UNIT 4: JOHN DONNE: "THE GOOD MORROW" AND "THE CANONIZATION"

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the poems "The Good Morrow" and "The Canonization" in details
- analyse the style and language employed in the poem
- further explore the poetry of John Donne

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Poetry has often been claimed as a product of the heart, that is, an expression of emotions which has very little to do with the intellect. But would it not be wonderful if somebody wrote poems that would strike a balance between the emotion and the intellect? John Donne's poetry blends these two faculties and has been acclaimed by T.S Eliot as a poet practising a 'unified sensibility'. The prescribed poem, "The Good Morrow", appears in Donne's collection of poems, *Songs and Sonnets* (1633). Written at a time when the sonnet form had earned popularity in England, under the patronage

of Queen Elizabeth, this poem is often identified as a sonnet. However, it does not observe the traditional sonnet pattern consisting of fourteen lines, since it consists of twenty-one lines (divided into three stanzas).

John Donne's poetry did not appeal to a large readership at that time because it was a deviation from the existing tradition of Elizabethan poetry tradition that harped mostly on courtly love traditions and unrequited love. It was a blend of wit and levity- a combination that not many readers could appreciate. Moreover, his exclusive use of the 'metaphysical conceit' lent his poetry a cerebral dimension that demanded a proper amount of concentration on the reader's part. Dr. Johnson speaks rather sarcastically about the metaphysical conceit, that it is an analogy where, "… most heterogeneous things are yoked by violence together." However, it is the same conceit that appealed to modernist poets, and T.S. Eliot has made a commendable use of this stylistic device in his own poetry.

The poem in question is about a lover waking up to a bright morning and his feelings at seeing his beloved sleeping beside him. The poem is a celebration of spiritual love, which is much above the mundane, physical love, and therefore, such love aspires to transcend boundaries of different 'hemispheres' and remain immortal.

4.3 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

The Good Morrow

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

4.3.1 Explanation of the Poem

This poem in question, "The Good Morrow" deals with a mature theme and hence, it occupies the first place among his other poems in his 1633 collection *Songs and Sonnets*.

The poem conjures up a vivid image of two lovers waking up to a bright morning and wishing each other 'good morrow'. It is in the form of an 'aubade', a song or a poem recounting the experience of lovers waking up after a night of lovemaking. It encapsulates the lover's intense feelings for his beloved and his subtle regret at having met each other late in life. He wonders what they had been doing before falling in love.

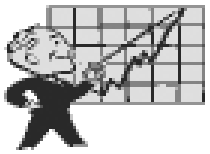
The speaker creates an idyllic, remote pastoral milieu where he wakes up to a morning, beside his beloved. He says that until falling in love, he and his beloved had merely been wasting their time.

The lover imagines that all this while, they had been 'sucking' leisurely at 'country pleasures' or the rural bliss, i.e., enjoying unrefined, uncouth pleasures. The image of 'weaning' has been adopted to give the reader a feel of childlike innocence that shelters in the minds of

the two lovers. It is the process of familiarising to food other than mother's milk. The allusion to the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers' reinforces the idea that all experiences of life before experiencing love were comparable to a long and deep sleep. However, the speaker also confesses that within this time frame, if he had 'fancied' anybody, it was his beloved's dream.

The lovers here seem to wake up from their deep slumber and the first thing they do is to wish their souls 'good morning'. The speaker acknowledges love as an all pervasive force that controls other 'sights' and exists everywhere. The lovers are so happy and satisfied with one another that for them the little room in which they lie becomes the whole world. All they care for now is one another's company, and nothing more. The geographical and other metaphors used here go on to develop more force in the next stanza. The accelerated growth of 'meaning' or significance is an important feature of Donne's poetry.

The speaker refers to geographical and climactic dimensions- a reference that would give the reader an idea of how intense and omnipotent their love is. The face of his beloved becomes his mirror where her eyes reflect him, and vice versa. These are the two worlds they possess. There is a comparison of the eyes with hemispheres which clearly delineates the transcendental quality of love. According to the lover, theirs is a world familiar and calm. In the poem the words 'declining west' possibly refers to the sunset. Then he brings in the subject of mixing elements- a phenomenon in chemistry. He argues that whatever rots was not blended properly, in exact equations, in the first place. But now that they have come together, their love is a perfect blend that would defeat the ravages of time and therefore, would never die.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Choose the correct answer:

a. The legend of the Seven Sleepers

is:

i. Pagan

ii. Catholic

iii. Secular

iv. None of the above

Answer:…….....……..

b. The speaker in the poem acknowledges the north hemisphere

as:

i. Benevolent

ii. Friendly

iii. Cold and hostile

iv. Warm

Answer: …….....

Q2. Name the volume of poetry in which "The Good Morrow" by John Donne is included.

4.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

The Canonization

For God's sake hold your tongue,
and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five grays hairs, or my ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your minds with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or stamped face
Contemplate; what you will approve'

So you will let me love.
Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plague bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.
Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So to one neutral one, both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysteriously by this love.
We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for love.
And thus invoke us: "You whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes

(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, town, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!"

4.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

'Canonization' is a famous poem by John Donne where he aspires to make his love for his beloved divine and immortal so as to be declared as saints in the religion of love. The term 'canonization' means the formal process through which one is declared a saint. Now let us look at the stanza-wise analysis of this poem-

This poem, like any other metaphysical poem, has a dramatic opening. The speaker is found to command another companion, besides his beloved, to stop bothering them. The speaker argues that his love has not affected his companion's life adversely and so he should be allowed to love his beloved without any hindrance from him. The speaker pleads his companion to remain silent while he involves in an emotional dialogue with his beloved. He offers his companions to make fun of (or 'chide') his palsy or his gout-two ailments occurring during old age. He also suggests him that he might as well make fun of his grey hair or his misfortune, while upgrading his own position with wealth, and refine his mind by involving in different arts. He suggests his companion to pursue an academic career by seeking different disciplines and getting a course or pay homage to the king, either his self or his replica stamped on his currency. In the last line of this stanza, the speaker says that he might do whatever he pleases to do and leave him and his beloved on their own.

In the second stanza, the speaker engages in a series of silent contemplations as to what could have been affected by their love. He wonders as to who could have been harmed by their love. He begins with a series of questions trying to come to a solution. He asks whether his sigh or tears that he had shed silently in love had drowned any

mercantile ship and caused someone's loss. He asks whether his tears deluged anybody's cultivable land. He questions whether his colds, caused due to weeping in love, dared to remove the season of spring from the year. He enquires whether the heat of passion that fills his veins ever caused the epidemic of plague to break out. It was believed that the Great Plague of London or the bubonic plague was caused because of the considerably warm weather that year. It caused the rats aboard a ship to come out and litter the streets of London.

They carried with them the germ of plague and spread it across the land. London was declared under quarantine for this reason. The speaker feels that the soldiers are interested in wars and so are lawyers, in quarrelsome men because they see their profit there. But the speaker and his beloved are interested only in love. Thus, Donne brings in matters of mercantile, agriculture, climate, diseases, and occupation of different kinds only to explain the intensity of his love. Such analogies are fine examples of the metaphysical conceit.

In the third stanza, the speaker discusses the strangeness of the nature of their love. The speaker suddenly becomes careless and announces that he is ready to be called by any name by others, because he and his beloved are made thus by love. He suggests himself to be called a fly and his beloved, another. They circle around with the insect-like attitude to perish in the candle flame. He calls himself and his beloved the candle too, that melt with the heat of their love. He finds an eagle and a dove in them, both at the same time. The eagle represents strength and masculinity, while the dove is symbolic of feminine grace and meekness. And finally he announces that they resemble the mysterious phoenix, whose is itself a mystery and it is believed to rise from its ashes after every 2000 years. But the speaker feels that their love is more mysterious than the riddles asked by the mythical phoenix. And like the phoenix, they die and rise again, and become strange and mysterious because of the love present between them.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker discerns the possibilities of making their love immortal. He says that if he and his beloved cannot live their life in love, they can at least die. And if no proper burial to given to their bodies, followed by tombs and hearse (a song of lament sung at someone's death) then they would satisfy themselves with verses or poetry. If their love is not proved strong enough to be placed in history (chronicle) then they will find a place for their love in sonnet or fourteen-lined poems, and thus make their love immortal. Just as an urn can contain the ashes of the dead, instead of a half-acre land, so also will they find a place in hymns and everybody will come together to announce that they have been canonized for their love. Now, as told before, canonization is the formal process through which one attains sainthood. Thus, the speaker attributes a sense of sacredness and religiosity by calling themselves saints in love.

The last stanza sums up all the apprehension of the speaker discussed in the previous stanzas. The speaker announces in a positive tone that they would be remembered for their love by posterity. People shall invoke them for their exemplary love. They would sing praises for the speaker and his beloved that their love was each other's hermitage-such was the spirituality in their love. People would regret that their love has none of the qualities of the love of the speaker and his beloved. They would recall the peaceful nature of the speaker's love and would regret at their own love which has turned horrid. Their love was so grand that it made the soul and spirit of the world reduce into each other's eyes (the speaker's and the beloved's) and like mirrors, they reflected each other's love. The greatness of their love exemplified them as saints and everybody began to epitomise them. 'Countries, towns, courts' and places of interest and importance-now seek a design, a pattern of their love.



LET US KNOW

John Donne's poetry concentrates not merely on love, but is also concerned with religion and mortality. His poetry is a record of the developments that characterise Elizabethan England. The prescribed poem, "The Good Morrow", refers to navigation and cartography, two popular occupations of that time. It was also the period that centered debates regarding a heliocentric universe. Most of his poems like "The Sun Rising" including the one in question raise issues about the globe and its paraphernalia. However, the primary focus and concern of a John Donne poem is almost always something other than a discussion of the knowledge system or social issues alluded to. The vocabulary of science or geography or metaphysics may be used, for instance, in bolstering an argument aimed at seducing a woman.

4.5 POETIC STYLE

Originally, a sonnet consists of fourteen lines, but John Donne deviated from the Italian Petrarchan tradition and composed a sonnet of twenty-one lines. Donne attributed any poem with the theme of love as a sonnet. His poem is divided into three stanzas and each stanza deals with a different dimension of love.

The first stanza emphasises the importance of the union of the two lovers by referring to the time spent before falling in love as wasted time. The opening lines set the tone of a pastoral, rural landscape. The spatial dimension referred to here is more about the 'outside' world ('country pleasures') and their childlike innocence. One also sees here an allusion to the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers'.

The second stanza is an extension of the image of the outside world through discoveries and cartography. It talks about unknown hemispheres, unfamiliar seas and new worlds. The last two lines express how the two lovers find total satisfaction in 'possessing' each other.

The third stanza marks a shift from the outside and one is led more into the inside of the two subjects present in the poem. The speaker here expresses the significance of the eye which is a microcosm of the vast macrocosm (the universe). These lines try to rekindle the Renaissance zeal of exploring new lands. The reference to 'mixing' could be read in terms of 'alchemy' which often involved mixing of different substances in required amounts. Some often quoted poems of John Donne are, "Canonization", "The Sun Rising", "The Flea", "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", "Go and Catch a Falling Star" and "Death Be Not Proud".



4.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading Donne's poems "The Good Morrow" and "Canonization". "Good Morrow" can be read poem as a record of the Renaissance period that presents before our eyes a large canvas showing developments in various fields. The references to various systems of knowledge and experience add an intellectual dimension to the poem, but these references are not purely academic or intellectual. They only help the poet to develop his argument, his assertion of love for his beloved. It communicates the intensity of the love, which cannot be limited in any way and paints a picture of the rural, distant and almost dreamlike setting where two souls open up to each other.



4.7 FURTHER READING

1) Alvarez, A. (1961) *The School of Donne*. London: Chatto and Windus.

2) Bennett, Joan. (1964) *Five Metaphysical Poets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3) Kenst, W.R. (ed.) (1930) *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

4) Leishman, J. B. (1934) *The Metaphysical Poets*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

5) William, George. (1930) *The Donne Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.



4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: a. Catholic b. cold and hostile

Ans to Q No 2: "The Good Morrow" deals with a mature theme and hence, it occupies the first place among this other poems in his 1633 collection *Songs* and *Sonnets*.



4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Comment on the geographical imagery used by John Donne in "The Good Morrow".

Q2. What is the philosophical basis of the statement: "Whatever dies was not mixed equally."?

Q3. Comment critically on the structure of the poem.

Q4. What does the term 'hemispheres' refer to in this poem?

Q5. Comment on Donne's reference to Elizabethan England through his use of metaphors in this poem.

Q6. Explain the poem "Canonization" by John Donne in your own words.

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