PGEG SI 02

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 2: ENGLISH POTERY: CHAUCER TO THE NEO-CLASSICAL

BLOCK 3: NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

CONTENTS

Unit 11: Introducing Neoclassical Poetry

Unit 12: John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I)

Unit 13: John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part II)

Unit 14: Alexander Pope: "The Rape of the Lock" (Part I)

Unit 15: Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock* (Part II)

REFERENCES : For All Units

Subject Experts

Prof. Pona Mahanta, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University

Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinator : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Assistant Professor, Department of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

Units	Contributors
11 - 15	Dr. Prasenjit Das

Editorial Team

Content: Prof. Udayon Misra, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University (Units 12-15)

In house Editing (Unit 1)

Structure, Format and Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das,

May, 2017

ISBN : 978-81-934003-1-9

This Self Learning Material (SLM) of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State University is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike4.0 License (International) : http.//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Headquarters: Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017
City Office: Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006; Web: www.kkhsou.in

The University acknowledges with strength the financial support provided by the Distance Education Bureau, UGC for preparation of this material.

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 2: ENGLISH POTERY: CHAUCER TO THE NEO-CLASSICAL

BLOCK 3: NEOCLASSICAL POETRY

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 11 : Introducing Neoclassical Poetry **Page : 179 - 188**

The Tradition of Neoclassical Poetry, Important Poets: John Dryden, Samuel Butler, Alexander Pope, Matthew Prior, John Gay, Edward Young

Unit 12 : John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I) **Page : 189 - 200**

John Dryden: Life and Works, Context of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* Dryden as a Satirist

Unit 13 : John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part II) **Page : 201 - 213**

Extracts of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* Summary of the Poem *Absalom and Achitophel,* Reading the Poem, Dryden's Poetic Style

Unit 14 : Alexander Pope: "The Rape of the Lock" (Part I) **Page : 214 - 226**

Alexander Pope: Life and Works, Context of the Poem, Pope as a Social Critic

Unit 15 : Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock* (Part II) **Page : 227 - 239**

The Text of Canto I, Summary of the Whole Poem, Reading the Poem (Canto 1), Pope's Poetic Style

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the last Block of Course 2. This Block introduces you 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 to the 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.

Block 3 : Neoclassical Poetry comprises five units, which are as the following:

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 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. 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 satire.

Unit 13: John Dryden: *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part II) deals with a 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 with the 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 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

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

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

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.

*** ***** ***

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

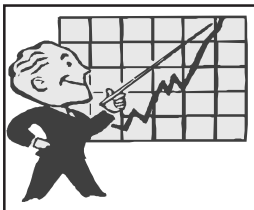
Rapin, Nicholas Boileau, etc. Naturally, this effort to formulate 'good writing' appealed to Dryden more.

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

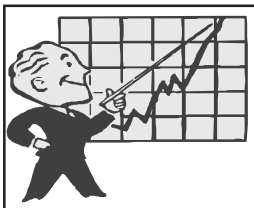
a few Odes including *A Song For St. Cecilia's Day* (1687). His last major achievement was *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700), paraphrases of Ovid and Boccaccio. His *Preface to Chaucer* is another excellent example of his prose work.



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:

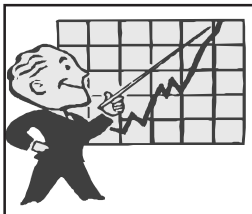
"Whether through native gift, experience with dramatic dialogue, breadth of classical and modern reading, or all of the above, Dryden could give satire shape, variety, and appealing public urgency for private concerns. Both in the largely punitive *Mac Flecknoe* (1682, 1684) and the corrective heroic 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 No 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 No 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 No 3: *Upon the Death of Losrd Hastings*… …*Heroique Stanzas*… …*Astrea Redux*.

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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.*

*** ***** ***

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.

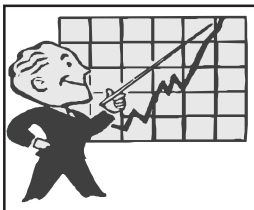
Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages curst :
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the 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

Christie W. D. (ed). (1911). *Dryden Absalom and Achitophel.* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.

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

Ford, Boris. (ed). (1975). *From Dryden to Johnson* (The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. IV), Penguin.

Ford, Boris. (ed). (1991). *From Dryden to Johnson* (The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.V), Penguin.

Jack, Ian. (1978). *Augustan Satire*. Oxford University Press.

Kingsley, James and Helen. (ed). (1961). *Absalom and Achitophel*. Oxford University Press.

Sutherland, James. (1948). *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry.* Oxford, At the Clarendon Press.

Weinbrot, Howard D. (1988). *Eighteenth Century Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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?

*** ***** ***

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.

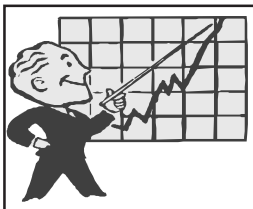
Since his boyhood, Pope had contracted a form of tuberculosis, which resulted incurvature of the spine that stunted growth so that he could never grow more than 4 feet 6 inches. This condition worsened with age and entailed physical pain and dependence on others. In the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" he 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. (ll. 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

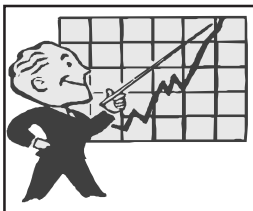
originally as a contribution to the war against dullness and pedantry carried on by Pope's fellow members of the "Scriblerus Club". The poem *Essay on Man,* on the other hand marked the arrival of Pope at maturity as he could combine moral seriousness with satiric wit.

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 No 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 No 2: *Homer… …An Essay on Criticism… …The Rape of the Lock… …The Beggar's Opera… …The Pastorals* and so on

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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.

*** ***** ***

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

Daiches, David. (1960).*A Critical History of English Literature.* (Vol. 3) Allied Publishers Limited.

Ford, Boris. (ed). (1991). *The New Pelican Guide To English Literature*. (Vol. V–*From Dryden to Johnson*) Penguin.

Jack, Ian. (1978). *Augustan Satire*. Oxford University Press.

Pope, Alexander. (1971). *The Rape of the Lock.* (ed). Geoffrey Tillotson. Routledge: London.

Rogers, Pat. (2006). *Alexander Pope: The Major Works.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Rogers, Pat. (2007). *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Sutherland, James. (1948). *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry.* Oxford, At the Clarendon Press.

Sowerby, Robin. (1988). *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose.* London, Routledge.

15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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..*

*** ***** ***



REFERENCES (FOR ALL UNITS)

Books:

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* (7th Edn). Singapore: Thomson Learning.

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

Christie W. D. (ed). (1911). *Dryden: Absalom and Achitophel.* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.

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

Ford, Boris. (ed). (1975). *From Dryden to Johnson* (The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. IV), Penguin.

Ford, Boris. (ed). (1991). *From Dryden to Johnson* (The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.V), Penguin.

Jack, Ian. (1978). *Augustan Satire*. Oxford University Press.

Kingsley, James and Helen. (ed). (1961). *Absalom and Achitophel*. Oxford University Press.

Pope, Alexander. (1971). *The Rape of the Lock.* (ed). Geoffrey Tillotson. Routledge: London.

Rogers, Pat. (2006). *Alexander Pope: The Major Works.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Rogers, Pat. (2007). *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Sowerby, Robin. (1988). *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose.* London, Routledge.

Sutherland, James. (1948). *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry.* Oxford, At the Clarendon Press.

Weinbrot, Howard D. (1988). *Eighteenth Century Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.