social customs of the Age of Queen Anne with an assumed seriousness, was to set going certain tensions and ironies which the early 18th century was especially fitted to appreciate.

Ans to Q 3: Pope's involvement with his known society resulted in a poetry thoroughly topical and social… …he wanted to could justify his satirising the follies and corruptions of his age… …Pope was a perfectionist... …Eliot said that after Pope, there was no one to think and feel like Pope and to be able to use language quite successfully.



15.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the mock-heroic characteristics of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock.*

Q 2: How does Pope satirise through Belinda the hypocrisy of the aristocratic ladies of his time?

Q 3: How is the heroic couplet suited to Pope's subject matter in the poem or to satire more generally?

Q 4: "*The Rape of the Lock* bears testimony of Pope's use of delicate imagination, subtle and ironic wit, and mock-heroic extravagance with affectionate humour. Discuss.

Q 5: Comment on Pope's poetic style as reflected in the poem *The Rape of the Lock..*

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