



GAUHATI UNIVERSITY Institute of Distance and Open Learning

Semester- I

MA in English

Paper - I (ENG-02-I-1016)
14th to 18th Century Literature

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GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
Institute of Distance and Open Learning

M.A. First Semester
(under CBCS)

ENGLISH

Paper: ENG-1016
14th to 18th CENTURY LITERATURE



Contents:

Block: I

- Unit 1: A General Introduction to Medieval Poetry
- Unit 2: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Lines 232-466)
- Unit 3: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Lines 232-466)
- Unit 4: Geoffrey Chaucer: The Nun's priest's Tale
- Unit 5: Geoffrey Chaucer: The Nun's priest's Tale

Block: II

- Unit 1: A General Introduction to Renaissance Poetry
- Unit 2: William Shakespeare: Sonnets 12, 29, 55, 116, 147
- Unit 3: Supplementary Unit on Shakespeare's Sonnets
- Unit 4: Edmund Spenser: 'The Garden of Adonis'
- Unit 5: Supplementary Unit on Edmund Spenser

Block: III

- Unit 1: A General Introduction to Metaphysical Poetry
- Unit 2: John Donne: 'The Canonization', 'The Ecstasy', 'At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners', 'Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God'
- Unit 3: Supplementary Unit on John Donne
- Unit 4: George Herbert : 'The Collar', 'The Pulley'
- Unit 5: Supplementary Unit on George Herbert
- Unit 6: Andrew Marvell: 'To His Coy Mistress', 'The Garden', 'Upon Appleton House'
- Unit 7: Supplementary Unit on Andrew Marvell

Block: IV

- Unit 1: Aemilia Lanyer: The Description of Cooke-ham'
- Unit 2: Supplementary Unit on Aemilia Lanyer
- Unit 3: John Milton: Paradise Lost (Book 1)

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Unit 1

INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL POETRY

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objective
- 1.2 Introducing medieval poets
- 1.3 Works of the poets
- 1.4 Characteristics of Medieval poetry.
- 1.5 Genres of Medieval poetry
- 1.6 Socio-political context of the Medieval England.
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 References and Suggested Reading.

1.1 Objective:

This unit introduces you to the forms of medieval poetry, the age, its socio-historical context and the practitioners of the period who have shaped the medieval literature. We will familiarize you with the different genres of the middle English poetry. Further this unit will lead towards the development of the language, the literary scholarship of the practitioners and their stylistic skills. With this aim in view this unit is designed to help you to:

- *Familiarize* you to the poets of the medieval period.
- *Acquaint* you with the characteristics and genres of the medieval poetry.
- *Understanding* the literary and the historical context of the medieval verse form
- *Exploring* the socio-political aspects of the medieval age for a better understanding of the poetry.

- *Develop* your critical faculties so that you can analyze the poems and you can form your own judgement about the same.

1.2 Introducing the medieval poets:

The development of English poetry of the 14th century is indebted to the Norman invasion of 1066 when English was occupied by France. This invasion has changed the shape of English language to a large extent in the sense that it has pushed aside the Old English use of language and helped in embarking on the middle English language which has become the standard English since that period. This development has revolutionized the language as well as literature and gave birth to many eminent poets. Amongst them the medieval period is remembered and it is endowed with the works of the father of English poetry Geoffrey Chaucer. The other poets of this period are John Gower and William Langland. Chaucer was born in 1340s and was the pioneer of the middle English literature. He was one of the skilled writers of that age. He was born in a family of wine merchants. Chaucer travelled to many places during that time like Italy, France and has incorporated the European tradition in his writings. He has visited Italy in 1372- 73 and during that time he became acquainted with the works of Petrarch Dante, and Boccaccio. The travel expeditions have helped Chaucer in mastering his skill of poetry and experimenting with new forms of poetry. Chaucer was a bourgeois as he belongs to a family involved trade and commerce and this has helped him in developing the courtly tradition of poetry and also met people of different sections of society. Chaucer was an exceptional writer and apart from that he had great knowledge in the fields of astrology, medicine, astronomy, philosophy etc. In his lifetime Chaucer had connections with the kings and early in his career he was under the service of the king. In 1374, he was appointed as the Controller of Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins and Hides in

London. In 1386 he was given the title of “Knight of the Shire of Kent” which was a remarkable stage of his illustrious career. In the year 1400 Chaucer died and he was buried in the chapel of Westminster Abbey. John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, Langland, Gawain poet wrote in Latin, French as well as in English. The poems of the medieval period are read by the minstrels in Churches and other religious events. It was an oral tradition and it was diverse in its own way. Not much details are known about Gower’s life except he has lived much of his life in Kent and Suffolk. It is known that Gower might have practiced law in London and had allegiances with the King Henry IV and Richard II which has helped him in writing his work *Confession Amentis*. His practicing of law helped him in his regular income. Chaucer was also fond of Gower and dedicated his *Troilus and Criseyde* in part to Gower and Chaucer used to address him as “Moral Gower.” Gower’s works are religious, political, moral and experimented with the genre of allegory. Gower died in the year 1408 and he was buried in the Priory Church now known as Southwark Cathedral.

William Langland, contemporary of Gower and Chaucer also wrote about the historical, social, religious issues. He is known for his long allegorical poem *Piers Plowman*. He is well known for his alliterative verse tradition. He was born around 1330 at West Midlands of England. The author is believed to be William Langland as David Daiches writes in his book “The author is traditionally taken to be William Langland and he certainly refers to himself as Will in the poem; but the attribution is uncertain and in any case it is possible that the later two of the three main versions of the poem which exist represent revisions and alterations by one or more other writers.” (Daiches, 123) Thus it can be deduced that little is known about the life of the author and he is generally addressed as Piers Plowman. The author is also believed to be the character of Plowman. But at the same

the contribution medieval poetry, its characteristics and the genre of dream allegory is worth mentioning. It is believed that he died in the latter part of fourteenth century. There are other poets known as the Gawain poet who was unidentified and has written the medieval romances based on the Arthurian stories of the “Matter of Britain.” By now you have become familiar with the poets of middle English period. In the later sections we will deal with the works and the genres of medieval poetry.

Stop to Consider

The Middle English literature is also influenced by the earlier period, Anglo Saxon period. This period spans from the invasion of Celtic England by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the 5th century till the conquest of Normandy in 1066. In the 7th century they have developed their written literature and the prominent poets were Cynewulf and Caedmon. The well-known epic poem Beowulf and a few lyric poems are the assets of this period and the biblical and religious themes were common in this period which is similar to the middle English period. There is an assumption of the presence of Arthurian tales in the writings of Anglo Saxon period as the Welsh poet has mentioned about a brave warrior though not Arthur but most the traits match with this character who is extremely popular in the middle English literature. There are instances of heroic poetry that has developed in the old English period as well the use of alliterative verses was profound. Beowulf has closer relations with heroic poetry and the pagan elements which is again similar to the medieval romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Check your Progress

1. Write a note on the types of religious literature of the Middle Ages?
2. Discuss the importance of the wars in medieval England

3. Assess the influence of Church on the literature of the Middle Ages.
4. Write a note on John Gower as a medieval poet and his contributions.
5. Compare and contrast the medieval English literature with that of the old English period.

1.3 Works of the Poets.

The poets of the fourteenth century mostly wrote about the ideals of religion, courtly notions, knights, dreams, romance etc. Fables were also a popular form and the poets have resorted to various fables of different origins in their writings. The social and political matters are reflected in the works of the poets along with the different genres specific to the middle ages. Among the poets of this period Chaucer has written extensively. Chaucer's first narrative poem in the dream allegory fashion was *The Book of the Duchess* which was written at the end of 1369 which was an elegy on the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster. His works can be divided into French, Italian and English and he was engaged in many translation works which were written in French traditions. He was familiar with the works of Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart and Deschamps and translated a part of *Roman de la Rose*. *The Book of the Duchess* was taken considerably from the writing style of Machaut. Chaucer's next work in the dream tradition is *The House of Fame* which was influenced by Dante's *Divina Commedia*. He describes a dream which he found in a temple of glass. It is religious in nature too. His next poem of importance is *The Parliament of Fowls* which is written again in the dream allegory form. The verse form is written in rhyme royal and it is influenced by both Boccaccio and Dante. It is a celebration of the Saint Valentine's Day and it is endowed with the royal courtship ideals. In the middle 1380's Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* was a breakthrough in his literary

career as his stylistic genius was brilliantly displayed. It is considered to be first English novel based on the Italian phase. It is written in the tradition of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* where one can see the issues of love and betrayal. The background of the story is the Trojan war and somehow it could be associated with the medieval life. The details of expression are remarkable which was enhanced by the Chaucer's own properties of genius. The best known work for which Chaucer is remembered is *The Canterbury Tales* and *Prologue to Canterbury Tales* which is a benchmark in his literary career. *The Prologue* introduces the characters and the setting and its written in late 1380s. It was incomplete when Chaucer dies. The tales encompassed the characters from all walks of life from the medieval England. Most of Chaucer's works are influenced by the French or Italian traditions but the originality of this genius is remarkable. His poems reflected the age and its people to a large extent in every detail. Chaucer's contemporary, poet and friend John Gower wrote in Latin, French and English. *Troilus and Criseyde* was dedicated to him by Chaucer and he gave him the title "Moral Gower." He was known for his three major works – *Miroir de l'Homme*, *Vox Clamantis* and *Confessio Amentis*. The first work is written in French and the last one in English. The *Vox Clamantis* is a description of the chaotic society of middle English period and its written in Latin. It is a dream allegory. The *Confessio Amentis* is written in English and it is a collection of tales dealing with morality, love and sin. There is a description of the poet meeting Venus, the Queen of love in the woods. Gower's descriptions are vivid and it is interspersed with imagination and perception. Langland was the author of *Piers, the Plowman* which is again written in dream allegory fashion. The poem is a description of the dream sequence and in every episode the religious and moral aspects are handled with dexterity. The author was distressed by the social and

moral condition, about the clergy and welfare system and the poem is a brilliant depiction of the anarchic society of that time.

Stop to Consider –

The contribution of the Caxton printing press (1476) is profound as it has standardized the language by taking care of the vocabulary and the spellings. It is a revolutionary moment in the history of English language as it helped in spreading literacy amongst the middle class and the upper class as well. It has promoted the English language as a whole.

Some of the minor poets to name a few are Thomas Chestre , John Audelay, John Lydgate and Nicholas of Guilford. Chestre was well known for the middle English romance Sir Launfaul and the 2200 lines poem “LibeausDesconus” and it is known that Chaucer has parodied this work in his Canterbury tales. Lydgate was a monk as well as poet and has explored the genres like **fabliau**. He has written a poem on the Trojan war. There is a mention of Lydgate in Chaucer’s *The Monk’s Tale*. Thomas Malory’s *Morte de Arthur* are the tales about the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The Arthurian stories are best known from the works of Malory.

Check Your Progress.

1. Assess how Latin and French literature helped in shaping the works of medieval poets.
2. Write a note on the impact of Caxton’s printing press on Middle English language and literature.
3. Examine Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* as a socio-political document.
4. Langland’s *Piers the Plowman* is a highly ambitious work which reflects the corruption of society and mentions sins.
Comment
5. Write a note on the Arthurian tales of Thomas Malory.

1.4 Characteristics of medieval poetry.

The middle English period saw the birth of the modern English usage of language. During the reign of King Henry IV English became the language of the court. In the twelfth century the poetry got expression in the form of songs which were mandatory for the minstrels and the troubadours to sing in an epic form praising the rulers and the battles. The English language has inflections of both Italian and French and the poets admired these languages as there was a similarity in their cultures. Most of the French, Latin and Italian works are read and translated by the English poets. Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio were the eminent writers and many new developments in the field of poetry like sonnets, narrative poems, epics had a great impact on the English poets and Chaucer's poetry is mostly influenced by Dante and Boccaccio in his works like *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Parliament of Fowls* etc. From the following points you will be able to learn the characteristics, techniques of writing of the Middle English poetry in brief:

- The medieval poetry is written in the form of epic style which was extremely popular since the old English period.
- The poems were religious in nature and they were written by the clerics. Most of the poems were liturgical prayers, hymns, psalms and they were read by the storytellers, entertainer etc.
- The allegory, dream conventions and lyric are well known forms of poetry.
- Elements of supernatural and fantasy were used profoundly which can be traced in the metrical romances of the matter of Britain especially the Arthurian stories.
- The folk legends are employed in the medieval poetry and it was present in the Charlemagne legends and the Arthurian tales.

- Paganism played an important role in fourteenth century England as the society was essentially primitive and rural and Church was the center of education, mannerisms, lifestyle etc.
- Marriage and courtly love tradition, subtle sentiments were the most feasible literary convention. The psychological treatment of romantic love is present in the works of Chaucer and in the Arthurian tales especially in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Chivalric literature gained prominence in this century and it included again the legends of knights and his adventures. It can be both in prose and verse as well. There are mentions of battles, events of fantasy in a chivalric literature. Once again *Sir Gawain and the Green knight* is one of the best known examples amongst medieval romances.
- The literary techniques involved the employment of rhyme, cross rhymes, couplets, tail rhyme stanzas, rhyme royal. The use of symbols in the medieval poetry is noteworthy and the use of ornamental language was profound. Another device in the literary style of the poets were the use of repetitions. The repetitions helped in emphasizing a particular idea but at times it was monotonous.
- The poetic device of alliteration has deep roots in medieval literature and it has enhanced the technical skill of the versification. The old English verses were also heavily alliterative. It is a systematic pattern where the consonant sounds at the beginning of the word are repeated and there are two or three stressed syllables in each line of the poems. The examples of alliterative style that have been adopted by the poets of this period are Langland's *Piers the Plowman*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poem *Pearl* to mention a few.

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| Some key literary devices of medieval poetry: |
| Exemplum: exemplum is widely used by Chaucer and it has elements in common with allegory. It is a short narrative poem illustrating a moral and it is mostly used in the religious sermons |

of the time. Chaucer has employed exemplum in his *Pardoner's Tale* and *The Nun's Priests Tale* in the late 14th century. Gower used exemplum in *ConfessioAmentis* in an encounter with Venus.

Alliterative revival: Alliterative revival is basically a collection of poems of the late 14th century. It was a basic device used in poetry in medieval period. The best known example is Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

Rhyme royal: Chaucer was the first to use this literary device and in his poem "Complaint Unto Pity" and it is also known as the Chaucerian stanza. It is a stanza form of seven decasyllabic lines and the rhyme scheme was "ababbcc". In most of the Canterbury Tales Chaucer has used this device and also in Troilus and Criseyde. This technique was carried forward by other practitioners and was highly experimented in their works.

1.5 Genres of medieval poetry

It is interesting to learn about the early English writers and their engagement with the textual and stylistic endeavors at a time when there were conquests and instability in society. In this section of the unit you will get a brief idea about the characteristics and new trends of the medieval poetry and how it has developed amidst inflections from French, imitations and the struggle behind the establishment of a standard English.

The poetry of the medieval period dealt with the religious themes and the most of the poems were written in the form of typical medieval sermons focusing on the ideas of sins, repentance, morality and biblical living. For example Langland's *Piers Plowman* talks about the sins like gluttony, lechery, etc and focuses on morality and repentance. Before embarking on the specific genres you should understand about

the production of the literary texts. In the end of the Middle Ages, in the year 1476 William Caxton has built the first printing press in England in Westminster and it has helped in producing books which are handed over from generations. Earlier the texts were handwritten and they in the form of manuscripts. In the Old English period manuscripts were produced in Churches. Most of the texts were remembered orally as medieval poetry was originally sung by the minstrels and troubadours in the Churches and the other religious events. These were performed in the form of romances, ballads, alliterative poems etc. The romances originated from the ideas of service, honour, ethics, moral which are mostly based on Christian virtues. Romances are works of fiction and they are in the form of adventure stories. The themes of romances are of chivalry, myth, gallantry or love. The characters belong to the courtly world. There are elements of supernatural and extravagance describing the heroic adventures in medieval romances. In medieval romances are taken from *chanson de gestes* (French epic poems about the Charlemagne legends). There are three cycles of medieval romances; (i) the matter of France dealing with the Charlemagne stories and the stories of the knights, (ii) the matter of Britain especially about the Arthurian stories, (iii) the matter of Rome including the stories of Trojan wars, Thebes and stories of Alexander. The courtly love poems are well known and in England two great romances are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Sir Thomas Malory's prose work *Le Morte D' Arthur*. Another genre of medieval poetry which is taken from France is the *fabliau*, a short narrative poem. It is often humorous. The **fabliaux** has a great importance in the middle English society as it depicts the middle classes in the feudal system of that period. It was popular in France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and in England it became popular in the fourteenth century. Its written in octosyllabic verse consisting of 300 to 400 lines. They are satirical in a coarse fashion and also

attacked the courtly love tradition. In Middle English literature Chaucer's Miller's Tale and Reeve's Tale are examples of fabliau. Fabliau takes into the account the students of Oxford and Cambridge and in Miller's Tale the oxford student Nicholas composed this fabliau in particular. A parallel development in the genre of medieval poetry is the **lyric** and the **ballad**. The Greeks defined a lyric as a song to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. A lyric is a short poem of fifty to sixty lines. In the Old English period the best known lyrics are The Seafarer, The Wanderer and The Wife's Lament. The lyrical poetry is also sung publicly. There were courtly love lyric , folk love poetry which were sung in the courts and the themes would be like the woes of the lover. The tradition of courtly love poems traveled through France and reached England and had far reaching impact on the English poetry. There were popular Latin hymns which were songs of the soldiers too and it has influenced both French and English verse. In the fourteenth century, lyrics depicted the socio-political issues and the songs were mostly political. The themes were for example people turning against the king Richard II. The patriotic feeling in lyrics got expression in the hands of the versifier Laurence Minot who has attacked the French and the Scots in his political poems. Lyrics became a form of secular literature and a transition from courtly love poems was witnessed. The most common theme of the English lyrics are the religious undertones. Religious poems survived and were preserved by the clerics and the themes were devotional as well as moral. The tradition carols were seen in the religious lyric poems sung during Christmas. The lyrics written praising Christianity and particularly the sorrows of Mary were common in Middle English period.

The most popular and well known genre of medieval poetry is the **allegory**. Allegory is a story which can be interpreted in various ways and the stories can play on multiple levels. The interpretations can be

on a literal level or the symbolical level. The plot of the story can be a moral story or can be on religious themes, knightly adventures etc. The term allegory is derived from the Greek word *allegoria* meaning , ‘speaking otherwise.’ In the Middle Ages there was the allegorical romance which were influential. The best known specimen of allegory of the middle ages is the *Roman de la Rose* and the first part of it is composed by Guillaume de Lorris about 1227. The second part of the poem is written by Jean de Meun forty years later. Rose which stands for the lady love is meant to be obtained in this allegory which is purely an example of courtly love. Apart from that the woman’s qualities of being timid and meek are treated effectively and the different elements of manners are being personified. It was translated in part by Chaucer. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is another remarkable examples of the allegory. It is a tale of knightly adventures, superstitions and courtly love. It is written in alliterative blank verse. ***Dream allegory*** also became a well-received genre and the fourteenth century poem “The Pearl” is one of the examples where the poet falls asleep in a May morning and has dreams of the loss of a little girl.

Amongst the other genres ballads are narrative poems which are transmitted orally and the themes were romances, historical events, common to folk songs. The ballads are considered to Scottish but it has travelled widely in parts of England and in the late Middle Ages it has flourished. Some examples of ballads steeped into folk themes are “Lamkin”, “The Wife of Usher’s Well” “The Twa Sisters” to mention a few.

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| Stop to Consider |
| Dream vision was a popular form of literature in the Middle English period. The common element that is present in a dream vision is that the writer goes to sleep in a rural setting and has dreams. Abstractions become important in a dream vision and it is almost |

similar to the traits of an allegory. Chaucer employed the dream vision in *The Book of Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowles*, *The House of Fame* and the *Prologue to the Canterbury tales*. The most famous example is the dream vision of Langland in *Piers the Plowman*.

Fables were also extremely popular and it has flourished in the works of Chaucer to a great extent. It is a short narrative may be in verse or prose which has a moral story in it. Beast fables became well known during middle ages where non-human creatures became the characters. It originated in Greece and the early collections is attributed to Aesop. Beast tales have a satirical purpose also as through the inanimate characters the social issues are discussed rather than simply entertaining the readers. The beast fables of Roman de Renart are most popular and Reynard the Fox was the main hero and the middle English translation of this fable doesn't exist. The beast fables can be found in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* and other examples are Fox and Geese, The Fox and the Wolfe.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on the relation between church and the concept of chivalry in the Middle Ages.
2. Discuss the metrical romances of the Middle English period and how it is a critique of the courtly love tradition.
3. Examine Chaucer's fables as a socio –political critique of the Middle Ages.
4. What is dream allegory? Explain the concept with reference to the works of the medieval poets.
5. Write a note on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a chivalric romance.

1.6 Socio-political context of the Medieval England:

In this section you will be able to explore the age and its multifaceted developments. The middle English society is steeped into major socio-political and religious developments which has influenced the literature to a large extent. The transition of the society after the Norman conquest in terms of language and literature is understood from the various issues that plagued the society. The Middle English period is also known as the Age of Chaucer. The fourteenth century England is basically a rural society and agriculture was the means of livelihood. This period is dominated by Christianity the rule of the king. It was often questioned that which of the two had far reaching impact and it was Christianity that has shaped the lives of the people and their beliefs. The authority of the Church was not questionable. The Church was the home of many individuals and in the monasteries were also the hub of learning and a reservoir of manuscripts. The historical and theological chronicles were written in the monasteries. The monasteries in the middle ages also helped people in lodging and they helped people in distress and the diseased. Monks, friars and nuns were significant members of the Churches who were involved in serving the society by preaching Christianity and by providing quality education. However, apart from the religious living , the social stratification is worth mentioning to understand the society and the struggles they have met with. The society was divide between classes and the feudal system had a stronghold. Though in Chaucer's England the parliamentary system began just like the modern England but the remnants of the Anglo saxon feudal society was present. A change took place when John Wycliff who used to teach theology in Oxford university to reduce the corruptions of the medieval society by attacking the parishes and the churches and embarking on a new system by opposing the clericalism and bringing in Protestantism. He

was in favour of reading the Bible but not as it is presented in parts by the clergy. Wycliff's disciples were came to be known as the Lollards. In the time of Chaucer, the society was divided into the manor class and the serfdom and it was an age of social disorder. The workers were demanding their rights and were on strikes for higher wages. The peasants revolt of 1381 is one of the popular uprising in the middle English period which led to an economic discontent. In the manorial system the laborers cultivated the land of the manors and they were treated as the bonded labourers. In the parliamentary system the wage were cut down amongst the smaller farmers and the tenant farmers. The peasants demanded the maximum wages from the Statutes of Labourers and their demand remained till the Black Death which led to scarcity of laborers. There were continuous riots but the wage earner came out victorious but the uprising of 1381 had a great impact and it reflects the ills of the society like murder, rape, robbery etc. There was a chasm between the social and the economic changes and disharmony prevailed. The middle English period witnessed the unhealthy life of women. Women died in childbirth, life expectancies were short, infant mortality rates were high. The personal hygiene and sanitary conditions were unhealthy especially amongst the poor sections of the society. This was the condition of the medieval England and they endured great hardships. Chaucer's England also witnessed the constant wars between the English and the French which is known as the Hundred Years War but the peasant's revolt was indeed a wonderful attack on the feudal system. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* was written in a time which is representative of the chaotic age which has in its bower the Hundred Years War, The Peasants Revolt, the mayhem of Black Death. During that period the Canterbury tales is a much needed text to understand the age and its people. It represents the complexities of the of the 14th century England which was brilliantly depicted by the tales narrated by different walks of life. The

age plays a pivotal role in any form of literature as a text is situated in a particular time and place and the knowledge of that particular age paves the path of a better understanding of the texts.

Stop to consider

The famous chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth helped shaping the historiography of England and his chronicle *The History of the Kings of Britain* was widely popular but to understand the geography and the political edifice of England one can see that the fourteenth century England is basically known as a town, a shire or a manor than a single nation. It is rather regionalism that can be deduced from the structure of the society than nationalism. England was sharing its boundaries with Welsh and Scotland but the divisions were not strong enough and it reflects a wavering identity. The political borders were not clear to call England as a nation.

Check Your progress.

1. The Norman Conquest of 1066 paved way for a change in English language and literature. Write a note on the how the changes took place in the medieval English period.
2. Write a note on feudalism and how the stratification of the rural England had an impact on the common people.
3. Discuss the issue of the scarcity of laborers and the angst of the landowners regarding the cultivation which resulted in the peasants uprising in 1381 in the manorial system .
4. Write a short note on the Black Death.
5. Chaucer was writing in a time of turmoil where the society was anarchic and there were multiple wars with French. Comment on the reflections of the chaotic society in Chaucer's work.

1.7 Summing Up

The medieval England and its literary productions are now familiar to you. You are in a position to understand the poets and different literary techniques used in the poetry and this is the introduction only which will help to understand the works of the period. There are many aspects of poetry which should be explored by you and whatever is presented will help you to read and analyze the poems. There can be questions related to the genre which you can explore on your own. The literary techniques and other allied study can be followed up by the suggested readings.

1.8 References and Suggested Readings.

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Unit 2

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Unit Structure :

- 2.1 Objective
- 2.2 Introducing the poet
- 2.3 Works of the poet
- 2.4 Critical Reception
- 2.5 Context of the poem
- 2.6 Reading the poem
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 Glossary
- 2.9 References and Suggested Reading.

2.1 Objectives

This unit introduces you to the Middle English literature, the tradition of medieval romances and the prescribed text for your study, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. We will familiarize you with the Arthurian stories and the little information whichever is found regarding the poet who is anonymous. Then we will move forward to make you understand the specific themes of the particular text and the medieval romances as a whole. With this aim in view this unit is designed to help you to:

- *Familiarize* you to the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the poems.
- *Understanding* the literary and the historical context of the medieval romances and the verse form.

- *Exploring* the multifaceted interpretations and approaches to the text for a better understanding.
- *Develop* your critical faculties so that you can analyze the text and you can form your own judgement about the text.

2.2 Introducing the poet.

Not much is known about the poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as he is an anonymous author but the poet literary talent is at par with the other known writers of the Middle English period. The author is addressed popularly as Gawain poet. From the use of language, it can be said that the Gawain poet is a contemporary of Chaucer, Gower and Langland. It is known that his works are preserved in the form of manuscripts, Cotton Nero in the British Library. The works are written in the North west Midland dialect and the use of this dialect reveals that the poet belongs to some north western Staffordshire and south eastern Cheshire. The poet was well versed in the courtly language and the Biblical implications are reflected in his works. Apart from that it is evident from his works that the anonymous poet had knowledge about law and theology. The poet is also known as the Pearl poet which is named after his poem “Pearl.”

The information given above is one way to give you a brief idea about the poet whose identity is unknown but his works acted as his identity and this will lead to your understanding of the author as a great poet of the late fourteenth century and the themes the poet dealt with. The tradition of courtly love is a reflection of the then society and culture and it is reflected in the works of the Gawain poet. While reading the anonymous poet it will be a quest for you to know the poet through his works which we shall focus on further.

The Middle English period witnessed a turmoil in the political, economic and cultural issues. There were natural disasters like Black Death and millions of people died. There was the struggle of identity between England and France. Apart from that in the fourteenth century English language gained prominence after the Norman conquest of 1066 and it has become the standard language of literature though there were French inflections. Literary writings became popular and the concept of chivalry, courtly romances, knighthood, military ideals flourished. During that time King Edward III became fascinated by the Arthurian stories and it has become a focal point of new literary interest. Arthur was the respectful Christian King and the legends of Arthur mirrored the entire concept of chivalry and the Gawain poet has brilliantly depicted the tales surrounding Arthur in his works.

SAQ

1. Write a note on the Arthurian romances

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2. Comment on the Middle age as an age of unrest and instability.

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3. What questions arise in your mind regarding the unknown poet and about the credulities of his works.?

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2.3 Works of the Poet:

In this section you will be introduced with the works of the Gawain poet. As we have mentioned in the introduction section that there is a single known manuscript and the works are found there and the poems are “Pearl”, “Purity” and “Patience” along with “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”. The exact dates of publication of the poems are not known but these are written in the late 14th century. There are many questions regarding the authorship but it is believed that all the poems are written by the single author as its written in the same dialect. The poetry is among the richest of the medieval romances. The use of imagery in all the poems stands to be remarkable as they fulfill the traits of the romances. The description of the royal courts, beautiful terrains, use of humor, literary style, the theme of chivalry, courage, Christianity is dealt with great proficiency by the poet and Sir Gawain is considered to be the best of romances of the Middle English Period. Stylistically the poems are rich as the use of alliteration is seen in all the works. Use of rhyming schemes and alliteration is seen in his poem Pearl. This poem also reflects the genre of dream vision and allegory and these have been experimented by Chaucer and his contemporaries. The other poem “Purity” or Cleanness reflects the subjects of the Bible and the ideas behind cleanliness which plays an important role in Christianity. This poem consists of 1812 lines. Patience is the shortest of all the poems consisting of 530 lines and the poem reflects upon patience as one of the virtues as the medieval thought and literature basically emphasizes on the virtues that play a pivotal role in Christianity and has shunned the vices or the sins. The Gawain and the Green Knight is one of the Arthurian stories which is allegorical and it belongs to the category of “Matter of Britain” of the medieval romances and in the Alliterative Revival form. All the poems

are allegorical and symbolical in nature and this technique helped in knowing the fourteenth century England, its values to a large extent.

Middle English and the tradition of Medieval Romances.

The knight's adventure and courtly love help are the important areas of understanding the medieval romances. The hero goes into an adventure and he proves to be superior than the others. He was an ideal knight who engages in courtly love and adventure and this character helps in understanding the aristocratic class of the medieval England.

Jean Bodel, twelfth century French poet categorized the romances into Matter of France, Matter of Britain and Matter of Rome. He was the author of *Chanson des Saisnes* (Song of the Saxons). His romances are written in the style of Alliterative Revival. Legends surround the plot of the romances and the legend of Charlemagne and the knights, their adventures is the basis of the Matter of Rome. The legends of Arthur and

the knights of the Round Table are found in the Matter of Britain. The reference of the Arthurian stories can be found in the writings of Geoffrey Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. In the Matter of Rome, the history and romances of the warriors like Alexander the Great, Trojan War, adventures of Aeneas can be seen. The works of this period are *Roman de Troie* by a Norman-French poet Benoit de Sainte-More. *Sege of Troye*. The poem *Gest Historiale* of the Destruction of Troy is one of the earlier poems which is an example of the Alliterative Revival. All the poems of the medieval romances are more or less written in the North west Midland dialect and the themes are mostly about knightly adventures and courtly romances. Apart from these above mentioned matters, there is the matter of England which deals with English culture and history which are based on the medieval literature. The genre of romance has roots in France and as the Anglo Norman conquest had a great impact on the English society

and history, most the literary forms are shaped by French influences in the fourteenth century which has changed in the later periods of the history of English literature.

The Gawain poet thus employed the use of symbols and allegory while tracing the adventures of the knight and of religion which is of great significance of the English society. Christianity is reflected in all the poems of the manuscript and it helps in fathoming the beliefs of the people. The allegorical significance of bravery, quest or journey, hero, chivalry, love, religion gives a knowledge of the historical times of the medieval England. It was an age of feudalism and the portrayal of Sir Gawain and the plot structure of the romance reveals the inherent feudal structure of the society. Though a few poems are known written by the anonymous poet but amongst these Sir Gawain stood to be most important and famous work of the medieval romances. All the poems are focused on the elements of romance and its intricately carved by the author's dexterity of the use of language and style.

Check Your Progress.

4. What do you understand by medieval romance and how it is different from other matters of romances?

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5. What is the role of Christianity in the medieval romances?

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6. Who was Jean Bodel?

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7. What do you mean by Chivalry?

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8. What kind of conclusion can be drawn from the works of the Gawain poet and the Age which he belonged to? Do the readers of that period were fond of these romance traditions?

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Stop to Consider:

Versification: Alliteration was used extensively by the poet. In the poetry of Chaucer the old English influences were there but in these medieval romances language is extremely rich and lucid at the same time. The use of stresses and meters refines his poetry. The language is ornamental but the depth of the content is expressed appropriately. There is a dramatic tone in the works of the poet. The use of imagery which means the use of figurative language endowed with visual images is very much present in the poems.

The Alliterative Revival: The historians have coined the term alliterative revival where this verse form is used frequently. Alliteration is the repetition of a particular consonant sound in a group of words.

The term “alliteration” can be traced from the Latin word “littera” meaning “letter of the alphabet.” This metrical structure is opposed to rhyme and it has been experimented by the Gawain poet in his poems. Langland’s Piers Plowman also dealt with the use of alliteration.

2.4 Critical Reception

The Gawain and the Green Knight has been read for more than six centuries. In this section of the unit you will get a brief outline of the critical studies associated with this poem and of the Gawain poet and the other poems too. The idea behind the inclusion of this unit is to make you prepared to read a text differently and instill in you the critical faculty which will help you to interpret a text in your own way. There are many critiques of the Gawain or the Pearl Poet and the works but basically as the poems are studied independent of the writer since time immemorial the focus was mainly on the poems and how it is received critically. The poems are highly praised by the writers as well as criticized and the research is continuing till the postmodern period. Many criticisms were put forward regarding the origin of the adventure of Sir Gawain.

Critics like Alan M. Markman in the 19th century wrote about the originality of the Green knight as this question was not dealt with much whether he actually lived or not. There were criticisms regarding the hero as “god like beings.” Markman says that it is magic, not mythology or folklore” Thus questions on the genre is being raised. There were studies regarding the “romance function” which is said to be partially real. The role of the hero is also studied as the hero in Sir Gawain exhibits the traits of the role of a man and the manners. Further there are studies regarding the medieval huntsman and the use

portrayal of animals. There were differences between certain beasts and the animals that are taken for games. The animals like deer and the wild boar were the preferred animals for hunting. The image of fox was associated trickery and in the context of the poem you can see the trickery of Sir Gawain. These areas have been studied by critics and authors like Henry L. Savage.

The most interesting critique of the poem lies in the Beheading game and many critics looked at these episodes from different angles. The scene of beheading game was also misinterpreted by many critics and also it has been challenged by other critics. One of the critics named Gaston Paris observed about the failure of the Gawain when he agrees to behead the Green knight. The challenge of the green knight was not interpreted appropriately. The response of the hero to accept the challenge of the Green Knight depicts the development of the hero but it may be said that the challenge was misinterpreted. It is a display of pride. Critics like J. R. R. Tolkien was overwhelmed by this allegorical marvel and he says that “in terms of literature, undoubtedly this break in the mathematical perfection of an ideal creature, inhuman in flawlessness, is a great improvement.”

J.A Burrow observes that Gawain is a comedy “Its version of the Everyman experience is such that the hero can survive it bodily as well as spiritually, returning from it with honour and being reincorporated into his society—a more human kind of happy ending.⁵” J.A Burrow also have written essays on grammar and stylistics of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and he gives an extensive analysis of the poem. He made a comparison with the Old English poem Beowulf. A recent criticism by Geraldine Heng of the poem lies in the underpinnings of feminist contexts. The poem is essentially a text, a discourse reflecting masculine narrative with masculine actors. There were studies regarding the female characters specifically there are debates on the character of Morgan who was represented as infamous. Literary

criticism has shown different aspects of the text and it is important to know that if you read a text you should not look at it from a single perspective. A text is a medley of varied interpretations and the critical responses help in a deeper understanding of the same. Your approach towards the text must include style, language, form and content. The understanding must move towards a discourse and you must interact with the particular text.

STOP TO CONSIDER

The critical receptions are varied and there are many critics who have been doing their research and till date there are questions regarding the poet and the age. The portrayal of Sir Gawain has been read in many ways and these are a few criticisms regarding the poem. The romance tradition is being questioned too and the representation of women was one of the important subject to critically understand the texts.

2.5 Context of the Poem

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as already mentioned is found in the manuscript along with the other poems, Pearl, Patience and Purity and its written by the anonymous poet. The poems are written at the time when medieval romances, knighthood, chivalry flourished in literary writings. Most of the plot and story is borrowed from the romances of the matter of France.

2.6 Reading the Poem:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a 14th century medieval romance. The author is known as the Gawain poet or the Pearl poet and it is one of the famous Arthurian stories. It is endowed with various symbols, imageries, folklore, magic, chivalry, mythology. The beheading game is the main thrust of the poem and the story revolves around this game in Arthur's court. It is written in the tradition of Alliterative Revival and bob and wheel rhythm. The setting of the Arthur's court is Camelot. The story is about a hero who goes on a quest and tests his valour as a chivalric knight. Gawain is an epitome of chivalry and honesty as he remembers the Green knight's vow after a year of beheading Green knight which was a challenge given to Gawain in the Arthur's court during the Christmas celebrations. In return the Green knight will give a blow after one year. Sir Gawain shows chivalry by finding Green knight and he stays as a guest in the castle.

STOP TO CONSIDER.

Bob and Wheel rhythm :Two metrical schemes are paired in this type of rhythm and it is especially used in narrative songs in churches during the 12th to 16th centuries. The song goes on like the movement of a wheel and at the end of the cycle there is a rhythm. It is mainly found in the Middle Ages.

Chivalry: The knighthood institution in the medieval age considers chivalry to be of great importance. The behaviours, mannerisms, social codes are defined by the act of chivalry. The horsemen are one of the symbols of chivalry. Armours and weapons are also important in the chivalric code. It basically came from the military system and the apprenticeship of the warrior which follows a particular code of conduct.

The poem can be divided into three parts. The first part of the poem opens with the celebration of Christmas in King Arthur's court. While the feasting and celebration was going on a frightful green knight who was on a green horse comes in suddenly. He started praising the knights of the round table for their pride and valor. The green knight puts a challenge by giving the axe that anyone can behead his head and later after one year it will be bargained by a blow. On this Sir Gawain accepts the challenge and beheads the green knight. The green knight picks up his head and mounts his horse. The head starts talking and says that he will be waiting at the Green Chapel after a year.

The second part of the poem is a description of the quest of Gawain and the castle where he stays as a guest. The knight faces many impediments on his journey and after praying to Mary thrice he finally reaches a castle where he was the honorable guest. The host welcomes him and Gawain meets the lady of the house. This part of the poem is basically about the advent of the courtly love.

The third section highlights the hunting culture of the medieval period and the episodes on hunting that the Lord of the House goes for is described and the elements of courtly romance between the lady of the house and Gawain become stronger. The lady gives a green silk belt which will save Gawain from every impending danger. The hunting adventures go on in this section.

The fourth section of the poem is the ultimate test of chivalry when Gawain meets the knight and they enter into the bargain which was decided one year back. But Gawain returns ashamed to the Arthur's court as he was wearing the green belt gifted by the Lady of the House. In this section the act of chivalry is shown through the honesty of Gawain towards his love but not towards the Green knight who felt deceived as Gawain was wearing the belt and couldn't keep the bargain wholeheartedly.

Check Your Progress

9. Write a note on the conduct of the knights of Arthur's Round Table.

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10. Discuss the development of the plot from your own understanding.

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11. Comment on the use of language of the Gawain poet.

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12. Comment on the myth behind the concept of quest or journey prevalent in the Middle English with reference to the works of the other medieval poets.

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2.6.1 Reading the lines 232 – 350

Following the tradition of the Arthurian stories of the Matter of Britain the lines prescribed for you spans the arrival of the Green knight in the Arthur's court during Christmas festivities till the beheading game where one can see the chivalrous Gawain. With wonderful expressions and use of language these lines set the tone of the Beheading game and

the valor of Sir Gawain and the graceful King Arthur. The following are the opening lines:

And they themselves sat and stared,/Wondering, bewildered, what it meant that a knight./And his horse could have such a color, could grow/ As green as grass, or greener! and glow./Brighter than emerald enamel and gold.

In the above lines you can understand that the setting and criteria of the chivalric romance is fulfilled by the mention of the knight, the horse and the green colour of the knight. The knights of the Round Table were surprised and some thought the green knight to be a phantom. The people of the court were silent as stones as corpses. Even King Arthur greeted the knightly with a tone of fear. With full of fear Arthur said

"Sir, you are welcome in my house,/For I am Arthur and I rule this court./Step down from your horse and stay, let me prayyou,/ And whatever you've come for can be talked of afterward." On this green man replied that he couldn't linger and he praised the knights of Arthur's courts, about their noble deeds. The Green knight further said I intend no war, what I wear is in peace. And if Arthur is as brave as his fame, in the name. Of this Christmas season you'll grant me the sport. I've come for." Arthur agreed and the Green knight proposed for a game and he said "I'll offer this noble axe and let them/Swing its weight as they like, and I'll sit/ Without armor and invite them to strike as theyplease...But not now: a year /And a day will be time/ Enough. So: is anyone here /Able to rise?"On this the knight , Arthur rose and accepted green man's proposal ""By God, fellow, this is foolish/ Stuff-but you've asked for folly, and folly/ You'll get! No one's afraid of your nonsense: /For God's sake, give me your axe,/ I'll grantYour request. When Arthur asked for the axe Sir Gawain exclaimed "Let this challenge be mine."

2.6.2 Reading the lines 350 – 466

The expressions of boldness and the courtly language is used brilliantly and the story unveils itself through the richness of the language. There are expressions of life and death and courage to face death. The following lines represents the honesty of Gawain and his duty towards the king "And I am the slightest, the dullest of them all;/My life the least, my death no loss/ My only worth is you, my royal/ Uncle, all my virtue is through you.Further with great courage and the axe in hand Gawain went near the green knight and the bargain was discussed clearly; "Sir Gawain, no one could do/What you'll do, and delight me/More--no man alive."By God," he swore, "Sir Gawain, I'm glad/ To have what I wanted at your hands. You've spoken/ Our bargain beautifully, and spoken it fair. After the bargain the actual beheading game was about to begin and the Green knight was smiling and bent his head for the action to happen. Sir Gawain swung the axe and split the green man's neck and the head fell into the ground. But the green man stood strong and held the head and mounted on his horse; Stepped in the stirrups and mounted, holding/ His head by its long green hair, sitting/High and steady in the saddle as though nothing/ Had happened. The head was speaking to Sir Gawain about the bargain ;"Gawain, be ready to ride as you promised;/Hunt me well until you find me-/As you swore to, here in this hall, heard By these knights. The green knight galloped and left the court and knights were smiling. The lines prescribed for you has a great significance as it encompasses the important characteristics surround the medieval games and the courageous knights of that period is reflected through their deeds. These lines reflects the duty of the knights towards their king and becoming chivalrous. In the later part of the poem as mentioned earlier is a quest of Sir Gawain to meet the bargain as he

accepted and on this quest the elements of courtly romance are also accomplished. This romance ends with the honesty and loyalty of Sir Gawain who defeated green knight by exhibiting his honesty through love and faith. The green belt which was given by the lady as a symbol of love and safety was intact and by protecting that Sir Gawain came out victorious. The characteristics of courtly love and romance was fully realized in this allegorical romance.

2.7 Summing Up:

The romance tradition of the Matter of Britain and Arthurian stories are now familiar to you. You should be in a position to understand the various aspects of the Arthurian legends and the medieval romances. It is only one text which you have read but there is much more to explore and there are many aspects that can be explored by you. We expect that you have closely followed the text through this self instructional material. Your experience of reading poetry may have taken a different course where you tend to study various strands of understanding. Whatever is presented here is not incontestable and you can dive more into varied interpretations of the medieval age and its romances. You can study further and get engaged in better understanding with the suggested readings that is given below.

2.8 Glossary

Dream vision: It is a narrative where the speaker of the poem falls asleep and relates the images of the dream with the reality. There are dream allegories which deal with allegorical aspect. The dream vision was popular in the Middle Ages poetry and it has enhanced the story telling technique.

2.9 Suggested readings:

Brown. Peter. *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture*. C 1350-1500. Blackwell Publishing (2007)

Burrow. J. A. *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Routledge Library Editions (1965)

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Unit 3

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 Understanding the Gawain poet and introduction to the different approaches of the poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:
- 3.3 Reading other important poems of Gawain poet/ Pearl poet.
- 3.4 Medieval romances: Its social and historical context.
- 3.5 Exploring the meaning of “hero” and the myth behind the “Green” knight
- 3.6 Issue of Gender in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
- 3.7 A brief survey on Critical Essays and Books on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 Summing Up
- 3.10 Suggested Readings.

3.1 Objective:

In the main unit you have gained an understanding of the medieval romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the themes like chivalry, legends of Arthur and the round table knights, adventure of the knight etc. You have also become familiar with the characters and the plot of the poem, the different literary devices used during Middle English period and other critical receptions of the same. In this supplementary unit you shall learn about different approaches of reading the poem and understanding the literary background. You will

also become familiar with the additional readings of the poem which shall inculcate in you a critical faculty while reading a text. With this aim in view this supplementary unit is designed which will help you to

- Explore the different approaches of the text and the poet
- Familiarize yourself with other writings of the poet which will help in a better understanding of the works of the Gawain poet.
- Place the text in a social and cultural context of the medieval England.
- Become conversant regarding the tradition of medieval romances and how you can place it within the scope of reality.
- Develop your critical faculty to understand the characters embedded in adventures and court love in particular and the text in general.
- Acquaint yourself with important books and essays which shall help you to comprehend the text in a better way.

3.2 Understanding the Gawain poet and introduction to the different approaches of the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

From the main unit you have come to know that this well-known poem is written by an unidentified poet and there are debates regarding the authorship. The poet's use of language indicates that he is a contemporary of Chaucer and has the literary scholarship of the subject matter he writes. It is interesting to read a text without knowing the author as it helps in impersonating the text it can be read independently. This shall remind you of the seminal work of Roland Barthes who writes about the death of the author and also shall enable you to recall the concepts of new criticism which focused on the significance of the text as an independent entity and show should be

read by dissociating the poet. Gawain poet is also addressed as Pearl poet. Most of the middle English poems were preserved in the form of manuscripts in the Churches unless and until the invention of Caxton's printing press in 1476. Similarly, the works of the Gawain poet were found in one manuscript in the Cotton Nero A x. owned by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton. The poem was not discovered until the reign of Queen Victoria and during that period it was found as a manuscript and Sir Gawain became the greatest middle English romance. The writings of the poet suggest that he belongs to the noble class and was well read and well aware of the society and its developments. His works also depicts his inclination towards Christianity which was the only way of life during that period and he knew the **Vulgate Bible**. It is evident that the poet had knowledge of the Latin literature which was obvious regarding the contemporary writers of the period due to the historical wars and conquests. Further the Gawain poet was fully aware of the emerging literary techniques of the era and its overwhelmingly evident in his poems.

The poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is not only a poem about the courtly love, adhering to the tradition of medieval romance pertaining to the Arthurian tales, about knightly adventures, Christianity rather you should understand that it is also about the representation of the stock characters like the brave attitude of the knight Gawain who respected King Arthur and was ready to behead the green man. It was his humble attitude and display of obedience towards the king. But as the narrative unfolds we can see that the hero is caught in the illusion of love and has accepted the green girdle of protection thus deceiving the vows of the green knight. The poem can be approached as a critique of the society where women are marginalized and they are subordinate to men. The poem devalues the women characters and it is almost like a celebration of masculinity. The concept of chivalry can be questioned here as you can assess that

it is a failure of chivalry and rather it is a submission of the knights. It can be understood from the instance that Gawain met the green knight after one year according to the challenge but he was wearing the green belt. The poem is more about supernatural elements and the folk culture rather than a reflection of the Christianity in its true form. The poem can be read as placed in a juncture between paganism and Christianity. The employment of games like beheading and challenging a return blow is a tenet of folklore and pagan living rather than believing in the traits of Christianity. Another way of approaching the text is to understand the myth behind the Green colour. It is a symbol of fertility and new life which is again similar to the idea of the rebirth of Christ.

There are seducing scenes in the green chapel where Gawain goes to fulfil his quest. In the chapel lady Bertilak comes to the bedroom of Gawain and tries to seduce him and in return she gets a single kiss. This continues in the consecutive days and in return Bertilak gives Gawain a deer, a boar and the green silk belt which shall protect him from any impending danger. At this Gawain gives her three kisses and in return gives him a fox. These episodes of exchanges evoke the pagan culture and the folklore. From this point of view too you can probe into the study of Christianity and Paganism and the differences between the two. In the course of the narrative Gawain gets defeated by his own whims and he couldn't draw a line between chivalry and love. On the day of fulfilling his quest Gawain goes to the Green Knight and bows his head to get the blow but he was not killed as Gawain was trapped into a trick where the Green knight was actually the lord of the chapel Bertilak and the magic was done by the sorceress of the castle Morgan Le Fay who was the sister of King Arthur. The entire act was meant to be a test to Gawain and he returned to Camelot being the failure knight. The practice of representing women as witch or sorceress can be another to approach to read the poem as it devalues

a woman and places her in the periphery of the narrative. Though it is a marvelous folk story and one of the famous Arthurian tales, there are many elements that can be studied individually as it has multifaceted interpretations.

Stop to Consider

The Gawain and the Green Knight is also a story of revenge of blood and flesh and the cycle of birth and death. The poem also depicts the nature with its changing seasons. The descriptions of nature play a significant role in the poem as it triggers the action of the plot. Gawain was a figure of honesty, courage, morality but at the end of the poem when Gawain comes back to the court and narrates the story to Arthur, it is seen that he has described about his failure as a knight. There are multiple allegorical interpretations which throws light on the question of chivalry, morality, courage etc. It is important to understand the psychology of Gawain and Gawain as a romance hero. It can be also interpreted as a thriller with supernatural elements.

Check your Progress:

1. Write a note on the use of supernatural elements employed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
2. What is the importance of games and exchanges in the poem. Elucidate
3. Do you think that Sir Gawain has shown his courage and chivalry in the entire course of the poem? Explain.
4. Write a note on the significance of adventures amongst the knights of the Arthurian court.
5. What are the characteristics of a Christian knight and

how did Gawain fulfill the tenets of a true Christian.

3.3 Reading other important poems of Gawain poet/

Pearl poet.

By now you have become acquainted with the different approaches of reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. However, you have to read other works of the same poet which will provide you with a better understanding of the poet and the contexts of his poems. In the main unit you have come across the other poems of the Gawain poet but in this section of the unit you will be well acquainted with the other poems too. In the surviving manuscript there were another three poems “Pearl”, “Patience” and “Purity” which are believed to be written by the same poet and thus the poet was also addressed as the Pearl poet. The first of the four poems is “Pearl” an allegory. The poem is about a lost child and the father’s pain for the daughter. In the course of the poem the father learns how to overcome the grief. The poem is endowed with dream visions and its inspiration is the ‘The Romance of the Rose’ which is written in the tradition of dream allegory and it is a courtly love poem and the Bible. It has been influenced by the story of Pearl of the Gospel and the dream vision tradition is influenced by Roman de La Rose. The poem is elegiac in tone as the father laments on the loss of his daughter. There are instances that Boccaccio has written an elegy on his daughter Violante, “Olympia.” There are no linkages between the pearl poet and Boccaccio’s work but it is an additional information. In the same tradition Chaucer’s Book of Duchess is written which indicates that the poet belongs to fourteenth century and the works have some similarity with the contemporary poets. It is written in alliterative tradition. While reading the other

poems of this manuscript you can compare and contrast with the writers of the same period and the techniques used. There are pictorial representations of the episodes in Pearl and the poem opens with the father who was into a deep slumber in the meadows. In the other illustrations also the father is found standing by the river and in a distance Pearl could be seen wearing a white dress. The image of Pearl appears in the later stanzas where she was extending her arms towards the father. The metrical style of the poem is structured in twelve lines and with four accents and the rhyme scheme is a b a b a b a b c b c. The rhythmic beauty is worth mentioning and has employed **caesura** which enhances the beauty of the poem. The length of poem goes on to 1212 lines and there are five stanzas grouped together in a 12 line stanza. The alliterative phrases are noteworthy and the dialect is a blend of French, English and Scandinavian language.

The next poem of the manuscript is written in a different style than Pearl and as you have known in the main unit, the name of the poem is Cleanness or Purity. It is written in epic style. It dives into the biblical unit to a large extent as it is about Flood, fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, Belshazzars fate regarding uncleanness. The fall of the angels and the fall of man is one of the subjects of the poem. There is a parable on the Marriage Feast. The third poem is “Patience” which is written on the Life of Jonah. Both Purity and Patience employs the same metrical style and it has a relation with the poem Pearl as it also belongs to the concept of purity of soul and patience. The theme of submission to the divine will is also present in all the three poems. The descriptions of nature, mysticism is similar to the poem “Pearl.” By now you have come to know that there are many similar themes in all the poems and reading the rest of the poems than the prescribed one shall give an immense depth in understanding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the style of writing of the Gawain poet. It is seen that religion plays a pivotal role in the medieval poems and this poet also not an exception

as Christianity was steeped into the lives of the people during the medieval times.

Stop to Consider

The best known poem of the surviving manuscript of Cotton Nero A.x, “Pearl” has a similarity with Langland’s Piers Plowman as such the opening scene of Piers Plowman depicts how the author falls asleep in a May morning on the Malvern Hills and he had a dream of the folks of the town. In the dream an angelic voice asks him to follow mercy and justice to live in the society. The dream convention is similar to the poem Pearl where the father goes asleep and had visions of his daughter. The literary form of elegy is found in Chaucer’s *The Book Of the Duchess* which is written for Blanche of Lancaster . There are repeated use of the word “white” associated with Blanche which can be again traced back to Gawain poet’s “Pearl” where the daughter is seen in the visions wearing white.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on the authorial question of the poems found in the manuscript , Cotton Nero.
2. What is an elegy? Discuss the literary traits of an elegy.
3. Compare and contrast the themes of the poems “Patience” and “Purity or Cleanness”
4. Do you find any similarity of theme and plot between the poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the other poems? If yes, write briefly on it.
5. Comment on the convention of dream allegory and compare it with Chaucer’s works on dream convention

3.4 Medieval romances: Its social and historical context.

Medieval romances emerged from the ideals of court in the middle English period. During that age the society was feudal and the concept of honour, duty towards the king was prominent amongst the people. The court was the space of interaction between valour and pride, strength and weakness, love and loss, kings and knights, religion and mysticism, mannerisms and etiquettes, etc. It was a necessary literary invention of the period which encompasses the everyday life of the court and its ideals and also to dig out the debates surrounding the courtly life. The narratives differed from the origin but it has been researched and interpreted in various ways. It was not only confined to exploring the Arthurian tales but medieval romances are a reflection of socio-cultural scenario of medieval England. Earlier there were local form of romances and they are influenced by the classical epics like *The Roman de Thèbes*, the *Roman d'Eneas*, and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*.

The Arthurian legends became popular from Geoffrey the Monmouth's work *Historia Regum Britannia* and it was widely circulated. The romances were written in eight syllable verses and the tales of love and honour became popular. In around 1160, the Arthurian romance named *Erec at Enide* written by Chretien de Troyes became popular and this included the stories of the knight Lancelot and Perceval. Other examples of romances are the tragic love tale of Tristan and Iseut and it was widespread in Europe and Scandinavia in the middle English era. The romance *Gautier de Arras* in *Eracle* is an exception which is not inspired by the Arthurian romances and rather it was a tale of the Byzantium. The romances than travelled to the German speaking regions from Anglo Norman and French romances. The romances were widely read and the techniques were refined and

written in a new form. In the middle English period the romances were circulated amongst the nobility and the bourgeois class. However, there were emerging discourses regarding the reality of society and the ideals of court. In Spain too romances travelled and they were on historical accounts. Romances became a medium of literary scholarship through which the courtly ideals, the medieval life, its culture could be traced. In the later years of the end of middle English period the issues of the romances became different as the England had witnessed the devastation cause by the Hundred Years War and the Black Death. The romances thus are a tool of social code and conduct, ideals of chivalry, birth and death, quest for identity and these elements later on faded away but a few reflections are found in the works of Cervantes and Shakespeare.

Stop to Consider

In the main unit you have come across Jean Bodel's model of romances; *Matter of France*, *Matter of Britain*, *Matter of Rome*. In his model of romances, the "Matter of England" reflects the romance tradition associated with the Viking period. One of the examples of the Matter of England is King Horn, written in alliterative verses. This romance was not based on the courtly elements of the Matter of France rather it was about various adventures and the focus was on the action of the plot. There are ballad versions on the character of Horn. The most prominent work of the Matter of England is Havelok the Dane. There are series of adventures of Havelok and the earlier actions of the poem depicts the evil plots of Godrich who took the place of King Athelwold after his death. There are supernatural elements in this poem too. The middle English romances thus ranges from variety of themes and the verse forms are unique. The experiments with verse forms continued in the middle English period regarding the rhyme

scheme and handling of the stanzas

Check your Progress

1. Write a note on medieval romance focusing on the Matter of Britain
2. What is Alliterative revival?
3. Write a note on the importance of Arthurian tales in the development of the romances.
4. Comment on the Middle English society and culture and its impact on the romances.
5. Write a note on the supernatural elements of the medieval romance.

3.5 Exploring the meaning of “hero” and the myth behind the “Green” knight

In this section of the unit you will be able to delve better into the meaning of the unfolding of the events and question the characteristics of “hero” and the meaning behind the myth of “green.” This shall help you to understand the meaning of the poem to a large extent. The poem opens at Camelot during Christmas festivities and on that day when the Green knight suddenly appears at Arthur’s court and puts forward a challenge you can notice that without hesitation Arthur accepts his proposal of the strange man. But on this Gawain shows his chivalry by uttering the lines “I am weakest of your warriors and feeblest of wit;

loss of my life would be grieved the least.

Were I not your nephew my life would mean nothing;

to be born of your blood is my body's only claim.
Such a foolish affair is unfitting for a king,
so, being first to come forward, it should fall to me
And if my proposal is improper, let no other person
stand blame. "

In this act of Gawain one can see the duty and honor towards his king and he agrees the bargain proposed by the Green man. Accordingly, Gawain goes in a quest to search the Green chapel and submits himself to the Green knight after a year and a day. Gawain stood to be the ideal Christian knight. Gawain was representative of a stalwart knight as he was physically perfect and strong which is evident in the scene where he swung the axe. He is a good horseman as was loyal to the king and these are the qualities that the age demanded. Gawain was also loyal to the lord of the castle Bertilak and till the end one can experience humbleness and honesty. The concept of hero in this romance can be questioned or deconstructed as Gawain is not like the epic hero whose actions and qualities are displayed and shown off again and again and he is almost a superhuman. On the other hand, Gawain is the harbinger of human conduct and behavior apart from being a man who displays his qualities. Gawain has shown his humility and honesty and these qualities make him a true hero unlike the epic heroes like Heracles, Achilles, Odysseus. At the end too Gawain has accepted his defeat and he was ashamed of himself as he wore the green lace and has become weak which is opposed to the ideals of a knight. However, he has portrayed his honesty and loyalty towards lady Bertilak and due to this Arthur has commanded to all the knights of his court to wear the green belt as an honour to Sir Gawain and his honesty. Gawain has thus earned his reputation though he is not a typical hero and the concept of chivalry itself delineates the social codes of conduct. But there may be questions arising in your mind

that Gawain is a representative of the psychologically weak man and other interpretations will be appreciated when you study further.

The “green” symbol represents nature, ritual of fertility which is a reflection of the pagan culture. In the ancient myths it means the renewal of life. Everything was green about the green knight right from his hair, his horse, his flesh and blood as well and it has been expressed in the poem as “no soul had ever seen/ a knight of such a kind/ entirely emerald green.” The Green knight constantly pricked the conscience of the knights of the Arthur’s court by preparing them for the test and the beheading game. The Green knight constantly praised them by saying they are the “worthiest” of the knights and it was evident that he wanted to test the worthiness of the knights of Arthur’s court and the test becomes the reality of this romance. The poem can be read in a different but apt angle where you can locate that it is a plot of magic. It was Morgan Le Fay’s machinations that she wanted to test the humble knights of Arthur’s court

who has created the Green knight and kept him under the magic spell. It was actually Bertilak and the game of tests has shaped the romance. The story is typical of the romances of old English as well the medieval times. The use of magic and representing women as witches was common to the plots of folk tales.

Stop to Consider.

You must note that Sir Gawain was caught between the known realities and the unknown realities. The moment when Gawain accepted the challenge of the Green knight and has shown honour to King Arthur, Gawain was unknown about the impending bargain which is a blend of life and death. Unknowingly Gawain fell into the trap of the Green knight and he even didn’t know about the green chapel and the episodes of hunting and the game of exchanges that he has fell into. He was unknown about the green girdle which will

protect him from death and being tempted he has accepted it and has forgotten about his chivalric deeds. The entire episode of the fulfilling the bargain of the Green knight was also unknown to him. Thus the romance hero also fell prey to the machinations of magic and it is typical romances that the known and the unknown shall play in tandem. Gawain is seen praying to mother Mary on the way to the green chapel which is unlike the heroes of the epics, but as it is mentioned earlier that a romance hero is a representative of the social codes and he was simply like a normal human being than a hero.

Check your Progress

1. Give a character sketch of Morgan Le Fay.
2. Comment on the opening scene of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
3. Discuss the symbolic significance of the colour “green.”
4. Comment on the setting of the poem and how it has enhanced the plot of the poem

3.6 Issue of Gender in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

This section of the unit will lead you towards a different approach of the poem which will widen the periphery of understanding. It is a tale of the glorification of masculinity and we have seen that the women characters are put in margins. The most important character Morgan Le Fay is depicted as sorceress which is an attack to the female world and even in postcolonial times there are immense research on the female as witches and this portrayal diminishes the image of the

women. Guinevere, the wife of Arthur is project as an epitome of beauty and her beauty has been expressed by the lines “with Guinevere in their gathering, gloriously framed at her place on the platform, pricelessly curtained by silk to each side, and canopied across with French weave and fine tapestry from the far east studded with stones and stunning gems. Pearls beyond pocket. Pearls beyond purchase or price.

But not one stone outshone the quartz of the queen's eyes.

In these lines the queen is compared to jewels and precious stones which highlights that women are a medium of visual pleasure and compared with the riches. Women are an object of display. The episodes of seduction games by Lady Bertilak is another method of diminishing the role of women and they are objectified and bound in the confines of pleasure, domesticity, malice, and sexuality. The green girdle also stands for sexuality as it is an intimate clothing which is given to Gawain and he becomes tempted in the advances of the women. The representation of women remained in the margins and they were highly objectified.

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Literary techniques of Gawain and the Green Knight.</p> |
| <p>The poem is written in West midland dialect and it has been best translated by Simon Armitage. It is seen that there are differences in the spellings from the original work for example the word “earth” was written as “erthe”, “days” as “dayes”, “green” as “grene” “knight” as “knight” etc. It is written in the form of alliterative revival, a principal device of the 14th century poetry where the consonant sounds are repeated. The title of the poem is also an</p> |

example of the alliterative device. The usage of this device is found in the Germanic languages. Most of the old English poetry including Beowulf also employed the alliterative verse. There are stressed syllables in the lines and five short lines in each stanza and the rhyme scheme is a b a b a.

Check Your Progress.

1. What do you think about the representation of women in the poem?
2. Compare and contrast the female characters of other poems of the Gawain poet and the prescribed poem
3. Write a note on the male –female relationship in the poem.
4. Elucidate your own views on the seduction scenes of the poem.
5. Write briefly about the courtly love tradition of the medieval romances.

3.7 A brief surveyon Critical Essays and Books on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

In this section of the unit you will be able to acquaint yourself with the critical works on the poem and the literary genres of Middle English period. It is important for you to read and analyze various works that have been written on the prescribed text and familiarize yourself with the interpretations which will help you for having a better grasp on the texts you read. There are various studies on the poem for example the essay of Denver Ewing Baughan’s “The Role of Morgan Le Fay in Sir Gawain and the Green knight” published in *English Literary History* is

an extensive study of the women characters and particularly on Morgan Le Fay and the role of women as a sorceress which was common in the literature of medieval England. Robert Blanche's work on colour symbolism is an interesting study of the myth behind the colour "green" and its multifaceted interpretations in his "Games Poets Play: The Ambiguous Use of Color Symbolism in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." The most essential book on the poem is J. A. Burrow's *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which acts like a handbook for the students and the scholar where Burrow has discussed the sections of the poem separately and has given a broad perspective on the medieval romance tradition, the knightly ideals, the importance of the multiple tests that Gawain had to undergo throughout the poem, the subject of chivalry, the beheading scenes etc. In the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romances* there are collection of essays which are curated carefully that describes the genre of medieval romance and the Arthurian tales from various viewpoints. The chapter written by Christopher Baswell throws light on the origin of romances and the issue of translations of the romances. Roberta L. Krueger's essay delves into the questions of gender in Sir Gawain.

3.8 Glossary

Vulgate Bible: It is the Latin translation of the Bible of late 14th century. The Catholic church has given the status of the official Latin Bible. The translation is extensively done by Jerome of Stridon who was appointed by the Pope to revise the Latin Gospels. It is believed that the Gawain poet was well versed in the Vulgate Bible.

Caesura :caesura is a break or stop or pause in one line of poetry which is required in the rhythm of the poetry naturally. A particular line may have more than one caesura and in Sir Gawain and the Green

Knight the caesura is employed skillfully and in Old English poetry too caesura has been used frequently and at times monotonously. An accented caesura is followed by an accented syllable and vice versa. Langland's *Piers Plowman* also used this literary device.

3.9 Summing Up

The additional unit is designed to have a better grasp on the text and by now you are familiar with different approaches of the text and the poet. Though there are questions on the authorial credulities but the text as an independent entity could be approached on multifarious subjects based on the other poems written by the same poet. There are other aspects of the poem that should be explored by you. Other facets of the middle English period and the genres of literature must be analyzed by you. We expect that this supplementary unit has widened your horizon of comprehending a text and the approaches required to read a text. There are other interpretations which can be beyond the issues presented here and you can examine those which will broaden your perspective further. You can study further and get engaged in better understanding with the suggested readings that is given in the following unit.

3.10 Suggested Readings.

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Unit 4

Geoffrey Chaucer: The Nun's Priest's Tale

Unit Structure :

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 The Nun's Priest's Tale: Summary

4.4 Chauntecleer as a Round character

4.5 Pertelote

4.6 Analysis of the Poem

4.7 Summing Up

4.8 Glossary

4.9 Reference and Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives

This unit introduces the medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer and the prescribed text for study the Nun's Priest's Tale. The background of the poet, and details to his life and times are provided in order to familiarise the students to his works. The unit focuses on:

- Chaucer and his life
- Literary context of the poet's work
- Look into the possible approaches to the text, and
- Develop the critical faculties of students in order to enable them to form their own judgment of the text.

4.2 Introduction

Chaucer's nun's priest's tale of a there is opinions on variety of topics, from economic status to moral behaviour, to dream analysis. Chaucer combines all these factors to create a story of great entertainment. The host of the journey to Canterbury calls upon the nun's priest to tell a story. The expectation upon the priest to entertain as high as the previous storyteller had not done a good job, leading the host to remark that he was " boring all of us to death". It was an opportunity for the priest to uplift everyone's spirits by providing and entertaining tale, which he does and the nun's priest tale receives praise.

4.3 The Nun's Priest's Tale: Summary

The tale is about how the rooster is actually presented as the ruler of the roost. The woman who owns the farm, lives on a plot of land and leads a simple life; she does not eat much and appears to be on the edge of poverty, her ' *bed- and living room was thick with soot*'. But the rooster, Chauntecleer, lived the life of a king in the form, who had everything he needed and wanted. He is neat, clean, and has a voice of the highest quality. All the hens loved him, , but his heart belongs to the love of his life Pertelote.

In the initial descriptions we are provided hints about the disparity between classes (rich and poor). The old woman lives frugally in a home which is dirty and run down. The rooster, which is a bird, lives a much better life than her, he has shiny crown, beak, and nails. This disparity in quality of life is one of the most important aspects of this tale.

Stop to consider

The Priest's Tale is a beast fable with a moralistic purpose; but it becomes a mock-epic, which has been mingled with burlesque, romance, parody, tragedy, dream vision, debate, allegory, transcending the restrictions of fable

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' is an example of which genre?

Chauntecleer's nightmare produces one of the most hilarious scene in the tale, the presence of the dream analysis and premonitions emphasize the fact that these animals have human characteristics; Chauntecleer tells Pertelote about the dream he has, where he sees a dog-like creature stalking him, and then sees his own lifeless body in the mouth of the creature. But Pertelote treats Chauntecleer's nightmare as nonsense, and looks down on him for being afraid of a dream. She brings in the reference of Cato, Roman historian and an orator, who did not believe in dreams, and ends up proclaiming that Chauntecleer was constipated. Chauntecleer disagrees with Pertelote, and brings in the writings of Cicero, a notable Roman orator, to his defense. He also brings in several stories which agreed to dreams being able to foretell the future. These birds display intelligence and are anthropomorphic representations (the most common feature of fables, where animals behave like humans).

Chauntecleer's nightmare actually comes true when another creature, the fox, Don Russell, starts to silently stalk him. The fox

approaches Chauntecleer and tell him not to be afraid; he was only there to honour his voice. Hearing this Chauntecleer closes his eyes and starts to sing.

Stop to consider

1. Chaucer, by introducing structural changes to the tale, takes away the focus from the bragging and foolish rooster,

Unfortunately for Chauntecleer, the fox grabs him and runs off. Pertelote notices that Chauntecleer is missing and raises the alarm. The entire farmyard, the widow, her daughters, the hens, the dogs all give a chase behind the fox. Chanticleer tells the fox that he should stop and turn around and give the crowd a piece of his mind. The fox falls for Chauntecleer words and opens his mouth to do so. Taking his chance Chauntecleer escapes to a tree top. The fox tries once again to lure Chauntecleer down by flattering him, but Chauntecleer declines, as he had learned his lesson. The Nun's Priest is praised by the Host at the end of the tale, thanking him for his fine tale and turns to another for the next tale

Check your Progress

1. In 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the name of the protagonist rooster, Chauntecleer, means what?
2. In 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Chauntecleer is comforted after a bad dream by his favorite wife, _____.

4.4 Chauntecleer as a Round character

The Nun's Priest Tale employs animals as characters that represent the various elements of human nature and the goal of the tale is to reveal the truth about the human nature. The main character of this fable is Chauntecleer, who is a rooster or a cock, characterized by his physical appearances. The physical characteristics attached to the rooster are that of egoistic, overconfident, and arrogant. We are informed by the narrative that Chauntecleer is a prized cock:

*And in the yard a cock called Chanticleer.
In all the land, for crowing, he'd no peer.
His voice was merrier than the organ gay
On Mass days, which in church begins to play;
More regular was his crowing in his lodge
Than is a clock or abbey horologe.
He is also described as physically handsome
His bill was black and just like jet it shone;
Like azure were his legs and toes, each one;
His spurs were whiter than the lily flower;
And plumage of the burnished gold his dower*

The praise that Chauntecleer receives leads him to ignore the signs that he receives in his dreams which foretell his demise. The narrator tells us that according to his view it was Chauntecleer's fault to have listened to his wife's advice; "*his wife advice, to his dismay*", which led him to the fox's mouth. Chauntecleer's fatal mistake of not believing in his dreams as well as his vanity is revealed when he sings for the fox, upon falling prey to the fox's flattery. The vain rooster is thus tricked into closing his eyes and crowing, only to be seized by the fox and carried off. :

*When Chanticleer the fox did then espy,
He would have fled but that the fox anon
Said: "Gentle sir, alas! Why be thus gone?
Are you afraid of me, who am your friend?
Now, surely, I were worse than any fiend
If I should do you harm or villainy.
I came not here upon your deeds to spy;
But, certainly, the cause of my coming
Was only just to listen to you sing.
For truly, you have quite as fine a voice
As angels have that Heaven's choirs rejoice;
Boethius to music could not bring
Such feeling, nor do others who can sing.*

Stop to consider

2. The Nun's Priest's Tale (middle English: The Noones Preestes Tale of the Cok and Hen, Chauntecleer and Pertelote) is one of the Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer composed in 1390's. It is a beast fable and mock Epic based on the Reynard cycle.

Check your progress

1. The tale presents a great opportunity to see the life of the peasantry, mostly obscured in the Tales.
2. What other aspects of this household tell you things about the economic realities of late 14th C. English peasant life?

3. Why might the Nun's Priest pay such close attention to this setting before moving into the beast fable?

As a result of being vain and not trusting his own instincts, Chauntecleer is easily captured by the fox. But as the fox runs away towards the forest, the farmyard erupts in mayhem, soon the widow, her two daughters, the dogs, the hens even the bees are chasing the fox. Chanticleer suggests to the fox that he should turn around and shout insults to his pursuers:

*In all his fear unto the fox did clack
And say: "Sir, were I you, as I should be,
Then would I say (as God may now help me!),
'Turn back again, presumptuous peasants all!
A very pestilence upon you fall!*

The fox turns around and brags about his good fortune, and as a result of his ego Chauntecleer is freed. The fox tries to entice Chauntecleer again, but Chauntecleer is not fooled for the second time. He learns his lesson and tells the fox:

*You shall no more, with any flattery,
Cause me to sing and close up either eye.
For he who shuts his eyes when he should see,
And wilfully, God let him ne'er be free!*

Chauntecleer learns from his mistakes and does not succumb to his ego a second time, therefore, develops as a character throughout the course of the tale; Chauntecleer therefore can be considered a round character in the Nun's Priest Tale.

Stop to consider

Beast fables are a form of allegorical writing, written with the intention of pointing out silliness of certain behavior. The main purpose of the Nun's Priest's Tale is to provide commentary on human behavior.

4.5 Pertelote

Pertelote is Chanticleer's favorite who is depicted as if she were a noble lady at court. Chaucer's tale has a subtle satirical tone, which is displayed by Pertelote and Chanticleer's relationship that mirrors the relationship between a lord and lady at court. By giving us a story told from the perspective of farm animals, Chaucer layers the tale with humor.

By rendering these relationships from the perspective of farm animals, Chaucer underlies his fable with a layer of humor. Pertelote is presented as someone who is nice, and a good companion, and in love with Chauntecleer. But she soon loses interest when Chauntecleer is disturbed by a nightmare. She exclaims that she could never marry a coward, portraying her as someone who is easily swayed and is judgmental. We can also see that she has a very clear vision about what she wants from her husband; though later it is revealed that she loves Chauntecleer deeply.

Check your progress

1. At the conclusion of 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the priest receives quite a bit of praise for his tale. Why?

2. The old widow in 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* lives in near poverty. With whom does the priest contrast the widow to demonstrate economic disparity?

3. When Pertelote and Chanticleer discuss dream analysis in 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' as found in *The Canterbury Tales*, which two notable Roman orators do they use to support their claims?

Stop to Consider

There are a succession of examples which of human flaws in the dream debates and pompous forays into philosophies, which make it easy to that we are in the animals' habitat. Both Chauntecleer and Pertelote behave unlike their avian natures as they take part in academic argument, citing authorities such as Macrobius (c. 399-422) to convince each other about the importance of dreams and medical cures.

Check your progress

What was the reaction in the farmyard when Chauntecleer was captured by the fox?

4.6 Analysis of the Poem

The Nun's Priest's Tale is an example of one of Chaucer's brilliant storytelling. The tale is an example of the literary style called bestiary or the beast fable. In beast fables, animals behave like human beings; and these types of fables are written usually to insult man or make a commentary on the flaws in the human nature. The tail makes a

suggestion that while animals behave like men, humans often behave like animals.

The tale is of a trivial event, which is told using the mock heroic technique; this raises the importance of this simple story. When Don Russell, the fox, runs off with Chauntecleer between his jaws, the entire farmyard involves itself in the chase. The scene is narrated in the elevated language which is found in the epics to describe the deeds and Adventures of the heroes. Chaucer's tale of a fox abducting a rooster is hardly epic, yet, his use of elevated language makes the reader compare the chase with that of Achilles' chase of Hector around the battlements in the Iliad. Comparing the despair of Chauntecleer to that of Hector brings out the comic absurdity of the situation.

Other instances of the use of the mock heroic is reference to the other prominent traitors of history in relation to Don Russell: "a new Iscariot, a second Ganelon, and a false hypocrite, Greek Sinon"; and when the farmyard animals discuss foreknowledge and prophecies in terms of a highly intellectual nature. The elevated use of mock-heroic is also present in the discussion between Chauntecleer and Pertelote regarding Chauntecleer's nightmare.

The opening lines in the Nun's Priest's Tale set up the contrast between differences of the simple life of the widow and the rich life led by the rooster, Chauntecleer. The tale represents the difference between the classes, one of the most telling themes of this tale is that animals representing men and women. The widow is poor and lives a very sparse life of a humble Christian, while Chauntecleer is shown to have belonged to the rich class, who have many obligations and responsibilities, for example, the sun could not rise, if Chauntecleer does not crow at dawn, which can also be interpreted as per the middle English (as in modern) meaning of the word

'crowing', which is boasting or bragging. Other responsibilities are equally silly, like that of taking care of his wives.

There is a light hearted irony in the way Chauntecleer is represented as a noble; in the description of Chauntecleer many adjectives have been used, such as 'Castle wall', 'polished jet', 'azure', 'lilies', 'burnished gold', which reminds the reader of a warrior or a knight, instead of a rooster.

Stop to consider

One of Chaucer's central sources was the twelfth-century French "beast epic" known as the *Roman de Renart*, which details the exploits of Reynard the fox and his attempts to outwit a wolf and other animals.

Chauntecleer is superior in many ways, he is not only well informed but very handsome. He is described in words that in mediaeval period was associated with royalty. He is also successful in love, with his many wives, and Pertelote being the chief among them. The irony is also presented in the contrast between the barnyard and the real life, bring out the pretensions and aspirations shown by the nobility and humanity alike. Chauntecleer and Pertelote interact in the manner of married couples who use sayings and examples of philosophers to expound upon their arguments. In the event where Don Russell uses flattery to ensnare chanticleer and how Chauntecleer plays on Don Russell's ego to escape his clutches; is one of the examples of the aspect of beast fables which deals with the issues of morality that are presented to the readers. These are important literary tools used to tell powerful stories describing the flowers of mankind. The reader is given a moral through these characters about how flattery and pride go before a fall. In the last stanza, the narrative addressing everyone stresses on the point that the tale is not merely about a fox and a

rooster, but more about a story of morality, a story about naivety and good character, rather than barnyard animals.

Check your Progress

When Chauntecleer first sees the fox in The Nun's Priest's Tale, What does he do?

4.7 Summing up

The Nun's Priest's Tale is one of Chaucer's most brilliant tales, and it functions on several levels. The tale is an outstanding example of the literary style known as a bestiary (or a beast fable) in which animals behave like human beings. This type of fable is often applied as an insult to man or used as a commentary on man's foibles. To suggest that animals behave like humans is to suggest that humans often behave like animals.

There are three main characters in this tale, the rooster Chauntecleer, his chief wife, the hen Pertelote, and a fox named Russell. The tale opens with Chauntecleer having a bad dream about being captured. He shares this information with Pertelote, who rejects it as a meaningless dream, pointing out that all dreams are meaningless and this specific dream must have been caused by his irritability, or red cholera one of the different 'humours' or fluids inside the body. Therefore, she advises her husband to take a dose of laxative and restore a healthy balance of said fluids inside his body. Chauntecleer is not convinced and sticks to his belief that dreams are forewarnings of actual things to come, and should be taken seriously. Both husband and wife argue with smaller anecdotes supporting their respective views. When night falls, the fox Russell does not attack Chauntecleer directly instead tries

to entrap him with clever words, declaring that he only wished to listen to Chauntecleer's legendary singing. He also professed to be aware of the rooster's father's singing; blinding Chauntecleer with his pride. He tries to sing with all his might, closing his eyes and straining his neck. The fox quickly grabs the rooster's neck and starts to run away. The noise alerts the whole neighbourhood. Humans and animals chase the fox. At this point Chauntecleer fuels the pride of his captor, and says that he trusts Russell is only taking him to a quiet place in order to better enjoy his singing. It would be just to tell these clueless chasers what his real intention is. Russell the fox agrees and opens his mouth to speak, and Chauntecleer quickly escapes to a treetop. The fox tries to sway him once more, but in vain. Chauntecleer tells him that he will not be fooled again, and the fox laments that he deserves to lose his prize because he did not know when to keep his mouth shut. These pronouncements become the morals of the tale, and pleasing the gathered company of pilgrims, as is shown in the epilogue. Chauntecleer in his argument against the meaninglessness of dreams brings up references from history, mythology and folklore. The wide range of information matches with the priest's career, as it was standard requirement that priests be trained in multiple disciplines. The tale emerges as a layered narrative showing England of that period in various planes, but in a lighter tone than many of the other tales by the nun's priest's co-pilgrims.

4.8 Glossary

azure a semi-precious stone, today called lapis lazuli. In the description of Chauntecleer, the use of azure reinforces his courtly appearance.

humors (humours) in Chaucer's time and well into the Renaissance, "humors" were the elemental fluids of the body — blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile — that regulated a person's physical health and mental disposition.

The Nun's Priest: The priest of the church who accompanies the nuns so that they may offer up their confessions.

Cato Dionysius Cato, the author of a book of maxims used in elementary education (not to be confused with the more famous Marcus Cato the Elder and Marcus Cato the Younger, who were famous statesmen of ancient Rome).

tertian occurring every third day.

lauriol, centaury, and fumitory herbs that were used as cathartics or laxatives.

Kenelm a young prince who, at seven years old, succeeded his father but was slain by an aunt.

Macrobius the author of a famous commentary on Cicero's account of *The Dream of Scipio*.

Crosus (Croesus) King of Lydia, noted for his great wealth.

Andromache wife of Hector, leader of the Trojan forces, who one night dreamed of Hector's death.

In principio / Mulier est hominis confusio a Latin phrase meaning "Woman is the ruin of man." Chaunticleer plays a trick on Lady Pertelote and translates the phrase as "Woman is man's joy and bliss."

Taurus, the bull the second sign of the zodiac.

Lancelot of the lake the popular knight of King Arthur's legendary Round Table.

Iscariot, Judas the betrayer of Jesus to the Romans.

Ganelon, Geeniloun the betrayer of Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, to the Moors in the medieval French epic *The Song of Roland*.

Sinon a Greek who persuaded the Trojans to take the Greeks' wooden horse into their city, the result of which was the destruction of Troy.

Physiologus a collection of nature lore, describing both the natural and supernatural.

Don Brunel the Ass a twelfth-century work by the Englishman Nigel Wireker. The tale refers to a priest's son who breaks a rooster's leg by throwing a stone at it. In revenge, the bird declines to crow in the morning of the day when the priest is to be ordained and receive a benefice; the priest fails to wake up in time and, being late for the ceremony, loses his preferment.

Geoffrey reference to Geoffrey de Vinsauf, an author on the use of rhetoric during the twelfth century.

Pyrrhus the Greek who slew Priam, the king of Troy.

Hasdrubal the king of Carthage when it was destroyed by the Romans. His wife screamed so loudly that all of Carthage heard her, and she died by throwing herself upon Hasdrubal's funeral pyre. The comparison to Lady Pertelote is apropos.

Nero A tyrant who, according to legend, sent many of the senators to death accompanied by the screams and wailing of their wives. Thus,

Lady Pertelote will be similar to the Roman wives if she loses her husband, Chauntecleer.

Jack Straw a leader of the riots in London during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

Source: "The Nun's Priest's Tale." *Cliffnotes*, www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/c/the-canterbury-tales/summary-and-analysis/the-nuns-priests-tale.

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Unit 5

Geoffrey Chaucer: The Nun's Priest's Tale

(Supplementary Unit)

Unit Structure :

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Reading the poem

5.4 Questions and Suggested Answer

5.5 Summing Up

5.6 Reference and Suggested Reading

5.1 Objectives:

After Going through this Unit, you will be able to

- Find clues as to how to read the poem
- Formulate answers to some of the questions pertaining to the poem

5.2 Introduction:

Chaucer's nun's priest's tale of a there is opinions on variety of topics, from economic status to moral behaviour, to dream analysis. Chaucer combines all these factors to create a story of great entertainment. The host of the journey to Canterbury calls upon the nun's priest to tell a story. The expectation upon the priest to entertain as high as the previous storyteller had not done a good job, leading the host to remark that he was " boring all of us to death". It was an opportunity for the priest to uplift everyone's spirits by providing and entertaining tale, which he does and the nun's priest tale receives praise

5.3 Reading the poem

The Nun's Priest Tale most closely resembles the beast-fable in genre, which has its origin in the fables of Æsop. The immediate sources are three-fold. Marie de France's *Del cok e del gupil*. Beast-epics *Roman de Renart* and *Renart le Contrefait*. The beast epic used animals to satirise human behaviour; the fables were moral tales. The Nun's Priest tells his tale at the request of Harry Bailey only after the Knight has interrupted the Monk's Tale. "The Nun's Priest's Tale" include the tale itself as well as its prologue and epilogue. While the central tale offers a bounty of text to analyze, the prologue and epilogue provide a glimpse into the tale's place within the larger Canterbury Tales that an isolated reading might easily overlook. Though the Nun's Priest cites religious sources in his tale, the tale itself is secular: it is a retelling of the folk fable of Chauntecleer the rooster. Here, the high ideal of religion is displaced in favor of a more lighthearted subject. "The Nun's Priest's Tale" mirrors the variety of thought present during Chaucer's time.

Stop to Consider

Find out more about the significance of the themes used in the tale

- The Simple Life
- The Significance of Dreams (what types of Dreams are mentioned? _
- Analyze the dream of Chauntecleer, and also try and find out more about the historical references made in the tale.
- Relations between husband and wife
- What role does Fortune play
- What are the stated *morarilatas* ?

Think about it:

Towards the end of the Tale, the Nun's Priest invites addresses his audience directly:

But ye that holden this tale a folye,

As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,

Taketh the moralite, goode men.

For Seint Paul seith that al that write is,

To our doctrine it is ywrite, ywis:

Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille. (3438-3443)

Think on these lines. The Nun's Priest seems to invite the reader to engage in an interpretation of his non-biblical story. But do any of these methods help us to find the "fruyt"? Is biblical exegesis even appropriate for understanding such a story?

5.3 Questions and Suggested Answers

5.3.1 "The Nun's Priest's Tale" is considered a "mock-epic." Discuss

Hint : "The Nun's Priest's Tale" is a parody of the epic genre in that it transforms the folk tale of Chantecler into an epic poem. Try and find out more about the differences between epic and mock-epic.

5.3.2 "The Nun's Priest's Tale" remains patriarchal, or at least socially conventional. Discuss

Hint: With Chauntecleer possessing numerous wives of which Pertelote is his favorite, clearly referencing his identity as a farmyard rooster but also harkening back to the Biblical and Classical eras where polygamy was common.

5.3.3 Explain how Chanticleer in The Nun's Priest's Tale exemplifies the following elements of a tragic hero.

(Hint: apply the following in your answers 1. hamartia, 2. peripeteia, 3. catastrophe, 4. anagnorisis, and 5. Katharsis).

5.3.4 Describe Pertelote's reaction to Chanticleer's dream. Quote a line or two from the text in your answer. Do you agree with her reaction? Why or why not?

Ans. Pertelote is shocked and ashamed, and berates him rather severely. She says, "Avoy! ... fie on you, heartless". She also says he has now lost her heart and her love, and that she "cannot love a coward, by my faith". (Hint: Answers will vary regarding her reaction. It is fairly easy to assume we would react differently considering we know that the fox does come and snatch him away, thus revealing the dream to in fact be prophetic).

5.4 Summing Up

The Nun's Priest's Tale is an example of one of Chaucer's brilliant storytelling. The tale is an example of the literary style called bestiary or the beast fable. In beast fables, animals behave like human beings; and these types of fables are written usually to insult man or make a commentary on the flaws in the human nature. The tale makes a suggestion that while animals behave like men, humans often behave like animals.

The tale is of a trivial event, which is told using the mock heroic technique; this raises the importance of this simple story. When Don Russell, the fox, runs off with Chanticleer between his jaws, the

entire farmyard involves itself in the chase. The scene is narrated in the elevated language which is found in the epics to describe the deeds and Adventures of the heroes. Chaucer's tale of a fox abducting a rooster is hardly epic,, yet, his use of elevated language makes the reader compare the chase with that of Achille's chase of Hector around the battlements in the Iliad. Comparing the despair of Chauntecleer to that of Hector brings out the comic absurdity of the situation.

5.6 Suggested reading

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Unit 1

An Introduction to Renaissance Poetry

Unit Structure :

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Renaissance humanism
- 1.4 Renaissance in Britain
- 1.5 Renaissance Poetry
 - 1.5.1 INTRODUCTION
 - 1.5.2 Tudor and Early Elizabethan Poets
 - 1.5.3 Edmund Spenser, Phillip Sidney and other Elizabethans
 - 1.5.4 Marlowe and Shakespeare
 - 1.5.5 Elizabethan Sonnet
 - 1.5.6 Did Women have a Renaissance?
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 Glossary
- 1.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

This unit is designed to introduce the students to the poetry produced during the Renaissance period in England. In this regard, a brief survey of the trajectory of the Renaissance can be helpful to contextualize English Renaissance poetry. Thus, after going through

this unit, you are expected to be able to

- *understand* and *describe* the characteristic traits Renaissance movement and its impacts upon the writers, especially poets
- *identify* the element of humanism that earmarked the movement
- *know* the major traits of English Renaissance poetry including its trends
- *familiarize* with the prominent figures of Renaissance poetry

1.2 Introduction

The term ‘Renaissance’ literally denotes ‘rebirth’. It may also signify a reawakening into the knowledge which existed in the past or revival of interest in the antiquity of classical Greek, Rome, etc. The term has its roots in Italian *rinascenza* or *rinascimento*. It is generally applied to signify the historical period that followed the Middle Ages or the Medieval Period. Many scholars believe that the Renaissance proper began in Europe (Italy) in the latter half of the 14th Century and continued throughout Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries and even after that. This period is marked by a renewed interest in ancient languages, the recovery of antique manuscripts, and the return to the classical ideals underlying the era’s defining intellectual movement called humanism. They took a greater interest in their heritage, as was there in Greek and Roman times as opposed to what the Church had taught them. It was a period that brought about profound changes in the philosophical outlook of the people of Europe. The intellectual minds were ignited and the zest for exploring intellectual and geographical dimensions was at its peak. Renaissance thinkers showed immense interest in classical art and culture and there was a deviation from the obsolete literature of the middle ages to the classical literature. There was a deviation from the whole to the individual – from general to particular in the Renaissance. In general, Renaissance

opened the door of immense possibilities.

Check Your Progress

1. What did Wyatt and Surrey do for English poetry?
(Hint: Look for their contribution and their achievements)
2. What is *Blank Verse*?
(Hint: Surrey introduced it to English.)

1.3 Renaissance Humanism

Humanism was the philosophical backbone of this movement of the Renaissance. It helped people discover their potential as opposed to the emphasis on religion. The impact was so overwhelming that it changed the mindset of the people from the dark ages of the middle ages to the sunshine of the modern age. The language and literature don new clothes in the new day. The impulse was instrumental in intensifying individual scholarship of scientific, geographical, and classical cognition to a so far unthinkable extent. There was an immense faith in the potential of individual man as he existed in this world. It also asserted that religion did not constitute the core of human life on earth. The Renaissance emphasized the present and secular lives that involve the appreciation of beauty and artifacts, and the emphasis on the other senses had a tremendous impact on human life. Renaissance men and women studied Greek literature with tremendous enthusiasm and inquisitiveness and developed new insights with every rereading. The works of Aristotle and Plato and the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes were rediscovered, reread, and reinterpreted. Thus, man, in general, becomes the essence of Renaissance scholarship. Renaissance scholars wisely called themselves humanists, who are interested in anything that talked about human existence in this life. Petrarch and Boccaccio were among the early humanists, and their works are described as the dawn of the

Renaissance. Great scientist Copernicus tried to prove that the Sun and not the Earth, was the center of the Universe. In religion, John Wycliffe and John Huss, and Martin Luther fought against the evils of the Church and the foul authority. The Renaissance minds considered themselves as modern in every aspect and tried to break free of the shackles of the middle ages. The Renaissance spread rapidly from its birthplace in Florence to the rest of Italy in the 15th century, and soon to the rest of Europe. The invention of the printing press by German printer Johannes Gutenberg allowed the rapid transmission of these new ideas. As it spread, its ideas diversified and changed, being adapted to local culture leading to the rise of vernacular literature throughout Europe.

SAQ

From your reading what do you understand by the term Renaissance?
(30 words)

.....
.....
.....

What is Renaissance Humanism? (20 words)

.....
.....
.....

Stop to Consider

Renaissance and Humanism: Let's consider the following comments:

According to literary Historian William J. Long:

“The term Renaissance, though used by many writers to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world is more correctly applied to the revival of art resulting from the discovery and imitation of classic models in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Humanism applies to the revival of classical literature...”

And according to J. A. Cuddon, the humanists of the Renaissance period were students of *litterae humaniores* – the literature of the Greek and Latin poets, dramatists, philosophers, historians, and rhetoricians. As a European phenomenon, it was more worldly and thus espoused more secular and anthropocentric philosophy. It helped to civilize man, to make him realize potential powers and gifts, rather than on the preparation for eternal and spiritual life.

1.4 Renaissance in Britain

In Britain, the impact of the Renaissance begun to be felt with the rise of the Tudor Dynasty (1485–1603) and attained its peak during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) and manifested in different genres like drama, poetry, and prose. This can also be taken as a cultural and artistic movement visible after the end of the Wars of Roses (1455-1485) and started with the Tudor dynasty. The second half of the 16th century is usually regarded as the height of the English Renaissance. The resultant intellectual thrust of the Renaissance moved the people forward from the primarily gloomy and passive literature of the past and got engaged in the modern active life that gave some meaning to their spirit of exploration. The major issues that manifested during Renaissance reflected the evolved culture, appetite for exploration, and enthusiasm to create new literature. However, this period also witnessed the continuation of some aspects of the literary practices of the Middle Ages and writers tried to incorporate the same with the newfound secular ideas. The pragmatic, anthropocentric approach and the passion to reform society was the hallmark of Renaissance literature. The development of the printing press in England by Caxton in 1474 propelled the widespread impact of the Renaissance throughout England.

Stop to Consider

There were many great civilizations in Europe. Still, why the Renaissance first started in Italy? Why of all European countries Renaissance had to be started in Italy? The geographical location of Italy has got something to do with it. Italy used to connect the rest of Europe with the Byzantium Empire and the Arab worlds as a trade route. As the trade progressed, this particular area comprising Florence, Venice, Milan, and Rome flourished financially competing among them to patronise culture, sculpture, music, and any forms of scholasticism. They became the epicenter of the Renaissance.

In the 13th century, Italian authors began writing in their native vernacular language rather than in Latin, French, or Provençal. The earliest Renaissance literature appeared in 14th century Italy with writers like Dante, Petrarch, and Machiavelli. From the early 15th Century onwards the influence of the Renaissance rapidly spread across Europe. Renaissance literature is characterized by the adoption of a Humanist philosophy and the recovery of the classical literature of Antiquity, experimentation with form and structure, modern outlook, and benefited from the spread of printing in the latter part of the 15th century.

1.5 Renaissance Poetry

1.5.1 Introduction

Many critics consider Elizabethan Poetry as the high Renaissance poetry in English and is one of the major literary outputs of this period. The kind of poetry that was produced in this period was very different in style, outlook, treatment of the subject matter, and theme from the poetry that was produced in the Medieval period. However, there was a certain continuity of medieval history and values into the Elizabethan times evident in the poetry of this period. It was primarily secular and

relatively modern, and the Renaissance intellectual input and effect of Reformation were very much visible in it. The printing of texts helped establish English as a literary language by standardizing modern English. Caxton printed English poetry of Gower, Lydgate, and Chaucer as well as translations of classical and continental poetry. This opened the intellectual horizon of English minds. Gradually printing manifold and literacy increased, and English education was transformed by Renaissance humanism with an emphasis on disciplines of rhetoric and eloquence. Renaissance poetry was beginning to emerge. The Reformation, together with the Renaissance pushed poetry towards new and hitherto unexplored directions. A clear shift from the narrative poetry of the earlier times towards lyrical poetry like sonnet, pastoral poetry was visible. English Renaissance poetry can be categorised into three different phases.

Check Your Progress

1. How did Renaissance influence English writers, especially poets?

(Hint: enquire how classical writers worked as models for English poets)

2. How did printing help in the development of Renaissance poetry?

(Hint: Consider the effect of printing press in the publication of books etc.)

3. What are the differences between Medieval poetry and Renaissance poetry?

(Difference of language, outlook of poet, theme, structure etc)

1.5.2 Tudor and Early Elizabethan Poets:

The earliest phase of the English Renaissance can be taken as the native phase because of its roots in medieval tradition. Notable poets of this phase are John Skelton, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Thomas Sackville, George Gascoigne, Thomas Churchyard, George Whetstone, George Whetstone, Barnabe Googe, etc. John Skelton (1460-1529) is usually considered the first Renaissance poet of England. Learned and versatile, Skelton wrote occasional poetry celebrating the reign of the Tudors. Most of his poems, however, reveal an independent mind, which is also reflective, playful, and satiric at times. His short, rhyme-rich lines featuring colloquial diction and rhythms came to be known as Skeltonics later on. His major poems include *The Bouge of Court* (1499), an allegorical dream vision warning of court corruption; "Speak, Parrot," "Colin Clout," and "Why Come Ye Not to Court?" (1522).

The first fruit of the English Renaissance was *Tottel's Miscellany* (first titled as *Songes and Sonettes*), printed by an enterprising printer Richard Tottel in 1557. It included poems written by poets or courtly makers that existed in manuscript form till then. Almost half of the poems were by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. These two poets were hugely influenced by the Italian Renaissance. Wyatt wrote verse letters, lyrics, and satires warning court corruption, and his dozens of poems are about love recount and disillusionment included his much-anthologized rhyme-royal masterpiece "They Flee from Me" (1530). Surrey introduced blank verse into the English Literary scenario in Book II and IV of translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. He developed the English sonnet by organizing the fourteen lines into three quatrains and a couplet (*abab, cdcd, efef, gg*) instead of the Italian sonnet's structure of octave and sestet. Thus, the chief literary contributions of these two men are the introduction of the blank verse and sonnet to the Elizabethan audience. Another popular book in the second half of the 16th century

was *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), a collection of verse laments by various authors recounting the downfall of princes and other powerful figures in English history.

Two other poets of the significance of this period are Thomas Sackville (1536-1608), the 1st Earl of Dorset, and George Gascoigne. Sackville's poem "Induction" (1563) is considered the finest single poem written between Chaucer and Spenser. In 1561 he composed the first English play in blank verse, *Gorboduc* with Thomas Norton, which deals with the consequences of political rivalry. There were very few poets of significance after Chaucer and before Spenser that English literary history has to reckon with. The co-author of *Gorboduc*, Thomas Norton (1532-84) is known for plays and verse, especially sonnets he composed with Jasper Heywood. He also contributed to *Tottel's Miscellany*. George Gascoigne (1525-77), poet and soldier, wrote the first blank verse satire of English literature titled *Steel Glass* (1576). He is also known for his amorous and mock-heroic poem *Dan Bartholomew of Bath*. There was the discernible influence of Petrarch in Gascoigne and his other significant contribution include *The Drum of Doomsday*, *The View of Worldly Vanities*, *The Shame of Sin*, *The Needle's Eye*, *Remedies against the Bitterness of Death*, *A Delicate Diet for Dainty-mouthed Drunkards*, *The Grief of Joy*, *The Grievs or Discommodities of Lusty Youth*, *The Vanities of Beauty*, *The Faults of Force and Strength*, *The Vanities of Activities*, etc. Another versatile writer of this period was Thomas Churchyard (1520-1604). He rose to brief fame through his occasional verse, pamphlets on wartime experiences, and pageants for Queen Elizabeth I. Churchyard's earliest work *A Myrroure for Man* (1552) reflects on the state of man. His most important poem, "The Legend of Shore's Wife," was printed in the 1563 edition of *A Mirror for Magistrates* and also authored lyrics in *Tottel's Miscellany*. Another little-known writer of this early Tudor period George Whetstone (1544-87) commemorated his friend George Gascoigne in a long elegy. His first volume, the *Rocke of Regarde* (1576), consisted of tales in prose and verse adapted from the Italian. George Turberville

(1540-1610) is the first English poet to publish a book of verses to his lady, a genre that became popular in the Elizabethan age later on. He wrote *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs, and Sonnets* (1567), which had models in *Tottel's Miscellany* and the *Greek Anthology*, addressing poems to his lady, the Countess of Warwick. He is also remembered for his translations of Ovid and Mantuanus (1567), which included early attempts at the blank verse in English. Lesser known but significant Barnabe Googe (1540-94) was one of the earliest English pastoral poet and translator who wrote in a plain or native style which. Googe's important contribution to pastoral poetry in English rests with his cycle of eclogues that synthesise trends from classical pastoral, the work of Mantuan, and the pastoral elements of Spanish romance. The poems of George Turberville, Thomas More, George Gascoigne, and Walter Raleigh are examples of a similar style. The English pastoral poem "Phyllida was a fayer maid" (from *Tottel's Miscellany*) has been doubtfully ascribed to Googe.

Check Your Progress

3. What did Wyatt and Surrey do for English poetry?
(Hint: Look for their contribution and their achievements)
4. What is *Blank Verse*?
(Hint: Surrey introduced it to English.)

1.5.3 Edmund Spenser, Phillip Sidney and other Elizabethans

With Edmund Spenser (1552-99), the “poet’s poet” (C. Lamb) English poetry entered into a new age of refreshing variety. He was one of the most important non-dramatic poetic figures of the English Renaissance. Although very little biographical detail is available about Spenser, it is believed that he received a befitting education and rose to prominence in London at a very young age without having any

privileged birth. Edmund Spenser popularised pastoral poetry in England and with the publication of *The Shepherd's Calendar* in 1579 Elizabethan age entered the Golden Age of Literature, especially for poetry in England. Spenser held Chaucer in high regard and he considered Chaucer as "The well of English undefiled". This respect for the past in Spenser created a balanced blend of all the finer things of medieval poetry and contemporary poetic trends in his poetic discourse. He is the one who lent English poetry a relatively modern structure with modern thoughts and attitudes. The protestant influence was reflected in his writing as well as in his attitude towards life and politics in general. Spenser died at the very young age of 46 in 1599. Most of his poetic oeuvre was composed during his stay in Ireland. His first poem, *The Shepherd's Calendar* which can be called the first work of the English literary Renaissance, was published while he was only 27 and was dedicated to his friend Phillip Sidney. It is a pastoral elegy concerning the theme of a sense of loss and the golden age. His best work and undoubtedly one of the finest poetic works of Elizabethan time is the heroic or allegorical epic *The Faerie Queen* (1589-96), written in what came to be known as the Spenserian stanza. It has some affinity with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in its structure and is written in the form of a set of six books (the original plan was to write 12 books). The design is grand and expansive and some of its parts are still unfinished. It is believed that Spenser published *The Faerie Queen* with the assistance of Walter Raleigh, who encouraged him to write and made all his works public. In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser proved himself a master artist of musing picture, music, meter, and story together. It seems that the epic celebrates Elizabeth I and Tudor rule, but it is also a satiric, suggestive text, full of surprises and contradictions. Spenser created a new stanza for his masterpiece which came to be known as the Spenserian stanza later on. The Spenserian stanza is more or less an expansion and intensification of rhyme royal and makes *The Faerie Queene* all the more suspenseful, thought-provoking, musical, and even mesmerizing. Two of Spenser's works *Amoretti* (1595), and *Epithalamion* (1595)

were written while he was in a relationship with Elizabeth Boyle, his future wife. *Amoretti*, which celebrates immortality of spiritual love and temporality of physical love, is a set of 88 sonnets where he talks about his luck towards his lady love. His lyric poem *Epithalamion* can be taken as the noblest wedding hymn in contemporary English literature. This set of poems is unique among Renaissance sonnet sequences in that it celebrates a successful love affair culminating in marriage. One of Spenser's most effective pastoral poems *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595) describes a provincial lad's resistance against the authority, with subsequent reflections on false, superficial love. During this time, he supervised the printing of some of his other poems in a collection called *Complaints* (1591), many of which had probably been written earlier in his career and were now being published to benefit from the great success of his new heroic poem.

Spenser's illustrious friend Sir Phillip Sidney (1554-86) is another prominent figure of English Renaissance poetry. He was born into the nobility and was the eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney and his wife, Lady Mary Dudley, daughter of the duke of Northumberland. The noble lineage provides him easy access to many influential political and social circles of contemporary times. Sidney was the model of a perfect Renaissance gentleman – soldier, courtier, scholar, diplomat, knight, lover, and poet – all rolled into one. He was awarded a knighthood in the year 1583 by the Queen herself and was the patron of several artists and writers that included Edmund Spenser, Abraham Fraunce, Thomas Lodge, etc. He was a complete courtier poet having all sorts of military and diplomatic prowess and a protestant to the core with strong English roots. It is rightly said that no one can get more English than him. Being a member of the parliament, he had the opportunity to travel widely across European countries like France, Germany, Poland, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. This experience of coming into close contact with different cultures and society accounted for the kind of poetry that we see in him. In the year 1582, he composed the sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) that recounts a courtier's passion in delicately fictionalized terms. These

witty and impassioned sonnets helped Elizabethan poetry attain a kind of maturity. His *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesie* (1579) remains the finest work of Elizabethan literary criticism. It was written as a response to Stephen Gosson's attack on the poetic expression and morality of the stage.

Stop to Consider

It will not be wrong to say that Phillip Sidney was the person who set the literary tone in England and started the trend of formulating literary clubs that became the centre of numerous discussions igniting the minds of many literary brains of England.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), was another Renaissance man like Sidney. He was a statesman, soldier, spy, writer, poet, explorer, and learned gentleman. One of the most notable figures of the Elizabethan era, he played a leading part in the English colonization of North America. C. S. Lewis considered him as one of the era's "silver poets", a group of writers who resisted the Italian Renaissance influence of dense classical reference and elaborate poetic devices. Written in a relatively straightforward and plain style, Raleigh's poetry contains strong personal treatments of themes such as love, loss, beauty, and time. Most of his poems are short lyrics that were inspired by actual events. In poems such as "What is Our Life" and "The Lie", Raleigh expresses an attitude more characteristic of the Middle Ages than of the dawning era of humanistic optimism. However, his lesser-known long poem "The Ocean's Love to Cynthia" combines medieval vein with the more elaborate conceits associated with his contemporaries Edmund Spenser and John Donne.

Check Your Progress

1. How did minor poets contributed to Renaissance poetry?
(Hint: Make a list of lesser known poets from your study and see

what they wrote)

2. What is pastoral elegy?

(Hint: A very favorite narrative poetry with the Renaissance poet)

Fulke Greville (1554-1628), a poet, dramatist, and statesman was the principal courtly writer of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, apart from his short-lived friend Sir Philip Sidney. Known as a composer of short poems, Greville's other poetic contributions include sonnet sequence *Caelica* (1633); and verse treatises *An Inquisition upon Fame and Honor* (1633), *A Treatise of Humane Learning* (1633), *A Treatise of Wars* (1633), *A Treatise of Monarchy* (1670), and *A Treatise of Religion* (1670). *Caelica* differed in tone from most Elizabethan sequences, and its treatment being realistic and ironic rather than romantic. His verse treatises reflected the role of the statesmen in keeping order in a naughty world. His poem "Humane Learning" ponders over the effectiveness of instruments and aims of earthly knowledge and, in stressing practical improvements, probably owed something to his friend Francis Bacon.

Better known as a classical scholar and an important figure in the English Renaissance, George Chapman (1559-1634) was a playwright, poet, and translator. An anticipator of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century, Chapman's first published work was *The Shadow of Night* (1594), composed of two hymns, one to Night and one to Cynthia. It is partly allegorical as in the tale of Euthimya (whose name means "Cheerfulness") and the hunt (or chase of the passions) in "Cynthiam". Despite the notoriety of obscurity, this poem displays throughout a quite remarkable and clear handling of syntax within some powerful pentameter couplets. Chapman is best remembered for his translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*. His translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were penned in iambic heptameter and iambic pentameter respectively, extending and elaborating on Homer's

original contents to add descriptive detail or moral and philosophical interpretation and emphasis. Chapman's translation of Homer was much admired by John Keats in his famous poem *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, and also drew attention from Samuel Taylor Coleridge and T. S. Eliot. Other poems by Chapman include *De Guiana, Carmen Epicum* (1596), on the exploits of Sir Walter Raleigh; a continuation of Christopher Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander* (1598); and *Euthymiae Raptus; or the Tears of Peace* (1609). Some critics hold that Chapman to be the 'rival poet' of Shakespeare's sonnets (in sonnets 78–86). Chapman also translated the *Homeric Hymns*, the *Georgics* of Virgil, *The Works of Hesiod* (1618, dedicated to Francis Bacon), the *Hero and Leander* of Musaeus (1618), and the *Fifth Satire* of Juvenal (1624).

SAQ

Who according to you are three major poets of Renaissance in England? (30 words)

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What are the major poetic trends of English Renaissance? (30 words)

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1.5.4 Marlowe and Shakespeare

The poetic works of the two Elizabethan greats, Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616) are integral to Renaissance poetry. They not only excelled as dramatists but also dominated the poetic scene of the Elizabethan age. Both the dramatic and non-dramatic verses of these two greats are of high quality. Christopher Marlowe, in his short life, became a role model for most

of the dramatic poets of the 16th century, especially in their use of language and the blank-verse lines. According to Havelock Ellis, “Marlowe’s place is at the heart of English poetry”. Thomas Nashe described Marlowe as “a diviner Muse” than Musaeus; George Peele called him “the Muses’ darling”. Marlowe began writing verse by translating the Roman poets Ovid and Lucan. Marlowe’s translations of these elegies are not uniformly successful, but they nevertheless form an impressive achievement. There are 48 poems in the collection *All Ovids Elegies. Amores*, the first book of Latin elegiac couplets by Ovid with translation by Marlowe (1580) was burned publicly as offensive in 1599. Marlowe’s *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (1587–88) is a popular lyric of the time. His unfinished but splendid narrative poem *Hero and Leander* (1593), completed by George Chapman in 1598, is one of the finest non-dramatic Elizabethan poems apart from those produced by Edmund Spenser. It is based on the work of the poet Musaeus on Greek mythology and is considered a mock-epic because of the prevalence of humour in it. This poem is also called an “epillyon” or mini-epic due to its themes, length, and subject matter. The influence of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* is very evident in Marlowe’s version of *Hero and Leander*. He also successfully translated Book One of Lucan’s epic poem *Pharsalia* (1593).

Marlowe’s coveted successor William Shakespeare conquered the Renaissance poetic scene in the same manner he did with the Renaissance drama. Apart from his sonnets, the study of his non-dramatic poetry can illuminate Shakespeare’s activities as a poet emphatically of his own age, especially in the period of extraordinary literary flourish in the last decade of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The closure of theatre during 1593-94 because of the Plague prompted Shakespeare to venture into poetry. Shakespeare’s long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593) is unquestionably a Renaissance product and can be read as a traditional Ovidian fable, locating the origin of the inseparability of love and sorrow in Venus’s reaction to the death of Adonis. Like Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*, *Venus and Adonis* is

rightly appreciated as an erotic fantasy glorifying the inversion of established categories and values. After the success of *Venus and Adonis* Shakespeare wrote *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) which works on a combination of ancient and contemporary elements. Unlike *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece* is not set in a mythical golden age, but in a fallen, violent world of corrupt morality. In *Venus and Adonis*, an innocent Adonis rejects the sexual advances of Venus; while in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the virtuous wife Lucrece is raped by the lustful Tarquin. Influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, both the poems show the guilt and moral confusion that result from uncontrolled lust. A third narrative poem, *A Lover's Complaint*, in which a young woman laments her seduction by a persuasive suitor, was printed in the first edition of the *Sonnets* in 1609. Most scholars now accept that Shakespeare wrote *A Lover's Complaint*. *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, printed in Robert Chester's 1601 *Love's Martyr*, mourns the deaths of the legendary phoenix and his lover, the faithful turtle dove. In 1599, two early drafts of sonnets 138 and 144 appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, published under Shakespeare's name but without his permission. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare's long narrative poems were very popular.

Another prominent name of this period, Michael Drayton (1563-1631) published his first book verse translations from *Old Testament* prayers entitled *The Harmonie of the Church* in 1591. After that, he experimented with different contemporary genres that were in fashion. His *Idea, The Shepherds Garland* (1593) is pastoral eclogues modeled on Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. *Idea's Mirrour* (1594) is a sonnet sequence of 51 poems of three or four quatrains concluded by a couplet. Erotic idyll *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595) is a mythological narrative in couplets describing the fortunes of Endimion (Drayton), who falls in love with Phoebe (Lucy Harington). *Robert, Duke of Normandy* (1596) and *Mortimeriados* (1596) are his historical heroic poem. The last poem was originally written in rhyme royal and was recast in Ludovico Ariosto's ottava rima verse as *The Barrons Warres* (1603). Drayton's most original poem of this period

includes *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597) which is a series of pairs of letters exchanged between famous lovers in English history.

John Marston (1576-1634) was a poet, playwright, and satirist during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods. He contributed to the development of a distinctively Jacobean style in poetry and its idiosyncratic vocabulary. He is fondly remembered for the energetic and often obscure style of his poetry.

Thomas Lodge (1576-1625) was another popular poet of the Elizabethan era who wrote the Ovidian verse fables *Scyllaes Metamorphosis* (1589). It is one of the earliest English poems to retell a classical story with imaginative embellishments, and strongly influenced Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. Lodge's next collection *Phyllis* (1593) contains amorous sonnets and pastoral eclogues from French and Italian originals. In *A Fig for Momus* (1595), he introduced classical satires and verse epistles into English literature for the first time. Nearly two hundred poets were recorded in the short period from 1558 to 1625, including many prolific writers. This is testified in *The Paradyse of Daynty Devices* (1576), or *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), where we can find hundreds of songs written by numerous poets.

SAQ

What according to you are the major publications of Renaissance poetry? (20 words)

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Why Blank Verse became so popular with the Renaissance poets? (25 words)

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Discuss major narrative poetry composed by Marlowe and Shakespeare. (30 words)

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1.5.5 Elizabethan sonnet:

Sonnets were the most important fruit of the Renaissance poetry which was beginning to be written from the early Elizabethan period onwards. It has an Italian origin and dates back to the days of Dante and Petrarch. Believed to be originated in Sicily and Provence, the sonnet is a short poem of fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameter, expressing one single feeling in two parts – octave and sestet. The octave, a stanza of eight lines, has two rhymes appearing alternately *abba, abba*. The sestet, a stanza of six lines, has either three or two rhymes, *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*. In Britain, it was almost in the 1590s that saw the heyday of English sonnets. Sonnet became more popular than it ever was during any earlier times even in its place of origin, i.e. Italy. The credit of popularizing sonnets in the English literary scenario mainly goes to Shakespeare and it is a tribute to this great literary genius that English sonnet is known as Shakespearean sonnet as well. However, it was Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47) who first introduced sonnets to the English audience. These two gentlemen wrote amorous sonnets that were modeled after the Italian master Petrarch. But, the English variety of sonnet underwent a change that adopted a rhyme scheme widely different from the original one. Surrey completed his sonnets in three quatrains in alternate rhyme, *abab, cdcd, efef*, followed by a concluding couplet *gg*. This was later on used magnificently by Shakespeare in the true Renaissance spirit. Thus, the two-part scheme of Petrarchan sonnet was modified by the English practitioners including the great Shakespeare which went on to become one of the poetic mainstays of the Renaissance. Apart from these varieties of Renaissance sonnet, Edmund Spenser evolved a new one, in which each of the quatrains was interlinked by an intricate rhyme scheme: *abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee*. Though there is no fixity of the subject matter of the sonnet, the Elizabethan has mostly restricted the thematic concern to love and friendship.

Sonnet rose to its pinnacle of glory in the Elizabethan period itself at a time when drama enjoyed overwhelming popularity. But, how it rose to prominence and changed the status of the sonnet form. In this regard, we must consider the influence Sir Phillip Sidney (1580-83) created upon Elizabethan writers to take up sonnet form as serious literature. The first major sonnet cycle of Renaissance England was Sir Phillip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). This sequence included 108 sonnets that talk about the unsuccessful courtship through the two main figures of Astrophil and Stella. Sidney's sequence was followed shortly by Daniel's *Delia* (1592), Lodge's *Phyllis* (1593), Constable's *Diana* (1594), Drayton's *Idea's Mirror* (1594), and Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595).

After Sidney, William Shakespeare, with his sequence of 154 sonnets published in 1606, put the Elizabethan sonnet at its pinnacle of glory in English literature. This sequence is not only the most innovative and psychologically complex of all the sonnet sequences but also arguably one of the greatest collections of lyric poems in English. Developing further the English sonnet first established by Wyatt and Surrey, Shakespeare captures the mind in many moods and patterns of thought - vulnerability, anxiety, longing, rejection, confidence, disgust, worldliness, anger, regret, hope, jealousy, depression, etc in different sonnets. His sonnets are not imitations but original and unconventional in nature. Here, the poet-lover addresses not a lady but a beloved young man (in sonnets 1-126), and a lady (in sonnets 127-52) - the poet-lover's sexual partners. He was followed sincerely by many English poets over the years.

Stop To Consider

Until the days of Shakespeare, the sonnet was considered a minor form of poetry. It was dismissed as an exhausted genre and many writers did not want to experiment with the form since nothing much has left to be done with this form of writing – thematically more theological with little possibility of cultural traction. The sonnet form was also seen as

too feminine and was not considered a masculine kind of art by the male writers. Moreover, the sonnet had a catholic connection because of its origin in Italy. As English was one of a protestant stronghold, it was considered blasphemous to practice a catholic form of expression. Some even rejected as too artificial for English rhymes. In comparison, drama enjoyed more popularity amongst the Elizabethan writers, and the stage was considered more profitable in comparison to the sonnet form. However, we can find there were three varieties of sonnets are Petrarchan, Shakespearean and Spenserian.

1.5.6 Did women have a Renaissance?

Although there was not much literature created by women during this period, there were few women writers who managed to achieve some sort of personal articulation in the form of poetry. Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621), and sister of Phillip Sidney was an exception because of her noble birth. She is listed alongside Spenser, Shakespeare, and her brother in English literary history. She was the most accomplished female writer of the 16th century. She translated Petrarch's *Triumph of Death* into English terza rima and Robert Garnier's *Antonius, A Tragedy* (1592) into English blank verse. Anne Askew (1521-46), is another important and earliest known woman poet of English Literature. Another important poet was Isabella Whitney (active during 1567-73) who published a love complaint (1567) and a collection of secular poems and prose, *A Sweet Nosgay, or Pleasant Posye* (1573). Her next publication *The Flowers of Philosophy* (1572) evidences her female experience, colloquial voice, and sense of purpose. Other prominent names of women writers include Margaret Tyler, Emilia Lanyer, Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639), and Lady Mary Wroth (1587-1651). Margaret Tyler is known for her successful translation of the Spanish romance *The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* into English in 1578. Emilia Lanyer, whose work is considered as the earliest feminist work of England is known

for her single volume of poems titled *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611). Elizabeth Cary was a poet, translator, and dramatist. Her *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry* (1613) was the first play written by a woman. Lady Mary Wroth wrote an important sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*.

Most of the critics and historians discussing the Renaissance literature do not accord any space to the female writers of the Renaissance period. There may be many reasons that account for the absence of women writers from the literary landscape of the Renaissance, e. g. low literacy rates among women, non-availability of the printed form of writing by women, restricted circulation, presence of non-canonical forms (letters, diaries, etc), the possibility of censorship by male authority, etc. Although some intellectual leaders of the later 16th century advocated literacy in women, few encouraged them to study rhetoric, humanism, and poetics. So, the question is – did women were part of this celebration of the secular, free spirit of Renaissance literature? This question was raised by Joan Kelly-Gadol’s 1997 essay “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” She argued that women’s historical experiences differ from that of men. While there were lots of options available for men during the Renaissance’s celebrated concept of courtly love was structured in such a way that it highlighted women’s passivity and virginity. This did not take into account the women’s point of view. In general, the status of women was pathetic in this age of rational thinking. Women of this period were mostly perceived in gendered roles and had no suffrage and access to university education.

SAQ

Describe the major characteristics of Renaissance poetry. (100 words)

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Define sonnet with proper examples. (30 words)

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Evaluate Elizabethan sonnets and its major exponents. (50 words)

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What according to you are the reasons behind Sonnets becoming a major trend of Renaissance poetry in England? (50 words)

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1.6 Summing Up

It is difficult to point out precisely when the phenomenon of the Renaissance came to an end. Probable it never ended and its effect continued to be felt throughout ages. Literary achievements don't neatly conform to an era's political and social milestones. It should be noted that by Elizabeth's death, many of the greatest Elizabethan poets were writing at or near their peak. The Metaphysical schools of poets, who were the men of letters, were beginning to assert their presence including Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and others. Though the Metaphysical poets were criticised by their contemporary Johnson for combining most heterogeneous ideas and their use of conceit and ingenuity, they are held in high esteem by modernists like T. S. Eliot. A famous example is Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," where he compares two lovers' souls to the "stiff twin" legs of a geometer's compass, one moving, the other fixed, the two inextricably connected. Later on, a contrasting school of poets appeared on the scene - the Cavalier poets,

including Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, and Richard Lovelace. They were Royalists and tended to harmonize classical moderation and cosmopolitan wit in measured verses. Most of the celebrated virtues of the English Renaissance religious and secular, classical and topical got reflected in the poetry of John Milton, whose synthesizing mind produced *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674) that stands tall over other poetry of many English greats.

1.7 Glossary

Blank Verse: This literary device or verse pattern was introduced into English poetry by the Earl of Surrey in the 16th century in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book II and IV) in 1540. It consists of unrhymed iambic pentameter lines, usually in any kind of meter, such as iamb, trochee, spondee, and dactyl. Surrey might have borrowed the idea from the *versi sciolti* (freed verse) of Molza's Italian translations of *Aeneid* (1539). This verse form became very popular because of the freedom it allowed to the writer as there was no fixed number of lines. In English literature, it is mostly used in narrative and reflective poems and dramas, especially in dramatic monologues. After Surrey, Sackville and Norton used it in *Gorboduc* (1561). Afterward, it became a standard verse form for later Tudor and Jacobean dramatists, who made it a more subtle and flexible device. Milton made the best use of it in his magnum opus *Paradise Lost* (1667). Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Coleridge are some of its later exponents in the Neoclassical and Romantic age.

Pastoral Elegy: An elegy, in general, is a poem of lamentation for the dead. So, a pastoral elegy is a type of elegy where the speaker, mostly a shepherd laments the loss of a companion. Pastoral elegy became very popular during the Renaissance period. The manner of speech and the setting were borrowed from rustic life, and display nostalgia, or a lost love. Thus, the pastoral elegy tends to be an idealization of shepherds life and creates an image of a peaceful and uncorrupted

simple existence away from the court and the town. During the Renaissance period, the expression of a longing for this ideal world was worked in great detail. Spenser's *Shephers Calender*, *Colin Clout*, *Astrophil* (on the death of Sidney, Spenser's friend), Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* are some famous examples of Pastoral Elegy from Renaissance England.

Spenserian Stanza: This stanza form was invented by Edmund Spenser for his long allegorical poem *The Faerie Queen* (1589-96). It consists of nine iambic lines, of which the first eight are pentameter; the ninth line is hexameter or alexandrine. The rhyme scheme followed by the Spenserian stanza is *ababbcbcc*. It is considered as one of the important innovations in the history of English poetry. It has its roots in the Old French ballade (eight-line stanzas, rhyming *ababbcbc*), and in the Italian ottava rima (eight iambic pentameter lines with a rhyme scheme of *abababcc*). A similar stanza form, the octave was used by Chaucer in his "Monk's Tale" (eight lines rhyming *ababbcbc*).

Sonnet Cycle: A sonnet cycle or sonnet sequence is a group or series of sonnets on a particular theme addressed to a particular individual. According to J. A. Cuddon, "love is the commonest theme and the advantages of the cycle are that it enables the poet to explore many different aspects and moods of the experience, to analyse his feelings in detail and to record the vicissitudes of the affair. At the same time each individual sonnet lives as an independent poem." Some examples of sonnet sequence are: Spenser's *Amoretti*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Donne's *Holy Sonnets* etc.

1.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

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Some Helpful websites

www.britannica.com

www.encyclopedia.com.

www.poetryfoundation.org

Unit 2

William Shakespeare: Sonnets

Unit Structure :

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Contexts of the Sonnets
- 2.4 Reading the Sonnets
- 2.5 Key Personnas in the Sonnets
- 2.6 Major Themes in the Sonnets
- 2.7 Summing up
- 2.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives: In this units, you will be able to

- Contextualize the poems
- Understand the poems
- Learn the key points in the poem
- Know the major themes in the sonnets

2.2 Introduction

In addition to his brilliant contributions to the theater, Shakespeare is also widely popular as a poetic genius who published the celebrated and critically acclaimed sonnet cycle in 1609 (most of the sonnets were written many years earlier). Shakespeare's contribution to this popular poetic genre is all the more interesting because while experimenting with this genre popularized by Petrarch, the bard experimented with contemporary notions of subject matter. In his sonnets Shakespeare idealized the beauty of man as an object of praise and devotion instead of sticking to the Petrarchan tradition of the idealized, unattainable woman. In the same spirit of breaking with tradition, Shakespeare also treated themes previously considered off limits—the dark, sexual side of a woman as opposed to the Petrarchan

ideal of a chaste and remote love object. He also expanded the sonnet's emotional range, including such emotions as delight, pride, shame, disgust, sadness, and fear.

The sonnets were first published in Shakespeare's lifetime, probably many years after their composition, and were dedicated to a mysterious Mr. W.H. with a vague dedication signed not by the poet but by the printer Thomas Thorpe. There are other equally mysterious layers of uncertainty shrouding the collection. First of all, the collection is divided into two large sequences – sonnets 1–126, which are dedicated to a beautiful young man and sonnets 127–152, which are dedicated to a “dark lady”. The sequencing of the sonnets may be done thematically as well – sonnets 1–17 urge the young man to procreate, sonnets 91–96 focus on the conflict and resolution between the poet and the young man, sonnets 133–134 depict the dark lady's unfaithfulness with the young man, while sonnets 135, 136 and 143 develop puns on the poet's name. Sonnets 153 and 154, the last sonnets of the collection, are more generic in nature and deal with the theme of love and the futility on the part of humans to escape or conquer it. The 1609 collection ends with *A Lover's Complaint*, a 329-line narrative poem spoken by a forlorn woman rejected by her beloved.

The sonnets still remain popular among readers today because they contain some of the most notable accounts of love and friendship in the English language. Shakespeare's sonnets explore love in an remarkably wide range of moods and situations – it describes love between two men, as well as love between men and women; it depicts love between the old and the young; it shows love transcending the accepted social and gender-based definitions; and it characterizes love both as an idealized emotion and a corrupting passion.

Compared to Shakespeare's plays, which were published in several unauthorized editions while he lived, and in an “authorized” edition, the First Folio, seven years after his death, the sonnets were published only once in Shakespeare's lifetime, in an edition that may or may not have been authorized. The volume seems not to have been particularly successful and a second edition did not appear until 1640. There was no reprinting of the sonnets between 1640 and 1709.

2.3 Contexts of the Sonnets:

Shakespeare was by no means the first writer to produce a long sequence of sonnets. Petrarch, a Florentine humanist, diplomat, and poet, elevated the sonnet to an influential literary form with his sequence known as the *Canzoniere* or *Rime sparse* (“Scattered rimes”). Petrarch’s literary predecessors in Florence, including the great epic poet Dante Alighieri, frequently wrote sonnets, as did Sicilian poets at the imperial court before them.

The sonnet was not imported into English writing till the early sixteenth century, less than 50 years before the birth of Shakespeare. Thomas Wyatt was the most important English sonnet writer, and he translated several of Petrarch’s sonnets found in his *Rime*. He also retained the “Petrarchan” or Italian sonnet form, comprising an octave, or eight lines in a rhyme scheme of abbaabba, followed by a “turn” to the sestet, the final six lines that rhymed cdecde, or featuring some variation of this pattern. Each line had 10 syllables, often in iambic pentameter (five pairs of syllables in unaccented-accented order), and this type of line has remained a key feature of sonnets up to our own day. Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, was a fellow sonnet writer during Henry VIII’s reign, and his frequent choice of a different sonnet form influenced the poet in Shakespeare.

Howard reoriented Petrarch’s sonnet form into a more symmetrical, repetitive scheme: abab cdcd efef gg. Howard’s alteration also introduced two other striking formal differences: There was no longer one main “turn,” as in the Petrarchan move from the octave to the sestet, and the ending was now punctuated by the concluding couplet, or pair of lines linked by one rhyme. Shakespeare almost always used this more flexible sonnet form, likely because it gave him more opportunities for shifts of voice or dramatic developments. This form, comprising three quatrains and a couplet, became known as the “English” sonnet or, in homage to its greatest practitioner, the “Shakespearean” sonnet. Of Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets, the only ones that diverge from this English model are sonnet 99, which has an extra line; sonnet 126, which has only 12 lines, in couplets; and sonnet 145, whose lines have only eight syllables.

The exact date when Shakespeare wrote the sonnets remains unknown. It is possible the sonnets were written during a brief phase of productivity when the theatres were shut down because of the plague. It is equally possible that Shakespeare worked on the sonnets

throughout his career. Scholars believe Shakespeare wrote the majority of his sonnets in the early to mid-1590s. He was in London at that point, writing for the public theaters, and many scholars of Shakespeare have found various parallels of language and image between Shakespeare's sonnets and his early plays written during this period.

In 1609, Thomas Thorpe published a quarto, or small book, of the sonnets. The edition contained no preface by Shakespeare himself, and so critics have henceforth debated whether or not Shakespeare authorized this publication. Whatever the case, it was an incredibly important moment in the history and reception of Shakespeare's sonnets, and Thorpe's edition remains the base text for modern editors today.

2.4 Reading the Sonnets:

2.4.1 Sonnet 12:

Sonnet 12 focuses on the passage of time. As with most of Shakespeare's sonnets, in Sonnet 12 too time plays a crucial role. In the first few lines the poet tries to make the reader aware of the havoc that time wreaks upon everything – from the “brave day” to the “violet” to the “sable curls” and the “lofty trees” – time stops for none. The primary idea behind these lines is that nothing can escape the wrath of time. The poet tries to build an atmosphere which signifies that with the passage of time the bright day turns into dark night, even the most beautiful of flowers cannot escape wilting as time moves on, black hair too, as time progresses turns silvery grey, the lush green trees that once gave shade to everyone become bare and a happy summer turns into bleak winter.

It is then that the poet becomes deeply concerned about the fading beauty of the young man. In an attempt to make the “fair youth” understand the fact that time waits for none, the poet suggests that qualities like beauty and youth are but transitory. Towards the couplet the poet stresses that time can be extremely ruthless and therefore the young man must try and preserve a part of him through his offspring as the poet feels this is perhaps the only way to ensure immortality and escape time's decay.

Self-Assessment Questions

- Are the two men friends only, or romantically involved, or committed to a sublimated love?
- Can you read the first 17 sonnets, often called the Procreation sonnets, and trace the common themes? What does the speaker urge the Young Man to do?

2.4.2 Sonnet 29:

Sonnet 29 begins with a tone of resentment, as the poet seems to begrudge his miserable state. He feels like an utter outcast in the midst of successful men reveling in the company of friends and admirers. He seems to be envious of the successful art of others and curses his fate. However, as with the rest of his sonnets, the poet arrives at a resolution towards the couplet to his conditional argument. The poet brings in the image of “morning lark” to stress upon the fact that the moment he is reminded of the fair youth’s love and affection towards him all his sorrows vanish and he realizes that no amount of wealth or success can bring him such pure joy. The basic idea behind this sonnet is the fact that the young man’s sweet love is able to sustain the poet through hard times.

Stop to Consider

- Note how the speaker’s emotions dramatically change from pessimism towards optimism as the sonnet progresses.
- This sonnet is basically a eulogy of love – love as a culmination of beauty, harmony, unity and truth.

2.4.3 Sonnet 55:

In this sonnet the poet rages a war with time to immortalize the young man. The poem’s opening images signal more explicitly than before Shakespeare’s engagement with his classical sources. Here the poet’s says that his powerful poetry will outlast marble and monuments. In

other words, poetry can make its subject immortal in a way no material commemoration can. This poem is noteworthy because, in the short space of its 14 lines, it literally shifts from one grand age to another—it begins on a classical, pagan note but concludes with an eye firmly on the Last Judgment (or “ending doom” in the poem) of the Christian revelation. The poet maybe making a hint at the Resurrection itself when the speaker says his friend will live in his poetry and in lovers’ eyes but only for so long (“till the Judgment”). Christians trust in the promise that the body will rise on the last day, the speaker more or less tells the youth that once he rises again, the speaker and he won’t have to worry anymore about these less satisfactory mementos.

Stop to Consider

- Did Shakespeare really believe that a single sheet of paper with a poem inked on it would outlive marble and gilded monuments?
- And if the poem is intended to make his love live in the eyes of posterity, why is the ‘you’ not named?
- Don’t you feel writing poetry of praise but forgetting to name the person praised is contradictory or oxymoronic?

2.4.4 Sonnet 116:

Sonnet 116’s famous defense of the “marriage of true minds” appears by context to be addressed to the fair youth. “Let me not to the marriage of true mindes / Admit impediments” is among the most famous descriptions of the tenderness and authenticity which love is capable of producing. This sonnet is usually taken to be an exalted celebration of love or perfect friendship. It attempts to define love by telling both what it is and is not. In the first quatrain, the speaker says that love—“the marriage of true minds”—is perfect and unchanging; it does not “admit impediments,” and it does not change when it finds changes in the loved ones.

In the second quatrain, the speaker tells what love is through a metaphor—a guiding star to lost ships that is not susceptible to storms. In the third quatrain the speaker states that love is not susceptible to time. Though beauty fades in time, love does not change with the

passage of time. On the other hand love is capable of overcoming all misfortunes.

In the couplet, the speaker attests to his certainty that love is what he thinks it is and he says that if his statements are false then he must never have written a word and no man could have ever been in love.

Stop to Consider

- Do you think Sonnet 116 is a simplistic celebration of love or do you feel it has other undertones as well?
- This sonnet definitely has a marriage context as the use of “impediments” might have been taken from the *Book of Common Prayer*’s “Solemnization of Matrimony”
- Notice the use of negative words—“nor,” “no,” “never,” “not” in the sonnet. Do the use of these negative words challenge the common identification of the sonnet as poem of affirmation?

2.4.5 Sonnet 147:

In this sonnet, the poet depicts a kind of obsession—bitter, hopeless and degenerating—quite in contrast to the ennobling love of the previous sonnets addressed to the Young Man. We might argue that the conflict between the ideal of love and the sensual obsession with the Dark Lady may be a manifestation of the change in the poet’s mood.

In this sonnet, we see the speaker dealing with the subjective experience of lovesickness. The opening quatrain focuses on the self-consuming nature of the disease. Love perverts the appetites and creates a condition where the body can no longer judge what is and is not healthy. In this sonnet, love is inseparable from lust, and entails an invariably torturous experience; even its longed-for satisfactions. The sonnet is underscored by an atmosphere of death, decay and suffering. Here love is not the healer, but it is rather the disease. A sense of hopelessness engulfs the poet as he feels that the deathly grasp of this dark love has entailed his logic and reasoning dysfunctional.

Towards the couplet, the poet bring in the ideas of black and white—what he believed to be bright is actually dark; what he thought to be heaven is in reality, hell.

Stop to Consider

- Try to assess the atmosphere of disease and decay in this sonnet.
- Make a list of the words that contribute towards the atmosphere of bleakness which engulf this sonnet.
- What impression of the Dark Lady does this sonnet create upon you?

2.5 Key Personas in the Sonnets:

- The Young Man: The sonnets from 1—126 are mostly addressed to the Young Man. He is the one to whom the speaker appeals in the first 17 “Procreation” sonnets. Later poems reveal a more aggravated or strained relationship between the speaker and Young Man. William Herbert is a more likely candidate for the role of the speaker’s male friend than Henry Wriothesley.

These sonnets refer to this youth as a cause of behavior that pains the speaker or at least becomes a convenient excuse for the younger’s actions. Often the Young Man’s youth is paired with his beauty. Sonnet 116’s famous defense of the “marriage of true minds” appears by context to be addressed to the male youth. Sometimes the speaker’s acknowledgement of the Young Man’s age sounds quite affectionate—“sweet boy” (108), “my lovely boy” (126)—and in the unequalled sonnet 20, “A woman’s face with Nature’s own hand painted.” The relationship does seem to have been intense enough that the Young Man’s “sweet love” sustains the speaker during hard times (29), and more problematically, the speaker could feel betrayed, or else conflicted, when triangles occur between himself, the Young Man, and another. Thus sonnets 40–42 dramatize a social scandal that many take to be the Young Man’s cheating on the speaker with a woman known to them both, who just may be the Dark Lady of the last series of sonnets.

- **The Speaker:** The speaker is a paradoxical persona in Shakespeare's sonnets. Too often throughout the history of the sonnets, the speaker has been instantly and simplistically equated with his creator, William Shakespeare. The "I" in lyric poetry is never such a simple, one-to-one affair and therefore readers of the sonnets must not settle for such simplified reassurances.

First of all, the speaker is an older man, for the friend is addressed as "young" repeatedly, and two young men typically do not speak of each other in such a way. We are also given the impression of a man who has endured trials in life. But most definitely, of all the personas in the sonnets, the speaker is the most transparent because he is the one who expresses himself in every poem to an incredibly revealing degree.

- **The Dark Lady:** The Dark Lady is the woman to whom Shakespeare's speaker turns after the sonnets to the Young Man. This new addressee surfaces in sonnet 127 and remains very much till the end of the sequence. Shakespeare's Dark Lady is traditionally cited as contrary to the traditional beloved. The speaker admits he loved the woman "dearly" but also admits that he laments the Young Man's unfaithfulness far more. The entry of the Dark Lady signifies a crisis in the speaker and the Young man's relationship. The woman stands accused of double-crossing the male lovers, at both of their expenses.

For centuries scholars have attempted to identify the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's final sonnets with a historical counterpart. Many critics have put forward names like that of Elizabeth Vernon, the bride of the Earl of Southampton, often thought to be the historical Young Man and Elizabeth I's maid of honor Mary Fitton, who was a popular candidate in the late nineteenth century. Many critics have also found possible parallels between the Dark Lady and the seduced woman in *A Lover's Complaint*.

- **The Rival Poet:** The Rival Poet is the least significant of the four personas in the sonnets, yet his brief appearance, from sonnets 78–86, initiates a series of blows to the speaker's self-confidence. The Rival Poet plays an important role in filling out another "triangulation" that repeatedly marks Shakespeare's sequence and mars the speaker's peace of mind. The "alien pen" of the Rival Poet further alienates the speaker from the Young Man's affection, thus creating a second triangle. This Rival Poet is called a "worthier pen" a few lines later and in sonnet 80 becomes "a better spirit." Sonnet 79 is mainly accusatory, implying that the Rival Poet is a fake and even a thief,

“robbing” the Young Man’s appearance and behavior to offer it up again, as if it were the rival’s own gift. The speaker’s inferiority complex grows in sonnet 80, as does his reliance on the Young Man’s approval of and preference for him and his poetry.

In 1874, William Minto first suggested George Chapman as the likeliest candidate for the Rival Poet, and Chapman remains the most valid choice today.

2.6 Major Themes in the Sonnets:

2.6.1 Love: Shakespeare’s sonnets mark an important shift in the history of gender relations. These sonnets have gradually emerged as a good way to gauge the sociocultural dimensions of male and female subjectivities in the period.

Critics made uncomfortable by the deep homoeroticism of the sequence have historically resorted to neoplatonism, arguing that what sounds like erotic love is meant to sound like friendship – that love is about spiritual and intellectual union rather than physical; that men might love men, and women might love women, without such love being corrupted by a lower, sexual appeal. The basic flaw of this approach is its evident homophobia. In the sonnet sequence the poet’s fondness for puns and wordplay that sexualize the relationship between the speaker and young friend is quite evident. As evidenced by these poems, Shakespeare did not appear to privilege, or even consistently separate, the soul from the body. He did not demean earthly love as deficient in comparison to a higher, spiritual love. A cursory reading proves that the sonnets are principally about erotic attachment between a man and another man and woman.

Stop to Consider

- Are these feelings about love, so passionately expressed, Shakespeare’s own, or are the poems spoken by just one more dramatic creation of a great writer?
- The “I” who speaks forth in lyric poems can be deceptive and may very well be just as fictive as any stage creation.
- The sheer emotional force of the speaker or persona in *The Sonnets* has led many to believe that these poems record Shakespeare’s heartfelt utterances.

2.6.2 Procreation: The Young Man is the one whom the speaker appeals to in the first 17 sonnets and some critics have hypothesized that Shakespeare may have been commissioned by concerned parents to write these poems to convince their son to marry and have children. Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated his first two narrative poems and who still remains one of the two most respectable candidates for Shakespeare's Young Man, may have been resistant to marriage in the 1590s. The speaker takes pains to discuss the Young Man's beauty in the earliest sonnets because he seeks to warn him that his beauty will not last, and so he should have an heir who will continue his beautiful form.

Self-Assessment to Questions

- Do you think the idea of procreation on the part of the Young Man, as forwarded in Shakespeare's sonnets was a good way of ensuring immortality for the former?
- What other ways are suggested by the speaker to the Young Man to achieve and ensure immortality in these sonnets?

2.6.3 Beauty and Time: Beauty is a recurring theme in Shakespeare's sonnets. The speaker talks about the beauty of the Young Man and the beauty of love. There are also references to the beauty of the Dark Lady in these sonnets. The poet shows beauty as a double-edged sword with both the ability to heal and kill. The conflict between beauty and time is a central theme here. Time is depicted as ruthlessly destroying beauty but the sonnets propose that they themselves have the power to preserve beauty—the beauty of the Young man.

Check Your Progress

- Discuss some of the main themes that Shakespeare deals with in his sonnets?
- Attempt a pen picture of the Fair Youth or the Young Man in Shakespeare's sonnets.
- Who do you think is the most intriguing persona in the sonnets? Justify your answer.
- Comment on the structural modifications used by Shakespeare while writing the sonnets.
- Do you think the sonnets have autobiographical elements in them? Justify your answer.

2.7 Summing Up:

Shakespeare's sonnets explore love in an remarkably wide range of moods and situations – it describes love between two men, as well as love between men and women; it depicts love between the old and the young; it shows love transcending the accepted social and gender-based definitions; and it characterizes love both as an idealized emotion and a corrupting passion.

2.8 References and Suggested Reading:

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Unit 3

William Shakespeare: Sonnets

Supplementary Units

Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 How to Approach the Poet
- 3.4 Important Poems You Should Read
- 3.5 Questions and Suggested Answers
- 3.6 Summing Up
- 3.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives:

In this unit you will be able to

- Find an orientation towards reading Shakespeare’s sonnets
- Learn about other important poems by the poet
- Write answer to important questions that may be asked from the texts under discussion
- Evaluate Shakespeare as a poet.

3.2 Introduction

The sonnets were first published in Shakespeare’s lifetime, probably many years after their composition, and were dedicated to a mysterious Mr. W.H. with a vague dedication signed not by the poet but by the printer Thomas Thorpe. There are other equally mysterious layers of uncertainty shrouding the collection. First of all, the collection is divided into two large sequences – sonnets 1—126, which are dedicated to a beautiful young man and sonnets 127—152, which are dedicated to a “dark lady”. The sequencing of the sonnets may be done thematically as well – sonnets 1—17 urge the young man to procreate, sonnets 91—96 focus on the conflict and resolution between the poet and the young man, sonnets 133—134 depict the dark lady’s unfaithfulness with the young man, while sonnets 135, 136 and 143 develop puns on the poet’s name. Sonnets 153 and 154, the last

sonnets of the collection, are more generic in nature and deal with the theme of love and the futility on the part of humans to escape or conquer it. The 1609 collection ends with *A Lover's Complaint*, a 329-line narrative poem spoken by a forlorn woman rejected by her beloved.

Shakespeare's contribution to this popular poetic genre is all the more interesting because while experimenting with this genre popularized by Petrarch, the bard experimented with contemporary notions of subject matter. In his sonnets Shakespeare idealized the beauty of man as an object of praise and devotion instead of sticking to the Petrarchan tradition of the idealized, unattainable woman. In the same spirit of breaking with tradition, Shakespeare also treated themes previously considered off limits—the dark, sexual side of a woman as opposed to the Petrarchan ideal of a chaste and remote love object. He also expanded the sonnet's emotional range, including such emotions as delight, pride, shame, disgust, sadness, and fear.

3.3 How to approach the poet

Shakespeare the poet is defined for us by his plays. Most readers are unacquainted with his poems. With the exception of a few sonnets, they are amongst the least known of his works. Most people think of his poetry mainly from his plays as these plays are written predominantly in verse. Shakespearean poetry that is most familiar to modern readers was not originally written as 'poetry'. It was the script for a medium of entertainment and communication in which it was only one of a number of elements of performance such as acting, music, costume, dance and clowning. Its function was to be dramatic rather than poetic, and to be dramatic in a way that would appeal to a large audience that included most social levels. Shakespeare considered his plays to be different from his non-dramatic poetry in the sense that he produced only a small amount of it, over an unknown number of years, probably starting around 1592. It was primarily directed toward powerful elite court circles, and consists of two long narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; 154 sonnets, published as a sequence in 1609; and a handful of minor poems.

Shakespeare is often represented as a defender of the narrow conservative interests of an elite establishment. In spite of the fact that

England had a female monarch when Shakespeare wrote most of his poetry, the state was a patriarchy, and his writings reflect the tensions generated by this incongruity. He also lived at a time when English adventurers were moving out into newly discovered lands and like other English men and women he had to find ways of coming to terms with the consequences of these discoveries. Shakespeare upheld the values of aristocracy because he recognized the instability of his position amongst the harsh political realities within which he existed. His plays were written for an audience that included a considerable number of common people, but the poems were written primarily for an elite readership.

Shakespeare's poetry reflects a set of attitudes too complex, even contradictory, to be described simply as traditional or conservative. Underlying all of his major non-dramatic poems is a fierce distrust of aristocratic power and values. Both his narrative poems are about the destructive nature of desire, and both are about what happens when a socially powerful individual attempts to impose his or her will on an inferior. His sonnets present an apparently more personal and private, and finally more disillusioned, account of hierarchical relationships and purposive desire.

3.4 Important Poems You Should Read

If we set aside the small body of verse that Shakespeare produced in lyric and elegiac forms, his main contributions to non-dramatic poetry are to two poetic sub-genres that were fashionable in the early 1590s and that are at almost opposite extremes of the poetic spectrum—the **sonnet sequence**, and the extended **narrative poem**.

Venus and Adonis, Shakespeare's retelling of the well-known myth of the doomed desire of the goddess of love for a young mortal, is a lively erotic narrative and a playful display of linguistic brilliance. Herein Shakespeare attempts to tell a tragic story in an energetic manner that often pushes his material towards the comic. Like much Elizabethan poetry it is a product of the Renaissance fascination with classical myths.

Venus and Adonis concerns human relationships at their most elemental and frustrating level. It raises questions about the meaning of desire, about the relationship between self and other, about the troubled connections between comedy and tragedy, and about the connections between beauty, love and death. Underlying all of these

concerns is the question of the relationship between language and power.

Venus and Adonis is a poem of 1194 lines, consisting of 199 six-line stanzas of iambic pentameter rhymed ababcc, a stanza-form known technically as a sixain. Shakespeare took the main outline of his story of *Venus and Adonis* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses Book X*. However Shakespeare combined and modified this Ovidian material. Shakespeare uses the myth of Venus and Adonis to explain why human love is such a painful business. The myth of Venus and Adonis is tragic, and it was treated as such in most Renaissance accounts. It was a popular subject for painters as well as poets. However Shakespeare's poem has invited a range of interpretations—mythic, allegorical and symbolic.

Venus and Adonis allows for the projection of a whole range of meanings in which the two figures represent binaries or paired opposites that could be set in motion as the two sides of a debate. Shakespeare's poem certainly uses such opposites, but it insistently complicates them, denying the reader the possibility of any simple response or experience.

In 1594 Shakespeare published *The Rape of Lucrece*, and like the earlier poem, *The Rape of Lucrece* too is concerned with erotic desire as it manifests itself in a struggle to exert power over its object. *The Rape of Lucrece* consists of 1855 lines of iambic pentameter, divided into 265 seven-line stanzas (septets) rhyming ababbcc. This stanza form, known as 'rhyme royal', appears to have been introduced into English poetry by Chaucer, most notably in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The story of the rape of Lucretia, wife of Collatinus, by Tarquinius Sextus, son of the Roman king Tarquinius Superbus, was history rather than myth. It had been re-told many times before it came into Shakespeare's hands. It begins when Sextus Tarquinius is fired with lust at Lucretia's beauty and chastity, and resolves to possess her. In spite of its erotic content *The Rape of Lucrece* never achieved the notoriety of *Venus and Adonis*, perhaps because its erotic elements are submerged into Lucrece's disturbing experience.

During Shakespeare's lifetime and for some years after, *The Rape of Lucrece* was very popular. After Shakespeare's death three more editions of *The Rape of Lucrece* were issued before the end of the century.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge found great poetic power in *Venus and Adonis*, although he thought that both narrative poems were immature. *The Rape of Lucrece*, he said, showed the same positive qualities as the earlier poem, ‘with a yet larger display, a yet wider range of knowledge and reflection’

Recent scholarship has shown that Keats too had a deep interest in the poem, reflected particularly in ‘The Eve of St Agnes’. However, in the twentieth century, with the vast increase in the number of professional Shakespeare scholars, *The Rape of Lucrece* has received something of the attention it deserves. While some critics have treated the poem with flat hostility, there have been thoughtful attempts to find merit in it, though few have wanted to call it a masterpiece.

3.5 Questions and Suggested Answers

3.6 Summing Up

We have discussed Shakespeare’s handling of the sonnet form as well as his treatment of themes/ideas. We have also discussed the issue of how to read the poet. There is a vast amount of critical literature on Shakespeare’s poetry as well as his negotiations with the genre of sonnet. It may not be possible for you to consult all of these, but you may go through some of the works on the subject, we I mention in “Reference and Suggested reading” section. I hope you have by now gained an understanding of ‘Shakespeare’s sonnets’ and can prepare yourself for examinations!

3.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

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Unit 4

Edmund Spenser's "The Garden of Adonais"

Unit Structure :

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Spenser's Contemporaries
- 4.4 Works of the poet
- 4.5 Critical reception
- 4.6
 - 4.6.1 Context of the poem
 - 4.6.2 Reading the poem
- 4.7 Summing up
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 References & Suggested reading

4.1 Objectives

This unit aims at introducing the learners with one of the greatest Renaissance poets, Edmund Spenser and "The Garden of Adonais" (from *The Fairie Queene*), prescribed for reading. Firstly, you will be acquainted with the background of the poet, his autobiographical details, the era he lived in, and the major aspects that influenced his life and his works of literature. Next we will proceed to introduce you to the text prescribed for you and help you to read and thoroughly understand it. With this objective this unit is structured in a way that will assist you to:

- familiarize with Edmund Spenser's life-history,
- point out the poet's specific contribution to the development of the tradition of English literature,
- situate the poet and his works in the history of English literature,
- explore the several ways in which the text can be approached, and
- develop in you the ability to analyze the intricacies of the text.

4.2 Introduction

Edmund Spenser, the renowned English poet of the sixteenth century is considered to have born in the year 1522 (which is not a confirmed one though), East Smithfield, London, United Kingdom. Although there is much speculation about his parentage, yet it is considered that he was born to a journeyman cloth maker, John Spenser. He started his education at the Merchant Taylors' School and successfully completed his matriculation as a *sizar* at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He earned both his Bachelor Degree in 1572 and Masters Degree in Arts in 1576 from Cambridge.

Spenser became a secretary to the Bishop of Rochester, John Young for a short period in 1578. In 1579, he published *The Shepheardes Calendar* and also married his first wife, Machabyas Childe. Together they had two children, Sylvanus and Katherine. He went to Ireland in 1580 to be in service of the newly appointed Lord Deputy, Arthur Grey, 14th Baron Grey de Wilton.

However, Spenser is best known for his work, *The Fairie Queene*. In 1590, he went to London and published the first three books of *The Fairie Queene* with the help of Walter Raleigh. This work immediately caught the attention of the Queen and he received a life pension of fifty pounds every year.

In 1591 Edmund Spenser's first wife died and he married Elizabeth Boyle (a relative of Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Cork) in the same year. It is notable that the sonnet sequence *Amoretti* was addressed to his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle. His *Epithalamion* is considered to be a celebration of his second marriage.

Spenser had gone through a tumultuous time in 1598 during the Nine Years' War. He was chased out of his home by the native Irish forces of Aodh O' Neil. Even his home at Kilcolman was burned. In the succeeding year, that is in 1599 he travelled to London traumatized by the perpetration in Ireland. At the age of forty six Spenser breathed his last. The contemporary poets carried his coffin to the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey and his last remains were buried there with tears and condolences.

Stop to consider

The precise details about the life and career of Edmund Spenser are provided above in order to give you an idea about the person as a remarkable poet of the Renaissance. His contribution to literature during that time seals his place among the stalwarts of English literature. His lineage lies in obscurity and he had to move away from Ireland to London after he had gone through a life threatening situation in 1598. However, with his unprecedented work, The Fairie Queene Spenser has secured a position in the history of English literature.

The period of Renaissance is an era of transition in all aspects of life and literature. Due to the revival of learning throughout Europe and also in many other parts of the world the trade, commerce, art and literature flourished during the Renaissance. The Renaissance is believed to have started in Italy towards the latter half of the fourteenth century and spread across Europe in varied forms. The invention of the printing press in England by Caxton in the year 1476 helped the spread of the Renaissance ideals more by producing several copies of the writings of the great minds of that age. As Elizabeth I was the queen of England during the Renaissance, this period is also known as the Elizabethan Age. The literary genres that were most popular at these times are poetry and drama. With dramatists like William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, John Webster, and others Renaissance theatre has seen a remarkable transformation from the drama of the Middle English Period. The experimentation that has been done in social-political and literary trends during the Renaissance has also earned the period the name Early Modern Period.

SAQ

Do we find a reflection of the socio-political happenings of the Renaissance in the poetry of Edmund Spenser? (80 words)

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Who were the other writers writing during the Renaissance period besides Spenser? (50 words)

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.....
What were the other genres of writing that flourished in Elizabethan age? What was the status of the poets when Queen Elizabeth reigned in England? (100 words)

.....
.....
.....
How does Edmund Spenser make use of Biblical imageries in his poetry? (80 words)

Edmund Spenser distinguished himself from his contemporaries by the use of a different verse form which later came to be known as the Spenserian stanza. Most of his writings are allegorical. His masterpiece, *The Fairie Queene* is also an allegory of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. *The Fairie Queene* like many of his poems was written in Spenserian stanza. He purposively wrote his poetry in an archaic language.

Spenser was a learned man. He not only had the knowledge of the literature of his own times, but also was informed about the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome. References to the great minds like Ovid, Petrarch, Aristotle, Plato, Homer, Ronsard, etc. are notable.

Due to the echoes of classical literature found in Spenser's poetry he is also known as the "poet's poet".

4.3 Spenser's contemporaries:

Among Spenser's contemporaries William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, and Thomas Kyd are worth mentioning.

William Shakespeare: Shakespeare was not just a poet, but he was also a playwright and actor par say. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. Although he did not go to the University his contribution to English literature is immense. He had written thirty nine (39) plays and one hundred and fifty four (154) sonnets. More than the comedies Shakespeare's name was engraved in history for his unparallel

tragedies like Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet. Even though Shakespeare and Spenser were contemporaries, the form in which the former had written this form of verse was pretty much different from the latter. That is the reason why we find two types of sonnet – Spenserian sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets.

Christopher Marlowe: Christopher Marlowe was born in the year 1564 in Canterbury. He was a poet, playwright and a translator. Marlowe’s play *Doctor Faustus* established himself as great dramatist. He mastered Latin during his school days. He is recognised as one of the ‘University Wits’ along with the other six of his contemporaries – John Lyly, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge and George Peele. Marlowe’s play *Tamburlaine* is written in blank verse. He has collaborative work with his contemporaries as well. One such example is the play *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which is a collaborative work with Thomas Nashe.

John Webster: Webster is known as a Jacobean dramatist. Although he is among the contemporaries of Spenser, yet when Webster became popular for his tragedies James I had taken over the throne after Queen Elizabeth. John Webster was born in 1580 in London. His reputation as a dramatist rest in the two plays – *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*. He also wrote poetry and served as an official poet of Merchant Taylor’s Company. His tragedies are believed to have set the stage for the development of the gothic literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century.

Thomas Kyd: He was born in 1558 in London. Kyd was famous for his play, *The Spanish Tragedy*. This play is found to have drawn elements from the tragedies of Seneca. Though Kyd has contributed a lot in the development of Elizabethan drama and was well-known for his tragedies during his times, he was not explored much later for almost hundred years after his death in 1594.

SAQ

What distinguishes Spenser’s poetry from his contemporaries? What are the differences between the sonnet forms of Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser? (80 words)

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Which are the Renaissance characteristics that find expression in Edmund Spenser’s poetry? (80 words)

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4.4 Works of the poet

The first poem produced by Edmund Spenser is “The Shepherdes Calendar” in 1579. As mentioned earlier, he had written and published his first three books of *The Fairie Queene* in 1590. The second set of three books was published in 1596. Although the poem was written in six books by the year 1596, yet what we read today is an incomplete poem as Spenser had intended to expand the poem to twelve books in total. However, *The Fairie Queene* remains the longest poem in the English language. It was written as an allegory to celebrate/praise the Tudor dynasty and Elizabeth I.

There are several short poems composed by Spenser. Among those “Complaints”, “Amoretti”, “Astrophel”, “Epithalamion” and “Prothalamion” are worth mentioning. “Complaints” is a collection of short poems published in 1591. In the poems published in this collection the poet expressed complaints mockingly and at times in a mournful tone as well. “Amoretti” is a sonnet sequence which was originally published as a volume named *Amoretti and Epithalamion* in 1595. This volume consists of eighty-nine sonnets and a few short poems under the title *Anacreontics and Epithalamion*. The sonnets in “Amoretti” convey to the readers about the courtship with Elizabeth Boyle, a beautiful Anglo-Irish woman. These sonnets were overtly attributed to his lady love. In “Epithalamion” Spenser celebrates and expresses the bliss of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle. This poem also speaks about how a romantic and sexual relationship gradually develops after marriage. His “Astrophel” is a pastoral elegy written on the death of the noble poet, Sir Philip Sidney. In 1596 Spenser wrote “Prothalamion”. This poem was strategically written as a wedding song for the daughters of a Duke with the expectation he will be favoured at the court for this gesture. There are a few works which were posthumously published. In 1609 Two Cantos of Mutability was came in print along with a reprint of *The Fairie Queene*.

Spenser has also written a few minor poems like “Babel-Empress of the East” and “Colin Clouts Come Home Againe”.

Renaissance and Spenser's contribution:

The Elizabethan age was a period when there was a revival/rebirth of learning. It is said so because the writers, sculptors, and artists of the period displayed some extraordinary ways of representing life and literature. However, the writers of the Renaissance did not keep the thoughts and ideas of the great masters of Greece and Rome aside. The Classical literature was highly appreciated by the masters of the Renaissance in England – William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Wyatt and Surrey and others. While deriving inspiration from the great minds of ancient Greece and Rome, these writers approached literature, specifically poetry and drama from different angles.

Both quantitatively and qualitatively Spenser's contributions remain extremely potential. His mastery over the art of poetry is unquestionable. At the time when the great master of English literature like William Shakespeare was writing Spenser was able to leave his mark on the pages of history by introducing the Spenserian stanza/sonnet. It is indeed notable that when Edmund Spenser started writing the Spenserian sonnet he kept the Petrarchan way of sonnet writing.

Spenser is widely known for his epic poem, *The Fairie Queene*. For the exemplary praise of Queen Elizabeth in this poem Spenser caught her attention and was also rewarded. His greatness as a poet finds expression in the manner in which the twelve months of a year has been represented in twelve "Eclogues" of his poem "The Shepherdes Calendar". From his works it is evident that Spenser has projected the Renaissance ideals of humanism, imaginative exuberance, and innovation. To practice a genre (sonnet) which was written in a different order by a contemporary like Shakespeare who was a master of literature is a display of both confidence and talent, which is found in Spenser.

Check your progress:

1. What was the political scenario of England during the Elizabethan period? Did that affect the poetry of Edmund Spenser?

(Hint: For example, the rule of Queen Elizabeth and the power of Tudor dynasty)

2. What were the changes that took place on the religious ground in Queen Elizabeth's rule?

(Hint: The conflict between the Protestant and the Roman Catholic church)

3. How can we recognise the affiliations of Spenser towards the classical writers of Greece and Rome like, Virgil, Ovid and Petrarch?

(Hint: The use of Petrarchan form of sonnet writing)

4. What did Spenser lose in Ireland and why did he return back to London?

(Hint: The Nine Years War in Ireland, for example.)

5. Was Spenser influenced by Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*?

(Hint: The deliberate use of some archaic English words, for example)

4.5 Critical reception

As Edmund Spenser is one of the representative poets of the Renaissance period and has been widely read throughout the succeeding centuries, he has been critically looked at by his readers. His works have gone through scrutiny and his artistic imagination has been appreciated by many critics.

Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth century poet, essayist, critic, biographer, editor, playwright and lexicographer, was somehow not in favour of Edmund Spenser. Johnson considered that the words used by Spenser were obsolete. According to the former Spenser's engagement with the pastoral and his diction in poetry was artificial and redundant. In his Dictionary therefore, Johnson had put up some of the words written by Spenser as examples of archaic language.

On the other hand, for Spenser's faculty of imagination that finds expression in his verses Charles Lamb has titled him "Poet's poet". Spenser was also praised by John Milton, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron and Alfred Tennyson. In *Areopagetica* Milton has addressed Spenser as a teacher and compared the latter with Scotus and Aquinas. Walter Raleigh being a contemporary had written a poem to praise the poetic genius of Spenser after *The Fairie Queene* was published.

4.6

4.6.1 Context of the poem

Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* is his magnum opus. It is a single poem that runs in six books. The deep belief in the judgement of the almighty and the role of hope and faith is the driving force of this poem. This long poem is a tribute to the Tudor dynasty. Spenser has drawn inspiration from the classical writers as well as the medieval romances, specifically of that of Chaucer's verse romances like "Roman de la Rose".

An analysis of the poem reveals that the fairy queen after whom the poem is titled is actually Queen Elizabeth. This poem also reflects the religious tension that was going on during the Elizabethan period. From the representation of the victory of good over evil by portraying various characters that stand for the virtues like chastity and truth it becomes evident that Spenser found the Catholic Church at the evil's end. Moreover, in the Preface of *The Fairie Queene* the poet makes it clear that the objective behind writing this poem is to preach how an individual can lead a virtuous life. In addition, Spenser also shows what consequences a human being has to meet if he/she leads an unholy life. A reading of the poem enables the readers to understand that Edmund Spenser was proud of his nation and his affiliation towards Protestantism or his Puritan faith. All these have been quite deftly woven into the poem to produce an allegory, a representative work of the Renaissance.

4.6.2 Reading the poem

"The Garden of Adonais" is a part found in Book III, Canto VI of the long poem *The Fairie Queene*. From our reading of the poem we can ascertain the fact that Spenser has written the poem in the Middle English diction as that of Geoffrey Chaucer.

Shee brought her to her joyous paradize,

Wher most she wonnes, when she on earth does dwell

So faire a place as Nature can devize:

Whether in Paphos, or Cytheron hill,

Or it in Gnidus bee, I wote not well;
But well I wote by triall, that this same
All other pleasaunt places doth excell,
And called is by her lost lovers name,
The Gardin of Adonis, far renownd by fame.

The “Garden” referred to in the above lines is mythical place. This place is a creation of Spenser’s imagination. In these lines the poet describes the garden as a marvel of Nature and hence named it ‘the Garden of Adonais’.

In that same gardin all the goodly flowres,
Wherewith Dame Nature doth her beautify,
And decks the girlonds of her paramoures,
Are fetcht: there is the first seminary
Of all things that are borne to live and dye,
According to their kynds. Long worke it were,
Here to account the endlesse progeny
Of all the weeds that bud and blossome there;
But so much as doth need must needs be counted here.

Besides praising the aura of the garden which is analogous to the Garden of Eden Spenser remains grounded to the realities of life and death. The description of the flowers blooming and the mesmerizing beauty of the garden have been depicted in the above lines. However, the speaker does not get swayed away by the charm of the view.

It sited was in fruitfull soyle of old,
And girt in with two walls on either side,
The one of yron, the other of bright gold,
That none might thorough breake, nor overstride:
And double gates it had, which opened wide,
By which both in and out men moten pas;
Th' one faire and fresh, the other old and dride:

Old Genius the porter of them was,

Old Genius, the which a double nature has.

In these lines a vivid description of the surrounding of the garden is given. The speaker of the poem tells that the garden is guarded on two sides by walls – one wall is made of iron and the other of gold. There are two gates that according to the speaker opened for all without any discrimination. It is said humans of all age group come and go through these two gates.

He letteth in, he letteth out to wend,

All that to come into the world desire:

A thousand thousand naked babes attend

About him day and night, which doe require

That he with fleshly weeds would them attire:

Such as him list, such as eternall Fate

Ordained hath, he clothes with sinfull mire,

And sendeth forth to live in mortall state,

Till they agayn returne backe by the hinder gate.

Here “He” seems to refer to God. The first line of the above line is suggestive of the fact that it is at the dispersal of God that people get in and out of the garden. By thousands of naked babies going to the garden is meant the birth of human babies. These babies are dressed with human flesh and flaws and sent to the earth to live their lives till they get old. When they reach the last stage and complete the cycle of their lives on earth they return back to the garden through the back gate. It indicates that the front gate is the doorway for the little ones and the back gate is for the old to enter the Garden of Adonais.

After that they againe returned beene,

They in that gardin planted bee agayne,

And grow afresh, as they had never seene

Fleshly corruption nor mortall payne.

Some thousand yeares so doen they there remayne,

And then of him are clad with other hew,

Or sent into the changefull world agayne,

Till thether they retourne, where first they grew:

So like a wheele arownd they ronne from old to new.

The poet here talks about the Christian faith of afterlife and rebirth. Some souls that return after death to this garden are again sent to the same place, same people where they had taken birth and grew up. But it is also mentioned that these souls that enter as old go through a process to generate their rebirth on earth again.

Ne needs there gardiner to sett or sow,

To plant or prune: for of their owne accord

All things, as they created were, doe grow,

And yet remember well the mighty word,

Which first was spoken by th' Almighty Lord,

That bad them to increase and multiply:

Ne doe they need with water of the ford

Or of the clouds to moysten their roots dry;

For in themselves eternall moisture they imply.

The above lines indicate the eternal nature of all the plants, flowers and trees in the Garden of Adonais. The speaker here throws light on how the Creator had bestowed the power of renewal to the objects created in the garden. It has also been told that these plants and trees neither need water from the clouds nor sunshine to keep the moisture intact or produce their food. Even without water the trees will not dry up. Those will remain as God had created. Rather, the divine power has blessed the plants to grow and germinate more such plants in the garden.

Infinite shapes of creatures there are bred,

And uncouth formes, which none yet ever knew;

And every sort is in a sondry bed

Sett by it selfe, and ranckt in comely rew:

Some fitt for reasonable sowles t' indew,

Some made for beasts, some made for birds to weare,

And all the fruitfull spawnne of fishes hew

In endlesse rancks along enraunged were,

That seemd the ocean could not containe them there.

Now the speaker describes the fauna of the garden – the animals, birds and fishes. There are innumerable creatures of different shapes and sizes. The creatures found in the garden are so unique that no human being has ever seen one on earth. Beasts too roam in that place and some animals are created for their food. Moreover, the water bodies in the garden house a huge number of fish which according to the speaker will not even the oceans on earth be able to accommodate.

Daily they grow, and daily forth are sent

Into the world, it to replenish more;

Yet is the stocke not lessened nor spent,

But still remaines in everlasting store,

As it at first created was of yore:

For in the wide wombe of the world there lyes,

In hatefull darknes and in deepe horrore,

An huge eternal chaos, which supplyes

The substaunces of Natures fruitfull progenyes.

These plants and animals proliferate day by day and everyday some are sent to the mortal world. But in the garden neither the quantity of plants get reduced nor the animals. This indicates that the growth rate of the flora and fauna is so high that those keep on multiplying even quite a few are placed on earth. The speaker points out that the objects created in the garden emerge out of the mysterious, chaotic, and dark secrets of Nature.

All things from thence doe their first being fetch,

And borrow matter whereof they are made,

Which, whenas forme and feature it does ketch,

Becomes a body, and doth then invade

The state of life out of the griesly shade.

The idea in these lines is continuation of the previous one. The creatures that Nature creates out of chaos gather matter from the

darkness, take a shape and form a body. After attaining a body those creatures comes into being and take birth in the world.

That substance is eterne, and bideth so,

Ne when the life decayes, and forme does fade,

Doth it consume and into nothing goe,

But chaunged is, and often altred to and froe.

Here the speaker is again throwing light on the mortality of earthly beings. When a life is born, it matures, grows old and meets death or decays. The body loses its shape and blends with the elements of Nature again.

The substance is not chaunged nor altered,

But th' only forme and outward fashion;

For every substance is conditioned

To chaunge her hew, and sondry formes to don,

Meet for her temper and complexion:

For formes are variable, and decay

By course of kinde and by occasion;

And that faire flowre of beautie fades away,

As doth the lilly fresh before the sunny ray.

There is however, no alteration in the basic essence of the object. Only the form changes when the cycle of one life is complete. Then another cycle of life starts in a different form like a flower blooms from a bud and its beauty fades with time and ultimately decomposes.

Great enemy to it, and to all the rest,

That in the Gardin of Adonis springs,

Is wicked Tyme, who, with his scyth adrest,

Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things,

And all their glory to the ground downe flings.

In the above lines the speaker conveys to the readers that the greatest enemy of the Garden of Adonis is time. Time is addressed as wicked

as the it uses it scythe and mows down the lovely flowers and plants of the garden.

Where they do wither and are fowly mard:

He flyes about, and with his flaggy winges

Beates downe both leaves and buds without regard,

Ne ever pittie may relent his malice hard.

Time is said to be malevolent and it has wings. It not only uses scythe to destroy the flora of the garden but also damages the beauty of there by cutting through the leaves and buds of the plants with its wings.

Yet pittie often did the gods relent,

To see so faire thinges mard and spoiled quight:

And their great mother Venus did lament

The losse of her deare brood, her deare delight:

Her hart was pierst with pittie at the sight,

When walking through the gardin them she saw,

Yet no'te she find redresse for such despight:

For all that lives is subject to that law:

All things decay in time, and to their end doe draw.

These lines refer to the sight that can be seen after time had destroyed the beauty of the garden. The destruction of the flora of that place by the scythe of time aches the heart of Goddess Venus. But it has been told by the speaker that She accepts the things as they because that is the law of Nature. Mother Venus understands that every living object has to endure the onslaught of time.

But were it not, that Time their troubler is,

All that in this delightfull gardin growes

Should happy bee, and have immortall blis:

For here all plenty and all pleasure flowes,

And sweete Love gentle fitts emongst them throwes,

Without fell rancor or fond gealosity:

Franckly each paramor his leman knowes,

Each bird his mate, ne any does envy

Their goodly meriment and gay felicity.

Although the objects in the garden have to endure the cruel blow of time, yet having been blessed with immortality no negativity has ever touched those. This is because the state of plenitude never leaves that place. All the plants, birds and animals live there in joy, peace, harmony and with love.

There is continuall spring, and harvest there

Continuall, both meeting at one tyme:

For both the boughes doe laughing blossoms beare,

And with fresh colours decke the wanton pryme,

And eke attonce the heavy trees they clyme,

Which seeme to labour under their fruites lode:

The whiles the joyous birdes make their pastyme

Emongst the shady leaves, their sweet abode,

And their trew loves without suspition tell abrode.

The mysterious and magical characteristic of the Garden of Adonais lies in the fact that the trees do not have to wait for Spring to grow new leaves. Everyday new leaves and flower buds grow and the harvest can be reaped everyday too. The birds of the garden sing merrily under the shade of the boughs of the tress they take shelter.

Right in the midst of that paradise

There stood a stately mount, on whose round top

A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise,

Whose shady boughes sharp steele did never lop,

Nor wicked beastes their tender buds did crop,

But like a girlond compassed the hight,

And from their fruitfull sydes sweet gum did drop,

That all the ground, with pretious deaw bedight,

Threw forth most dainty odours, and most sweet delight.

In the above lines description of a specific place in the garden is given. The middle part of the garden is a plateau-like structure whereupon the top grew a cluster of myrtle trees. Even the most ferocious of beasts did not try to destroy the buds of those trees. What is remarkable about these trees is that from those some gum like substance oozes out. That liquid when falls on the ground it appears like that of dew and its captivating smell permeates throughout the place.

And in the thickest covert of that shade
There was a pleasaunt arber, not by art,
But of the trees owne inclination made,
Which knitting their rancke braunches part to part,
With wanton yvie twyne entrayld athwart,
And eglantine and caprifole emong,
Fashiond above within their inmost part,
That nether Phoebus beams could through them throng,
Nor Aeolus sharp blast could worke them any wrong.

The heightened centre of the garden was a shady place with the myrtle trees thickly growing over there. Not only that but creepers like ivy climbed and embraced the trees in such a manner that the light from neither the light (represented by Phoebus) nor wind (represented by Aeolus) could enter into that spot.

And all about grew every sort of flowre,
To which sad lovers were transformde of yore;
Fresh Hyacinthus, Phoebus paramoure
And dearest love,
Foolish Narcisse, that likes the watry shore,
Sad Amaranthus, made a flowre but late,
Sad Amaranthus, in whose purple gore
Me seemes I see Amintas wretched fate,
To whom sweet poets verse hath given endlesse date.

In the Garden of Adonais flowers of all sorts bloomed. The poet seems to understand the agony of lovers who are reminded of the sweet

bygone days. Hyacinths, Narcissus, and Amaranths add up to the colourful scene of the garden. The beauty of these flowers have always inspired poets to compose poems since times immemorable.

There wont fayre Venus often to enjoy
Her deare Adonis joyous company,
And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy:
There yet, some say, in secret he does ly,
Lapped in flowres and pretious spycery,
By her hid from the world, and from the skill
Of Stygian gods, which doe her love envy;
But she her selfe, when ever that she will,
Possesseth him, and of his sweetnesse takes her fill.

These lines speak about the love of Venus and Adonis. It has been said that the latter stay hidden amidst the flowers so that the envious Stygian gods cannot find him. Only she could admire and adore him whenever she wished.

And sooth, it seemes, they say: for he may not
For ever dye, and ever buried bee
In balefull night, where all thinges are forgot;
All be he subject to mortalitie,
Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,
And by succession made perpetuall,
Transformed oft, and chaunged diverslie:
For him the father of all formes they call;
Therefore needs mote he live, that living gives to all.

Through these lines the readers come to know that Adonis does not die, he takes different forms. Although mortal, he comes alive in a different body through mutation. Due to this reason Adonis is popular as the father of all forms. This trait makes him perpetual.

There now he liveth in eternall blis,
Joying his goddesse, and of her enjoyd:

Ne feareth he henceforth that foe of his,
Which with his cruell tuske him deadly cloyd:
For that wilde bore, the which him once annoyd,
She firmly hath emprisoned for ay,
That her sweet love his malice mote avoyd,
In a strong rocky cave, which is they say,
Hewen underneath that mount, that none him losen may.

An indication of consummation of Venus and Adonais is also sensed in the above lines. With the power of a goddess Venus had captured her lover's enemy and captivated him in a cave of rock under the mounted middle portion of the garden. That was done so that no one could let that beast free.

There now he lives in everlasting joy,
With many of the gods in company,
Which thether haunt, and with the winged boy
Sporting him selfe in safe felicity:
Who, when he hath with spoiles and cruelty
Ransackt the world, and in the wofull harts
Of many wretches set his triumphes hye,
Thether resortes, and laying his sad dartes
Asyde, with faire Adonis playes his wanton partes.

The last lines of this poem suggest how Adonis spent his life merrily in the garden when he was assured safety by his beloved Venus. With a sense of security he left aside his sorrows and lived in the garden elated at the company of many other gods.

4.7 Summing up

“The Garden of Adonis” is an idyllic place, a product of Edmund Spenser’s fancy. However, the descriptions given in the poem imply that the poet has drawn an analogy between the Garden of Adonis and

the Garden of Eden. In the poem the word “paradise” is also mentioned. Therefore, the readers can easily understand the vision that Spenser had in his mind while he was writing this poem.

The cycle of life of the mortal beings and the bliss of the creatures living in the garden is set as stark contrasts. The fact that time brings in change to everything has been clearly pointed out in this poem. The language of the poem is archaic in the sense that Spenser has used the Middle English diction.

4.8 Glossary

Canto: a section of a long poem

Sizar: one who is an undergraduate at the Cambridge University or the Trinity College, receives financial grant from the university/college entitled to perform certain menial work.

Sonnet: a fourteen line poem, practiced originally by the Italian poet and philosopher Petrarch.

Garden of Eden: a beautiful garden where Adam and Eve (the first human beings) were made to live after God created them.

4.9 References and suggested readings

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Unit 5

Edmund Spenser's "The Garden of Adonais"

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure :

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 A Brief History of the Renaissance

5.4 Spenser's contribution to the sonnet form

5.5 Common themes in Edmund Spenser's poetry

5.6 The poet's style

5.7 Spenser and his critics

5.8 Glossary

5.9 Reference and Suggested reading

5.1 Objectives

This unit has been designed to facilitate the learners with some additional information related to the life and work of Edmund Spenser and other Elizabethan poets. At first we will discuss about the history of the Renaissance period in brief. Secondly, we shall note the contribution of Edmund Spenser to the sonnet form. Thirdly, an analysis of the common themes and Spenser's specific will be attempted. Finally, the notable critical reception of himself as a poet and his poetry will be looked into. In the process the students will be able to:

- acquire the knowledge of the historical background of the age in which Spenser was writing poetry,
- get an understanding of the poetic techniques used by Spenser,

- thoroughly appreciate the contribution of the poet to the genre of poetry,
- know how the sonnet form has evolved in English literature during the Elizabethan period,
 - develop a critical faculty to analyze the intricacies of poem.

5.2 Introduction

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of writing in respect to the fact that the legacy of poetry dates back to the times when literature existed in oral forms. The nomads and bards sang verses comprising of several themes. When we trace the history of English literature the first manuscripts that could be retrieved were verses. The verses were written in stone carvings, bark of trees, and monoliths. The Greek and Roman masters have dealt with poetry like Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, which stand out as the Classics of world literature. Even in Southeast Asia the epics – the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are stories narrated in the versified form.

The oldest poem in the English is an anonymous epic poem *Beowulf*. The themes of the poems that are available from the Anglo-Saxon period are mostly related to chivalrous knights, adventurous voyages, monsters, pilgrimage and some virtuous traits.

It is remarkable that poetry was an art that was meant for the court of kings. It was not something that was available for the common people. There are various forms of poetry that has evolved throughout the centuries – ballad, epic, sonnet, mock-heroic, dramatic monologue, and many more. However, it can be noted that the noted form happens to become popular during the 13th century. Gradually it developed in the English language with the masters like Wyatt and Surrey and later with William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Philip Sydney.

5.3 A Brief History of the Renaissance

The term renaissance is French which means “rebirth”. This period extends from the 14th to the 18th century. The Renaissance first began in Italy. The Renaissance spreads to the rest of Europe gradually. With the Renaissance a change could be seen in almost all the spheres of life and literature. In England the decline of the feudal system is remarkable. Discovery and exploration of new world began. This

resulted in the growth of commerce. The Renaissance has also brought in remarkable innovations as paper printing, the mariner's compass and gunpowder.

Basically in literature the Renaissance is the revival of classical learning after a prolonged period of decline in the cultural scenario of England. The inspiration of the masters of the renaissance where the ancient Greek and Roman masters in the political field the expansion of the British Empire started during this period the consciousness of the individual developed as a result of changes that took place by the implementation of certain laws. Liberal forms of arts proposed by the Greeks became popular during the period. Reading of the Latin text was emphasized. As the Renaissance began in Italy the French and Italian influence could be seen in when the movement flourished in England. The befitting example here is that of the sonnet form, which was originally introduced by the great master Petrarch in Italy. Although the sonneteers of England – Wyatt and Surrey, William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney – experimented with the structure, yet they did not alter the basic form of sonnet. The number of lines of a sonnet was kept as introduced by Petrarch, which are fourteen lines. From then on a sonnet came to be recognized as a fourteen lines poem with a rhyme scheme and mostly in iambic pentameter.

There was a revival in the way poetry came to be written during the Renaissance. A surge of new and different forms of poetry like elegies, sonnets, marriage songs and pastoral poetry contributed to the enrichment of English literature. The trend of lyric poetry became popular as a result. Besides Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, lyric poetry was also written by Daniel and Drayton.

Renaissance Humanism

Renaissance humanism was a movement that was more intellectual than political. It is due to the renewed interest in classical scholarship which stressed on the importance of being human. The focus shifted from the religiosity of the middle ages to the humanitarian aspect of life. This has come down to the renaissance from the philosophy of the ancient masters like Petrarch Dante Alighieri and Giovanni Boccaccio. Petrarch is considered to be the father of humanism however all the three Italian masters are believed to be the torchbearers of the humanist movement in Europe.

An analysis of the writings of this period gives an understanding of the fact that the writers focused on dealing with the aspects that affected the life of an individual. Poetry and drama flourished with writers like

William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser and others. In the works of these great writers reflect the nuances of human engagements, the complexities of life and the intricacies of human relation and human nature as a whole.

Stop to consider

Contribution to versification:

Edmund Spenser’s contribution to the development of poetry during the Renaissance is unprecedented. This owes to the reason that among the other masters of English literature in that period Spenser has successfully created his own space by his form of poetry. Although he followed the Petrarchan style of sonnet writing, yet he had brought in some newness to the form of sonnets. It is due to this fact that besides Shakespearean sonnets Spenserian sonnets come to one’s mind when Renaissance poetry is concerned. No doubt, his epic poem *The Fairie Queene* has sealed his fame as a great master of Renaissance poetry, but the amendment done to the Petrarchan model of sonnets and to English sonnets after Wyatt and Surrey has also earned him a lot of praise. With Spenser the sonnet form evolved from the Italian model practiced by Petrarch. This poem has the fame of being the longest poem in the English language with 36,000 lines and 4,000 stanzas.

There is also a prose work that Spenser had written during the Nine Years War in Ireland. It is “View of the State of Ireland”. For his opinion shared regarding the tumultuous condition of Ireland in that period his house there was demolished and he had to escape to England for the safety of his life.

SAQ

What are the remarkable changes seen with the coming of Renaissance in England? (About 80 words)

What is Renaissance Humanism? How does the ideals of Renaissance Humanism get reflected in the literature of the time? (about 120 words)

5.4 Spenser's contribution to the sonnet form

The sonnet form was brought into English by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey. Popularly they were known as Wyatt and Surrey due to their collaborative work *Tottel's Miscellany*. Wyatt brought in the sonnet to the poetry of England. Surrey introduced the blank verse in his translations of the second and the fourth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, both of them followed the Petrarchan form of sonnet writing.

Edmund Spenser's fame is far and wide for his unprecedented contribution to the sonnet form. During the time when another great master of sonnet writing, William Shakespeare was writing sonnets Spenser successfully secured his position as a sonneteer alongside the former. As discussed above, the writers of the Renaissance derived their inspiration from the Classical master of Greece, Rome and Italy. Like the other Spenser too sought inspiration in the father of sonnet writing to practice and invented a new form of sonnet which came to be known as the Spenserian sonnet/stanza. His sonnet sequence *Amoretti*, which depicted his love affair with Elizabeth Boyle and the culmination of their love into their marriage, stands as an unparalleled work of literature.

Spenserian sonnet comprises of three interlocked quatrains and a final heroic couplet. The rhyme scheme of Spenser's sonnets is abab bcbc cdcd ee. A discussion at this point between the Petrarchan and Shakespearean Sonnet is in order. All the Petrarchan, Shakespearean, and Spenserian sonnets comprise of fourteen (14) lines. The basic

characteristic of a sonnet is kept the same. The remarkable difference between the two is in the way the lines are arranged.

In a Petrarchan sonnet there are two stanzas – the first stanza consists of eight lines called an octave and the second stanza is made up of six lines and is called a sestet. The rhyme scheme of the octave is abbaabba and the sestet is cdcdcd or cdecde. As we have read about the rhyme scheme of Spenserian sonnets above, the difference in the rhyming scheme of the two types of sonnets is evident.

On the other hand a Shakespearean sonnet comprises of three quatrains and a sestet. Each quatrain is formed by four lines and the sestet is of two lines. The rhyme scheme is also different from that of the Petrarchan or Spenserian sonnet form. In a Shakespearean sonnet the rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg. Shakespeare also wrote his sonnets in iambic pentameter.

Stop to consider:

During the same time another great poet of the Renaissance wrote sonnets. It is Philip Sidney who has been praised for his unprecedented contribution to English verse by Edmund Spenser. Anyone who reads Sidney's poetry is bound to admit that he had an unparalleled way of writing verses. The most famous of Philip Sidney's works is his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, published in 1591. This sonnet sequence consists of 108 sonnets and 11 songs. For the lyricism and the choice of his words in the sonnets incorporated *Astrophel and Stella* is considered to be one of the outstanding works of the Renaissance after Shakespeare. The rhyme scheme of the sonnets written by Sidney is abab abab cdcd ee. The sonnets are written in iambic pentameter. These sonnets were written sometime around 1580, but were posthumously published. Before publication these sonnets were circulated among the close acquaintances of Sidney as manuscripts.

It is, however, notable that the sonnets in this sequence are also allegorical. At the surface level the theme of this sonnet sequence deals with the feeling and passion of Astrophel to win over the heart of his lady love, Stella.

SAQ

How did the sonnet form develop? What is the form of Petrarchan sonnets? (about 80 words)

Love:

Spenser's poems, especially his sonnets, take up the theme of love. His sonnet sequence *Amoretti*, which consists of eighty-nine (89) sonnets, expresses the theme of love or rejoices in the love he bears for his lady love – Elizabeth Boyle. These sonnets speak of love in a very passionate way. Sensual descriptions involving the poet's lady love can also be found in the sonnets of this collection. *Amoretti* imply "little Cupid" or "little loves". The title of the sonnet sequence too tells of the fact that the sonnets are about the poet's reiterations about his love affair and the feelings associated with it. It is also suggestive of the uncontrollable energy of love that emanates when Cupid strikes with his magical arrow, according to mythology.

Spenser has written a collection of hymns too under the title *Fowre Hymnes* published in 1596. The hymns celebrate the honour of love and beauty. In the collection are included four hymns in total, viz. "An Hymns in Honour of Love", "An Hymns in Honour of Beautie", "An Hymns in Heavenly Love" and "An Hymns of Heavenly Beautie". It is believed that Spenser was inspired by Plato's Symposium in writing the four hymns. Besides, he also owes to some Renaissance Neo Platonists like Castiglione and Bruno.

Marriage:

Marriage is a predominant theme in Spenserian sonnets. Along with *Amoretti* the *Epithalamion* was published in 1594. The latter is exclusively focuses on his courtship with Elizabeth Boyle that very beautifully culminated into his marriage with her. The poems of *Epithalamion* celebrate not just the marriage of Spenser with his lady love, but also provide descriptions of their marital relationship. The bliss he enjoyed with this lady, although this was his second marriage, is the central theme of *Epithalamion*. This marriage with Boyle had been presented as an achievement for life.

Again, in *Prothalamion* the theme of marriage has been worked out. But unlike *Epithalamion* this poem is meant to celebrate the betrothal or engagement of the two-sisters – Lady Elizabeth and Lady Katherine Somerset, the daughters of Earl of Somerset.

Praise of the Queen:

The long poem which runs in six books, *The Fairie Queene* is written in honour of Queen Elizabeth I. In this poem the readers are introduced to several characters, which are fictional, yet bear resemblances to real life people of the period. The character who represents Queen Elizabeth is Gloriana, depicted as the Queen of Fairies. The objective of Spenser to attract the attention of the queen

and win the favour of the royal court was successful. Impressed by Spenser's work Elizabeth I rewarded him a lifetime pension of fifty pounds every year. The character Belphoebe also stands for the Queen who is also known as "the virgin queen".

The political condition of England:

The political scenario of England has changed when Queen Elizabeth I took over the throne. The emphasis of the Queen on human virtues finds reflection in *The Fairie Queen*. Medieval tradition of celebrating the adventures and qualities of a chivalrous is represented by the Red Cross Knight. Moreover, the rise of the power of the Tudors, as Elizabeth I herself was the last of the five Tudor monarchs, is the most decipherable undercurrent in his epic poem. As Spenser too was on the Protestant side he has very subtly endorsed it against the Roman Catholic Church, which was prioritized by the former Queen Mary I – half-sister of Queen Elizabeth.

Pastoral:

Spenser established himself as a poet with his anonymous (at the time of publication) poem "The Shepherdes Calender" published in 1579. This poem is a series of twelve poems, each representing a month of the year. The title of this poem itself gives an image of the countryside where shepherds herd a group of sheep that he takes over through valleys and hills for grazing. Edmund Spenser was specially inspired by Virgil. The latter's *Eclogues* became the muse for him during his early years as a poet when he was drawn more towards the pastoral. Influence of Geoffrey Chaucer is also evident in "The Shepherdes Calender". The deliberate choice of the Medieval English by Spenser is overtly seen in his poetry. Moreover, "The Shepherdes Calender" is dedicated to Philip Sidney.

A discussion of Spenser's preoccupation with the pastoral also brings forth his poem "Mother Hubbard's Tale", which is actually a fable. The poem is written in the form of a fable to satirize the people who the animals stand for. The fox represents Lord Burghley, an influential politician and Duke of Anjou, who wanted to marry Queen Elizabeth, has been represented by an ape.

Another collection of miscellaneous poems is *Complaints*. The theme of these poems is quite unlike Spenser. It is because this is a collection of translated works from Latin and French.

5.6 The poet's style of writing

When we look into the writing style of Edmund Spenser the most remarkable characteristic of his poetry that the readers and critics have found is his unique form of sonnet. It is due to the fact that the sonnet form which he has structured or discovered came to be known as the Spenserian stanza/sonnet. The principal meter of a Spenserian stanza is iambic pentameter with a concluding line in iambic hexameter (six feet or stresses, popular as Alexandrine).

As a poet Spenser did not stick to any strict rules as such. However, besides his unique iambic hexameter/Alexandrine in his sonnets he used epithets and alliterations. The iambic hexameter created a rhythm in his poetry that added up to the lyricism. It also helped in beautifully summarizing the thought in the stanza. The iambic hexameter could be divided into twelve syllables or six phrases which bring in a lyrical end to the whole stanza.

By using the Medieval English in writing his poems he happened to inspire others to use that version of the English language as the literary masters of the Middle English period practiced. He was someone who looked up to Geoffrey Chaucer, evident in his use of archaic words, classical and pastoral expressions. A reading of his poems is also suggestive of the fact that Spenser effortlessly inculcated the ideals of moral virtues among his readers with a dignified seriousness.

Spenser's ability to homogenize diverse elements is a quality that distinguishes him as a poet. In *The Fairie Queene* he has woven into the story all sorts of characters – dwarfs, knights, human beings, heroes, demons and many others so deftly that they are made to play their role in the poem in response to what the poet had imagined it to be. This work is also a testimony of Edmund Spenser's mastery in producing poems which are allegorical in nature. His inclination towards allegory has also emerged from his affiliation to the allegorical writings of the writers of the medieval period. As Spenser chose Virgil as his role model the former's diction echoes the influence of the latter. "The Shepheardes Calender" is an inspiration derived from Virgil's *Eclogues*, which too is a sequence of twelve poems. The mythical allusions that Spenser makes use of in his poetry are also attributed to his inclination towards Virgil.

Elegy is another form that Spenser tried his hands on and excelled. "The Complaints" and "The Tear of the Muses" are elegiac poems. The most famous of his elegies is "Astrophel" written in order of lament over the death of Philip Sidney. The title of the poem itself is suggestive of the fact that it has a relation to Sidney because the latter

has written the sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. In this sequence Astrophel is the protagonist of the narrative presented in poetry. Not only the greatness of Sidney as a poet is highlighted but the inspiration that Spenser got from the former has also been beautifully expressed in this poem.

The four hymns written by Spenser in praise of love and beauty are different in respect to their lyricism as well. The rhythmic construction of the stanzas is another remarkable characteristic of his poetry.

Check your progress:

From where did Edmund Spenser derive his inspiration to write poetry? (Hint: For example -Virgil,Petrarch, Dante.)

What are the Renaissance ideals that get reflected in Spenser's poets? (Hint: For example – His emphasis on the various facets of human life and his interest in the legacy of the Classical masters of Ancient Greece,Rome and Italy.)

Why The Fairie Queene is considered to be the greatest of all of Spenser's poetry? (Hint: the work allegorically deals with the socio-political status of England, use of Middle English diction, portrayal of Elizabeth I and several mythical characters.)

How does Spenser use imagery in his poems? (Hint: For example, the vivid description of the flora and fauna, the setting of the Garden of Adonais and specifically the details of the elevated centre of the garden.) Besides the Classical masters Sidney was inspired by a few great writers of his own age and nationality. Who are they and how did they influence Sidney in writing poetry? (Geoffrey Chaucer for the diction and allegorical allusions, Philip Sidney in composing sonnets)

5.7 Spenser and his critics

The stature of Edmund Spenser as a poet has been both praised and questioned. One of the critics John Aikin, who belonged to the eighteenth century, has commented on Spenser as, “on the whole, he may be reckoned the greatest master of personification that ever existed; and more original delineations of this kind are to be met with in the *Faery Queene*, than, perhaps, in all other poems united. Some of these are truly excellent, and are wrought into scenes of wonderful power. The allegory of 'Despair' in the first book may be placed at the head of all such fictions”.

Abraham Cowley, who was a well-acclaimed poet himself, highly praised Spenser's poetry. Cowley also asserts that Spenser was

a great source of inspiration for him in his poetic journey. The fact that the former held the latter at a very high esteem is evident when Cowley says, “My mother only reads highly valued books. When I came to my mother’s room, there were only Spenser’s books”.

John Milton too did not lag behind in singing praise of Edmund Spenser. In appreciation of Spenser’s poetry he said, “Our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas”.

Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene* has inspired many and Dryden is one of them. In writing *Annus Mirabilis* Dryden considered this work as a role model. He accepted Spenser a master, which is obvious in words, “No man was ever born with greater genius or more knowledge to support it”.

In the year 1975 a critic named Joseph Anthony Wittreich focused on Spenser’s capability of envisioning. To define it the former used the idiom “line of vision”. By this Wittreich conveyed Spenser’s visionary and prophetic power in writing poetry. It was emphasized more in relation to *The Fairie Queene* for the epic amalgamation of diversified elements from the Classical, medieval and Renaissance ideals and forms.

From the discussion made above it becomes prominent that Edmund Spenser had contributed a lot in the development of English poetry. The stanza that he introduced in his sonnets came to be known by his own name, Spenserian stanza. It is the uniqueness of his poetic genius that has immortalized him as a poet in the history of English literature. Though he is known more by his masterpiece *The Fairie Queene*, but from the analysis of his other works including his hymns, pastoral poems, elegies and poems celebrating marriage it becomes clear that Spenser was versatile as a poet.

5.8 Glossary

Shepherd: Middle English word which in modern English is written as ‘shepherd’s’.

Calender: Middle English word for “calendar”.

Fairie: Originally Middle English, the modern English word is “fairy”.

Queene: Middle English word which is now written as “queen”.

5.9 Suggested readings:

Drayton, Michael. *Idea: Elizabethan Sonnet Cycle (British Poets)*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2013. Print.

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Unit 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICAL POETRY

- 1.1 Objective
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Historical Contexts
- 1.4 What is Metaphysical Poetry?
- 1.5 Introducing the Metaphysical poets
 - 1.5.1 John Donne
 - 1.5.2 George Herbert
 - 1.5.3 Richard Crashaw
 - 1.5.4 Abraham Cowley
 - 1.5.5 Andrew Marvel
 - 1.5.6 Henry Vaughan
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 Glossary
- 1.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- Evaluate the social context in which Metaphysical Poets emerged
- Learn about the distinguishing features of metaphysical poetry
- familiarize the learners with the most celebrated Metaphysical poets
- Understand some of the key concepts associated with metaphysical poetry.

1.2 Introduction

In this section of the unit, the learner will be introduced to the origins of Metaphysical Poetry and its reception across centuries, up to the present day context. Metaphysical poetry is a genre of poetry that emerged in the 17th century England. It refers to a kind of poetry written by a loose group of 17th century poets who were writing individually in their own contexts, and had little or no familiarity with

each other's work. Yet, their poetry had certain traits that were common to all of them. This is why, from the 18th century onwards, they were grouped together as the "Metaphysical poets" by critics and scholars of poetry. The term "metaphysical" was not used by these poets themselves.

1.3 Historical Context

The use of the word "metaphysical" to refer to this group of poets and their works was, arguably, first done by a Scottish poet and pamphleteer, William Drummond of Hawthornden, who, in an undated letter, complained that some of his contemporaries "attempted to abstract poetry to Metaphysical ideas and Scholastical quiddities." This letter is believed to have been written circa 1630. Then came John Dryden, who in his "Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" (1693) talked about how the poet John Donne affected the metaphysics. It was only in the 18th century that the word "metaphysical" was used as a label to categorize a specific group of poets. Samuel Johnson wrote *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-1781), a collection of biographies of some of the most well known poets of the 17th and 18th centuries. There, in his biography of Abraham Cowley Johnson says that in 17th century England, there "appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets." Though Johnson wasn't the first to make use of the word "metaphysical", he was the first to consolidate under one label this group of 17th century poets whose works showed traces of metaphysical elements.

Metaphysical poetry began as a reaction against Elizabethan poetry which was felt to have become exhausted by the 17th century. Metaphysical poetry rose as a revolt against the conventions of Elizabethan poetry. As opposed to the romantic, harmonious sweetness of Elizabethan poetic expressions, metaphysical poetry was rather coarse and prosaic. There was an intellectual and psychological depth to it which was more often than not, absent in Elizabethan poetry. Metaphysical poets, consciously or otherwise, sought to break away from the Elizabethan traditions.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, metaphysical poetry was not seen and studied in a positive light. Instead, it was treated with contempt. As a

matter of fact, the label of “metaphysical poets” was used in a derogatory sense, and as a mockery. Samuel Johnson went ahead to call this genre of poetry to be “violent”. In a rather condescending manner, Johnson says that the Metaphysicals were “men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour. They neither copied nature, nor life, their thought were new but seldom natural.” He also attacked the metaphysical poets on grounds of exhibiting extreme artificialities and ransacking art and nature. John Dryden who was one of the literary stalwarts of his time also criticized the metaphysical poets for their “unnaturalness” and their use of extravagant conceits. Talking about John Donne, who is regarded as the father of Metaphysical poetry, Dryden says: “He affects the Metaphysics.... In his amorous verses...[he] perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, where he should engage their hearts.” For over two centuries, Metaphysical poetry remained eclipsed by Romantic and Victorian poetry. In the 18th and the 19th centuries, the Metaphysical poets continued to receive harsh criticisms, accusations and condemnations. They were seen as a group of people who indulged in unnecessary and complicated comparisons, and conceits simply to establish and assert their intellectual superiority over others, leading to the creation of artificial, rough, strained, and obscure poetry.

In the 19th century, Alexander Grosart published an edition of some of John Donne’s poems in 1872. The edition on Donne was subsequently followed by editions of poems of George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Abraham Cowley. In 1899, Edmund Gosse published a biography of Donne. These, amongst others, triggered a renewed interest in readers and critics to read metaphysical poetry from newer perspectives.

It was only in the 20th century that the Metaphysical poets firmly began to emerge from the shadows of disdain. It began with T.S. Eliot’s essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921) where he talked favourably about the Metaphysical poets. Eliot used his concept of “**unification of sensibility**” to describe the Metaphysical poets. Talking about the contribution of Metaphysical poetry in the landscape of English poetry, Eliot says that in the works of the metaphysical poets, we find a fusion of thoughts and feelings- that is, we find a unification of sensibility. Unlike the critics of the earlier centuries who were sceptical about the use of **metaphysical conceits**, Eliot actually praises the use of conceits and says that “the elaboration of a figure of

speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it”, as done by the metaphysical poets is what has enriched English poetry, instead of contaminating it, as accused early critics. He appreciated the group for being able to “devour all kinds of experiences.” Besides Eliot, other proponents of New Criticism like Cleanth Brooks and Allen Tate also worked towards reviving metaphysical poetry

In 1921, besides the works of New Critics, Herbert Grierson’s “Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: From Donne to Butler” was also published and gained limelight. This anthology proved instrumental in reviving literary and scholarly interest in the 17th century metaphysical poets. In the introductory essay to this anthology, Grierson discussed various aspects of metaphysical poetry. He extensively investigated into the works of John Donne who is usually regarded as the first metaphysical poet, and praises him and remarks that “the divine poets who follow Donne have each inherited metaphysic.”

Theodore Spenser and Mark Van Doren, in *Studies in Metaphysical Poetry* (1939) also traced the origins of metaphysical poetry, and contributed to the revival of the genre. Joseph D. Duncan, who traced the revival of metaphysical poetry in “The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, 1872-1912” says that in the early 19th century, the acceptance of metaphysical poetry broadened both in Great Britain and in the United States. He also acknowledges the contribution of the three Gs- Grosart, Gosse, and Grierson in preparing the stage of revival for the metaphysicals.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, scholars and critics began to observe that that poetry with metaphysical traits were being written in other parts of the world as well, including the United States. However, the term “metaphysical poetry” did not include under its purview these writers from different regions, but remained exclusive to the 17th century poets of England. Hence, many contemporary scholars today argue for bringing together all of these poets under the umbrella term “**baroque**”, which they believe would be more inclusive than the term “metaphysical poets”.

1.4. WHAT IS METAPHYSICAL POETRY?

So far, the unit as discussed how Metaphysical poetry came into existence, its reception, and its place in the canon of English

literature. In this section of the unit, the learner will be introduced to “what” Metaphysical poetry is all about, what are its traits and characteristics, and how is it distinct from other genres of poetry.

Etymologically, the word “metaphysical” is derived from two words- “meta” and “physical” where “meta” means “beyond”. Therefore, the word “metaphysical” means “something that goes beyond the physical”. Metaphysical poetry refers to a kind of poetry that originated in 17th century England, and is characterized by the extensive use of intellect, philosophy, wit, and conceits. Love, time, the human soul, and religion are some of the most predominant themes of metaphysical poetry.

According to Grierson, “metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which... has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence.” Metaphysical poetry is characterized, as Grierson points out, by “the more intellectual, less verbal character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; their finer psychology of which their conceits are often expressions; their learned imager; the argumentative style, the subtle evolution of their lyrics; and above all, the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement.”

The works of the poets who have been clustered together as the “metaphysical poets” are distinct from each other. However, there are some common traits that bind them together as a group, and set them apart from other poets. Some of these characteristics have been discussed below”

- **The choice of spiritual and philosophical subjects:** The Metaphysical poets were men of great intellect and learning. They pondered at depth about matters concerning everyday life. They were also well versed with the scientific developments happening in their contemporary times, and were inquisitive about human psychology. Their poetry is reflective of their intellect. Hence in their poems, we often find an exploration of the spiritual realm and a philosophizing of commonplace subjects. Philosophies like *carpe diem* and *tempus fugit* are also found in many of the metaphysical poems. They question the co-relationship between the physical and the spiritual aspects of human beings. For example, in his poem “The Extasie”, John Donne narrates how the souls of two lovers leave their human bodies to

engage and interact with each other. While he acknowledges the powerful connection between two souls, he also expresses desire for physical intimacy. He asserts that the complete union of two beings can happen only when the physical and the spiritual fuse, and hence it is futile to restrict oneself from indulging in carnal pleasures that the human body seeks:

We then, who are this new soul, know
Of what we are compos'd and made,
...But O alas, so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?

- **The use of metaphysical conceit:** The metaphysical poets are known for their wit and the use of conceit. Their poems contain unfamiliar and unexpected comparisons. The use of extravagant metaphors and enormous hyperboles that often might look like absurdities to those unversed with conceits. The use of conceits is a pervasive element in metaphysical poetry. Two very dissimilar objects are brought together by metaphysical poets to draw comparisons with human experiences. These figures of speech are drawn from various fields like nature, recent scientific discoveries, medicines, law, mythology, astronomy etc. The use of conceits adds intellectual depth to metaphysical poetry. It also sometimes adds layers of ambiguities to the poems, making them open to multiple interpretations. The most famous use of metaphysical conceit is, perhaps, done by John Donne, who, in his poem “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”, compares the souls of two lovers with the two legs of a compass. Donne wrote this poem for his wife, Anne, before he left on a trip. According to Donne, just like the legs of a compass remain linked even when they are parted, the souls of two true lovers also remain connected, even when they are temporarily and spatially distanced:

As stiff twin compasses are two
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move....
And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and harkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

- **The use of love and religion as themes of their poetry:** Metaphysical poetry is sometimes divided into two broad categories—love poems and religious poetry. While some of the stalwarts like John Donne and Andrew Marvell dabbled both with love and religion, it is Carew, Suckling and Lovelace who are known mostly known for their amorous poems. Vaughan, Herbert and Crashaw are considered more of religious poets.

Even though poetry across time and space have engaged with issues of love and religion, the metaphysical treatment of love and religion are strikingly different from that of their contemporaries. Metaphysical poems are amorous. However, the metaphysical expression of love is nothing similar to the sweet, subtle expressions of their Elizabethan precursors. The amorous verses of the Metaphysicals do not follow the traditions of Spenserian or Shakespearean love poetry. In metaphysical poetry we find direct, blatant pursuit of carnal pleasures along with the spiritual. Metaphysical poems are often songs of seductions. Unlike their contemporaries, the metaphysicals did not shy away from the sensual dimensions of love. Emotional conflict, pain of separation, death and eroticism are issues that the metaphysical poets deal with in their love poems.

Metaphysical poetry also deals with different preoccupations of man through the avenues of religion and religious thought. Some of the metaphysical poets, including George Herbert, were members of the clergy. Their poetry critiqued many aspects of Christian life. Some characteristics of Morality Plays are sometimes seen some of the metaphysical verses. John Donne's "Holy Sonnet" and "Batter my Heart"; and Herbert's "The Collar" and "The Church Porch" are some of the finest metaphysical verses dealing with themes of religion.

- **The fusion of emotions and intellect:** The metaphysical poets were men of learning. Their poems reflected their knowledge and logic. However, their use of intellect did not exclude their acknowledgement and experience of human emotions. In the poems composed by the metaphysical poets, we find a fine blend and balance of emotions as well as intellect. Grierson, in his "Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the 17th Century" (1921) elaborated how "passionate thinking" is an indispensable part of Metaphysical Poetry. He says, "Metaphysical poetry is the blend of passionate feelings and paradoxical ratiocination." The expression of love, faith, and all other human experiences was done with intellectuality as well as intense

passion. T.S.Eliot calls it the unification of sensibility. Eliot asserts that one of the achievements of the Metaphysical poets is that they were able to unify the sensibilities. Their verses emanated out of sheer emotional experiences and thoughts, the thoughts were articulated with exquisite use of reason. For instance, in John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", there an analysis of why it is futile for lovers to grief at parting, because even though they might part on the physical level, eventually they would unite on the spiritual plane:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempest move,
'twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love

- **The development of an argument:** Like it has already been mentioned, the metaphysical poets were learned men who were in possession of scientific as well as philosophical knowledge. They were deep thinkers who dished out their emotions and thoughts in a very logical, systematic and organized manner. Hence, Metaphysical poetry is often argumentative in nature. The subject matter of a poem is often presented in the form of a syllogism. Along with the progress of the poem, the argument put forward by the poet also develops. By the end of the poem, the reader is usually convinced of the validity of the poet's argument. This use of deductive logic, combined with persuasive analogies and imageries from different domains of field contributes to the poems quest for truth. The conceits, paradoxes and all other literary devices used contribute in consolidating the central argument of the poem. For instance, Andrew Marvell, presents his poem "To his Coy Mistress" in the form of a syllogism where the first two stanzas of the poem act as the premises, and the third and concluding stanza is the conclusion to the argument that Marvell tried to establish in his poem. The said poem argues that if they had all the time in the world, the lovers could afford to delay their union. But since their time on earth is limited, and their bodies continue to age and wither away with every passing minute, they must hurry and consummate their love:

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin...
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour

Than languish in his slow-chapped power.

- **The extensive use of imagery:** One of the striking characteristics of metaphysical poetry is that it indulges in the usage of grand, dramatic, uncommon, and unfamiliar imagery. The metaphysical use of imagery often establishes links and relationships between things that are usually seen as independent of and unrelated to each other. They are born out of the use of metaphysical conceits. Alice S. Brandenburg, in her essay “The Dynamic Image in Metaphysical Poetry” (1942) talks about how all imagery can be classified into categories- static and dynamic. She says that the Petrarchan and Elizabethan poets that came before the Metaphysicals made use of static images. The imagery of the Metaphysicals, however made use of dynamic imagery. According to Brandenburg, the Metaphysical poets made use of static imagery when they wanted to achieve comic or satirical effects. In the context of metaphysical poetry, the use of symbols and images makes intangible concepts and intense emotions appear somewhat comprehensible to the average reader. For instance, in the poem “The Flea”, John Donne uses the imagery of a flea as an elaborate and extended metaphor to express his desire to his beloved. The flea, that sucked the blood of both the lovers becomes a symbol of union of the two lovers:

It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our bloods mingled be...

Because the blood of the two “mingled” inside the flea, the flea becomes a “temple of marriage” and a “marriage bed”, and thus, when the poet’s beloved tried to smother the flea, the poet sees it as almost an act of sacrilege. The choice of the parasitic insect as an image and symbol of love is unconventional, in a truly metaphysical fashion.

- **The use of colloquial language:** The metaphysical poets deliberately tried to break away from the formal and conventional poetic expressions that were traditionally used in composing poetry. Their poetic diction did not usually include grand and complex use of language. Their priority was more upon the use of wit and intellect, rather than embellished language, rhyme, or rhythm. Therefore, their verses often felt prosaic, with rather coarse rhyme. In metaphysical poetry, we find a sharp juxtaposition of grand intellect and commonplace language. The metaphysical poets chose intricate and

delicate subjects which they treated with complex use of conceits, albeit in a simple language. Their verses had a spoken, rather than lyrical quality. However, the use of colloquialism should not be confused with use of “incorrect” language. The metaphysical poets merely avoided using laboured, artificially lofty speeches, as done by their neo-classical contemporaries. A prominent use of colloquialism is John Donne’s “The Canonization” where he makes use of a very spoken-like diction:

For God’s sake hold your tongue, and let me love...

Along with colloquialism, comes brevity. It is to be noted that most metaphysical poems are brief and concise. Every line is succinct, straightforward, and loaded with meaning, and appeals to the senses.

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| <p>SAQ Write a note on the salient features of metaphysical poetry.</p> <p>----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----</p> |
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1.5 INTRODUCING THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

T.S. Eliot, in his review of Grierson’s anthology talked about the difficulties in defining Metaphysical poetry. Along with defining the genre, there also comes the difficulties in deciding who are the poets who come under the purview of this genre. There is no consensus amongst scholars as to who exactly comprise the metaphysical poets.

Collin Burrow, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, includes John Donne, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw as metaphysical poets. Some of the Cavalier Poets and the **Sons of Ben** and the **Cavalier Poets** are also included as Metaphysical Poets by some scholars and critics.

Helen Gardner, in the anthology *Metaphysical Poets* (1957) also included proto-metaphysical poets like Shakespeare and Walter Raleigh, and extended the arena of the metaphysical upto the Restoration period to include Edmund Waller and Earl of Rochester.

American scholar and critic, Harold Bloom, known for his theories of Influence, went to the extent of calling the term “metaphysical poets” to be a misnomer in his introductory essay in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*. In fact, it is not just Bloom, but many others who resisted to category “metaphysical poets”. One of the reasons behind the disfavour of the term in the 20th and 21st centuries, according to Colin Burrow, is that “the poets known as metaphysicals are all different from each other and they wrote in a wide range of genres and historical circumstances... These poets were all doing very different things from different political and geographical positions. Their poems are correspondingly different.” Some of their works from these different genres and positions that they dabbled with had metaphysical traits. According to these scholars, there is no poet who is exclusively metaphysical. Instead, there is a subset of poetry that is metaphysical in nature. Therefore, they advocate the replacing of the term “metaphysical poets” with “metaphysical poetry”.

Nonetheless, for most parts, the terminology “metaphysical poets” continue to persist amongst the readers and scholars. Some of the major poets seventeenth century poets of England who are regarded as the metaphysical poets have been introduced in this section of the unit.

1.5.1 JOHN DONNE (1572-1631)

John Donne is usually regarded as the founder of the Metaphysical School of poetry. He wrote religious poetry, elegies, sonnets, satire and amorous poetry. He was one of the predominant poets of his time who continues to be relevant and widely read to this day. Donne went out of fashion during the Restoration, but was revived by the likes of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats in the 20th Century.

His works bear the very essence of metaphysical poetry. He is known for the use of conceits and wit. In a rather colloquial language, Donne often asked startling questions in his poems, and forwarded his argument with the use of exalted metaphors. The use of images and metaphors often makes his poetry ambiguous. According to Grierson, Donne is “metaphysical not only in virtue of his scholasticism but by his deep reflective interest in the experiences of which his poetry is the expression, the new psychological curiosity with which he writes of love and religion.”

John Donne's poetry is usually broadly divided into two broad categories- religious poetry and love. He was born into a Roman Catholic family, but later in life, he embraced the Church of England, and went on to become an Anglican clergyman. His personal religious journey had an impact on his writings. He talks extensively about Christianity, of God and spiritualism, of truth and lies, of life and death; and of sins and redemption in many of his poems. John Donne was also a deeply in love with his wife Anne Donne whom he married against the wishes of her family, and was devastated by her untimely death. His love for her is reflected in many of his poems. Furthermore, he also led a brazenly sexual life, and wrote some of the most erotic and intense love poetry in English literature. Some of Donne's famous works are:

- *Satires*: Donne's Satires usually considered to be his earliest works. In this collection of poems he satirized the corruption of the English legal system, the profanity of the courtiers, and the vanity of lesser poets of his times
- *Pseudo Martyr*: This is a prose tract in which is anti- Catholic in nature. In this tract he accused the Roman Catholics of promoting a pseudo patriotism and martyrdom for accumulating wealth.
- *Ignatius His Conclave*: This is a satirical attack on the Jesuits and their founder St. Ignatius of Loyola.
- *The Good Morrow*: This poem is thematically considered to be the first poem in Donne's Songs and Sonnets. Though it is a fourteen line poem, it does not follow the structure of traditional sonnets. This poems compares love with religion, and makes use of Biblical and Catholic references. Here, Donne says that both love and religion are equally profound.
- *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*: This is one of the most celebrated poems by Donne. The poem is known for its use of metaphysical conceit where he compared lovers with the two legs of a compass.
- *The Anniversarie*: This poem was written by Donne to commemorate his first year of being in love. Here, he talks about the immortality of true love which, he believes, can transcend even death.
- *The Exstasie*: This is one of the longer poems of Donne. The poem has a pastoral setting. In this poem he emphasizes upon the importance of not only the spiritual, but also of the sensual aspects of

love. While talking about the union of souls, he also acknowledges the need for physical union.

- *Sweetest Love*: In this love poem, Donne deals with the issue of separation of lovers. He says his beloved that he must go away from her not because he doesn't love her anymore, but because his duty beckons him. And just like the sun goes away each night only to return the next morning, he would return to his lover again.
- *A Hymn to God the Father*: As the title of the poem suggests, this poem is about God and religion. The poet begins by describing the sinful world that we inhabit, and how he too is a contributor in all the prevailing sins. He also asks for forgiveness from God for the sins that he committed.
- *Death Be Not Proud*: This sonnet is one of the nineteen sonnets in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*. Here Donne paints Death as a proud and vain figure, and argues that it need not be so proud because Death is but a temporary sleep between man's earthly life and eternal after-life.
- *The Canonization*: In this poem, a friend talks to another friend where he asks the listener not to disturb him in his pursuit of love. Love, according to the poet, is above all things and that love will canonise him into sainthood.

1.5.2. GEORGE HERBERT (1593- 1633)

George Herbert, like Donne, was an Anglican priest. He is chiefly known for his religious verses. Herbert was follower of Donne, and was heavily influenced by Donne's works. In turn, he influenced the later metaphysical poets like Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, and Thomas Traherne. In the later centuries, poets like Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley and W.H.Auden also reflected in their works the influence of Herbert.

Herbert composed poems early in life, right from his days at Cambridge. However, he did not publish his poems in his life time. When in his deathbed, Herbert sent a manuscript of his poems to his friend Nicholas Ferrar, asking Ferrar to either destroy or publish them. The poems were eventually published by Ferrar with the title *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633). The collection is divided into three sections which are called "The Church Porch", "The Church" and "The Church Militant". Many scholars opine that *The Temple* is reminiscent of Sir Philip Sidney's secular sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1580).

Herbert's verses are mostly devotional in nature, and are written in a simple diction. In his own words, Herbert described his poems as "a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul." Some of the most well known poems by Herbert are:

- *The Collar*: This poem is a reflection of the poet's own struggle with his religious beliefs. The collar here refers to the collar worn by clergymen. The collar is symbolically used by the poet to refer to the restraints imposed on the lives of the clergymen. The poet seeks to take off the collar, and break free into a more liberated life outside the bindings of the church.
- *The Altar*: It is **shape poem** that is written in the shape of an altar. It makes use of conceit where the human heart is compared to an altar. In this poem, the poet expresses his desire to make sacrifices like Christ. The poet describes how he will endeavour to create an altar out of his own heart.
- *Jordan I*: In this poem, the poet discusses what should the material for poetry be. He says that instead of always choosing fictional topics, one should opt for topics out of one's own life.
- *Love III*: In this poem, the poet personifies Love as a host who has invited Herbert as a guest for dinner. Here, God is equated with Love. The poet hesitates to accept Love's invitation for dinner because he is aware of the many sins that he has committed, and hence he doesn't consider himself worthy of being Love's guest.

1.5.3 RICHARD CRASHAW (1612-1649)

Richard Crashaw too, like Donne and Herbert, was an Anglican cleric who was known for his Puritan beliefs. However, in his later life, he converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. While at university, he was in the matrix of some of the best poets of his era: John Milton, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Sir John Suckling, and Abraham Cowley, to name a few. Crashaw was also influenced by the Italian and Spanish mystics, particularly by Giambattista Marino some of whose works Crashaw also translated.

Crashaw's poetry may be categorized into three groups- the early epigrams, the secular poetry, and religious poems. The epigrams are to be found in his *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber*. The epigrams bear the influence of classical writers and biblical motifs. Crashaw's secular poems are found in *The Delight of the Muses* which is his second

collection of poems. This collection contains some of his famous poems like “Love’s Horoscope”, “Wishes to His (supposed) Mistress”, and “Venus Putting on Mars his Armour”. These poems have an urbane feeling to them, and have irregular rhyme and meter. *Steps to the Temple* is where we find most of Crashaw’s religious poems. Another collection of Crashaw’s poems. Christianity, the life of Christ, God, justice, humanity are some of the frequently recurring themes in his religious poetry. *Carmen de Nostro*, was published posthumously. Crashaw’s poetry is characterized by the use of puns, repetition, and conceits which are reminiscent of John Donne.. He talks about the physical as well as the spiritual aspects of human existence. Crashaw’s poetry is marked by an unwavering optimism. Some of his best known poems include

- *The Weeper or The Sainte Mary Magadlene*: This poem traces the legend of Mary Magdalene who Crashaw describes as weeping. The poem contains a number of conceits and images related to the act of crying, like cheeks drenched with tears, and tears falling like dewdrops
- *In the Holy Nativity of our Lord*: The poem deals with conventional Christian images. It deals with the birth of Christ and the revelation of it to the three shepherds who try to find the perfect bed for the infant Christ. The poem is known for its use of paradoxes and dualities.

1.5.4. ABRAHAM COWLEY (1618-1667)

Abraham Cowley was an English poet and essayist, and was influenced by the works of Edmund Spenser, particularly *The Faerie Queene*. He wrote his first poem at the age of ten. He was a Royalist. He was a student at Cambridge and was working on a poem on King David when the Civil War broke out, and he was ousted from Cambridge on account of his political stance. Cowley spent twelve years in exile as a secretary to Queen Henrietta, and returned to England only after the Restoration. Upon his return, he was reinstated as a Cambridge fellow.

Cowley is regarded as a transitional poet who unlike Donne, focused less on emotions, and prioritized wit and reason. As a poet, he was more flexible and versatile in his style and themes, as compared to the early metaphysicals. Cowley drew from Ben Jonson and John Donne, while also experimenting with the Pindaric ode. His choice of

subjects were more diverse than the early metaphysical, and he adapted with the contemporary sensibilities as far as his poetic imagination is concerned. He avoided extravagance and wrote with propriety. Some of Cowley's noted works are

- *Poetical Blossomes*: This was Cowley's first collection of works which was published when he was fifteen. It has five poems which includes the epic poem "The Tragical History of Pirasmus and Thisbe" that Cowley wrote when he was ten. "Constantia and Philetius", the second poem in this collection is a supplement to the first one.
- *The Mistress*: It is a collection of a hundred Metaphysical love poems. It is written in a courtly and clever style that bears the influence of both Metaphysical and Cavalier traditions. *The Mistress* was Cowley's most widely read work in those days.
- *Pindaric Odes*: Cowley did not follow the traditional structure of the Pindaric ode, but experimented with the form to create irregular odes. His intention, as he himself states, was to introduce the English to odes. Cowley's odes are known for their bold imagery.
- *Davideis*: This is an unfinished Biblical epic that Cowley conceptualized way before Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. Of the twelve books that were planned, Cowley completed four.
- *Hymn to Light*: This poem is known for the way it strikes a balance between Cowley's knowledge and imagination. The poem is a deliberation upon beams of light
- *Ode to the Royal Society*: This poem was written by Cowley at the request of his friend John Evelyn as complement to Thomas Sprat's *The History of the Royal Society*. This is considered to be Cowley's last significant work.

Most of Cowley's poems were published in the collection *Poems* which underwent many editions.

1.5.5. ANDREW MARVELL (1621-1678)

Andrew Marvell was a poet as well as a civil servant and a politician. He initially wrote poems supporting the Royalist cause, but later shifted to supporting the Parliamentary cause so much so that he came to be known as Cromwell's poet. His works were posthumously published in a collection called *Miscellaneous Poems*.

The life and Andrew Marvell have been discussed at length in a different chapter.

1.5.6. HENRY VAUGHAN (1621-1695)

Henry Vaughan, besides being a poet and a translator, was also a doctor. He was a Royalist, and is best known for his lyrical and religious poetry. Vaughan is usually credited for introducing the **slant rhyme** in English literature. His poetry bears the influence of Ben Jonson, John Donne and George Herbert. He credits Herbert for being behind his conversion from “idle lyrics” to “religious verses”. His poetry is concise and mystical. He wrote extensively about nature and drew inspiration from his native environment. He used the term “silurist” to describe this native setting, a term evocative of the Silures tribe that Herbert’s ancestors belonged to. His treatment of nature led to Vaughan being regarded as a Proto-Romantic. In fact, the Romantic stalwarts, including William Wordsworth is said to have been influenced by Vaughan. The works of Vaughan include:

- *Poems with the Tenth Satyre of Juvenal Englished*: This is Vaughan’s first collection of poems. It has thirteen poems along with the translation of the tenth Juvenal. This work is regarded as derivative work with less originality. Many of the poems in this collection are dedicated to Amorett. Amorett is usually believed to be Catherine Wise, a lady that Vaughan courted.
- *Olors Iscanus*: When translated to English, “Olors Iscanus” means “The Swan of Usk”. This collection has Silurist settings, and is believed to have been written by Vaughan in the darkest and lowest period of his life. It alludes to the Civil wars, the despotic Republican Government, and Vaughan’s eviction from his own home. It contains poems lamenting the defeat of the Royalists and elegies in memory of those he lost in the War.
- *Silex Scintillians*: This is Vaughan’s most celebrated work. Translated, it means “sparks from the flint”. *Silex Scintillians* is a two volume work that contains the best known religious lyrics by Vaughan. This collection marks Vaughan’s “conversion” from secular poetry to religious poetry. It bears the influence of Vaughan’s Welsh origins and that of George Herbert, who, as a matter of fact, was also Welsh. In *Silex Scintillians*, Vaughan makes use of Biblical and scriptural symbols. This collection includes poems like “The Retreat”, “The Nativity” “The Morning Watch”, and “The Dawning”.

- *The Mount of Olives*: This is a prose piece that contains many devotional prayers.
- *Thalia Rediviva*: This work is Vaughan's last collection of poems. It is subtitled *The Pass-Times and Diversions of a Countrey-Muse*. It contains many pastorals and translations

1.6. SUMMING UP

- Metaphysical Poetry is a term used to refer to a specific kind of poetry that was written by a loose group of poets in 17th Century England.
- The label “Metaphysical poetry” was first used by Samuel Johnson.
- This genre of poetry is characterised by the use of Metaphysical conceits and wit, use of uncommon metaphors and images, and use of colloquial language.
- Love, religion, and spirituality are some of the common themes of Metaphysical poetry.
- Metaphysical poetry is usually written in a very concise and precise manner, in the form of a very well argued syllogism.
- Metaphysical poetry was looked down upon in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- In the 19th century, there was a renewed interest in Metaphysical poetry after T.S. Eliot lauded the genre in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921).
- Many contemporary critics prefer the use of the term “baroque poets”/ “baroque poetry” instead of “metaphysical poets/ metaphysical poetry” because they are of the opinion that the latter is not a very inclusive term.
- The metaphysical poets are a loose group, and different scholars and critics include different poets under the label.
- The best known Metaphysical Poets include John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan.

1.7. GLOSSARY

- **Baroque**: The word “baroque” derived from the word “barocco” which means “irregular pearl/stone”. It is a specific style of expression of art and architecture that developed in Europe in the early 17th Century. It is characterized by the use of complex forms and

intricate ornamentation. Baroque style was supported by the Catholic Church.

In the context of poetry, baroque poetry is characterized by the use of exalted language, extended metaphor and dramatic intensity. Religion and Mysticism are predominant themes in Baroque poetry. The baroque poets were preoccupied with philosophizing the mystical and spiritual aspects of everyday life. They also wrote satires on their contemporary socio-political circumstances.

- **Cavalier Poets:** The term refers to a group of English poets of the 17th Century who were Royalists and supported King Charles-I and Charles-II during the English Civil Wars. They were mostly members of the aristocracy who were lavish and elegant not only in their lifestyle and conduct, but also in their lyrics. They wrote liberal poems about love, sensual pleasures, seizing the day, and making merry. The attitude of their poetry reflected the attitude of the royal courts of the pre-Commonwealth era. Many of the Cavalier poets were also soldiers and members of the clergy. Famous Cavalier poets include Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Sir. John Suckling, and Thomas Carew.

- **Disassociation/ Unification of Sensibility:** These are critical concepts that were put forward by T.S. Eliot in his essay “Metaphysical Poets” (1921). In this essay, he said that the metaphysical poets wrote poetry in which there was a unification of sensibility. But the poetry that came after the metaphysicals carried a dissociation of sensibility. “in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in from which we have never recovered.”

Unification of sensibility is the “fusion of thoughts and feelings”. In other words, it is the blending of elevated thoughts with intense emotions. The Elizabethan poets and the early Jacobean poets and dramatists, along with the Metaphysical poets, according to Eliot, wrote poetry that contained unification of sensibility. Their works accommodated not only exalted thoughts and philosophies, but also deeply emotional experiences. In particular, William Shakespeare and John Donne in particular, were in possession of unified sensibility. This means that they could express their state of mind and emotions with precision.

According to Eliot, after the era of the metaphysical, the later poets began to lose unification of sensibility. Instead, their works reflected a dissociation of sensibility. That is, there was a fracture or

disparity between the thoughts conceptualized and the poetic expression of it. Eliot was specifically critical of Browning and Tennyson, and disfavoured the artificiality of their language. The poets with dissociated sensibility are those who are either thinkers or are poets, but not. They often fail to synchronise between their thoughts and poetic expressions.

- **Metaphysical conceit:** The use of metaphysical conceit is the trademark of the metaphysical conceit of the 17th century. Metaphysical conceit is a complex literary device that makes use of extended metaphors. Strange, uncommon and seemingly unrelated objects are usually brought together in comparison to give exotic expressions to lofty thoughts and feelings. The use of conceit is a reflection of intellect and wit. Metaphysical conceits often appear unnatural and exaggerated at the first glance.
- **Shape Poem:** A kind of poem whose words are written out in such a shape that it resembles the subject it is talking about. It is also called structure poem.
- **Slant Rhyme:** It is also called “half rhyme” or “imperfect rhyme”. It refers to a kind of rhyme where the rhyming words have similar, but not exactly identical sounds.
- **Sons of Ben:** A term applied to a loose group of poets and dramatists of the early 17th century England who were influenced by and followed Ben Jonson. Thomas Nabbes, Richard Brome, Thomas Killigrew, Sir William Davenant, and Thomas Randolph are a few that are regarded as Sons of Ben. Some of the Cavalier poets like Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, and Sir John Suckling also acknowledged the influence of Jonson, and self-labelled themselves as Sons of Ben. “Tribe of Ben” is an alternative term that is used to refer to this group. Some believed that this group gathered in different taverns of London to hold meetings amongst themselves. They drew from the styles and philosophies of Ben Jonson, and hence had a classicalist bent to their works. They wrote witty satires and epigrammatic works.

1.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

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Unit 2

John Donne: “The Canonization”, “The Ecstasy”, “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”, “Batter My Heart, Three-Person’d God”

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3. Introduction to Metaphysical Poetry

2.4 John Donne: The Poet

4.4.1 His Life

4.4.2 His Works

2.5. Explanation of Poems

2.5.1 “The Canonization”

2.5.2 “The Ecstasy”

2.5.3 “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”

2.5.4 “Batter My Heart, Three- Person’d God”

2.6 Summing up

2.7 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives

The Unit is an attempt to analyse the poems of the Metaphysical poet, John Donne. After going through the unit you will be able to-

- *define* the term metaphysical poetry
- *discuss* the life and works of the poet John Donne
- *explain* the text of the prescribed poems

appreciate the prescribed poems of John Donne

2.2 Introduction

In the previous unit, we had discussed the sonnets of William Shakespeare also widely known as the Bard of Avon. In the present unit, we shall take up one of the most prominent 17th century metaphysical poets known as John Donne. As evident in the title of this unit itself, some of the representative works of the poet titled “The Canonization”, “The Ecstasy”, “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners” and “Batter My Heart, Three Personed God” have been prescribed for your study. Apart from being highly regarded as the most prominent metaphysical poet, Donne is also known as one of the greatest love poets of all time.

A thorough study of the unit shall familiarise you to the life and works of the poet while also providing explanation of the four prescribed poems. Therefore, we shall proceed with a systematic and a step-by-step approach in discussing the poet, the representative poems as well as the time and context in which these were written so that we may fully appreciate the same.

2.3. Introduction to Metaphysical Poetry

Let us quickly analyse the term ‘metaphysical’ which is derived from the words ‘meta’ meaning ‘after’ and ‘physical’ referring to the physical world. Thus, it refers to exploring the

Metaphysical poetry is characterised by elements of sharp wit and intellectual thought in terms of its characteristics that has a charm of its own. The concepts and ideas reflected in metaphysical poetry provides a reader much food-for-thought as it usually leaving him or her thinking seriously on various aspects. Some of the distinct features of metaphysical poetry are the use of wit and humour; use of conceits and paradoxes; ratiocination (logical reasoning) mixed together with emotions; abrupt openings and colloquial style. While poetical conceits reflect complex intellectual ideas, poetical paradoxes are contradictory or opposing statements that are common in metaphysical poetry.

For the ease of general reference, practitioners of metaphysical poetry are referred to as metaphysical poets. When these poets wrote in their time, they had no way of knowing that ‘they’ or ‘their poetry’ would be identified as ‘metaphysical poets’ or ‘poetry’. It was the literary critic, biographer and writer, Samuel Johnson who had first coined the term ‘metaphysical poetry’ which he had mentioned in his seminal work entitled *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. You will do well to know that apart from its leading practitioner John Donne, some of the other important metaphysical poets who wrote during this period are namely, Andrew Marvell, John Cleveland, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley, George Herbert and Richard Crashaw.

Stop to Consider

You may have read or come across the term ‘metaphysical speculation’. Have you ever wondered what does it mean? To help you gain an idea regarding the same, you would be interested to know that it has to do with one’s philosophical plane of thought where a person deeply reflects or examines the nature of reality and workings of the universe. Perhaps, such speculations or search for definite answers will always remain endless but the human mind is ever inquisitive or curious to explore the uncertain or the unknown. At some point in your life, you must have surely found yourself lost in such patterns of philosophical thought.

Check Your Progress

Q1. What is the derived meaning of the term ‘metaphysical’?

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Q2. Who had first coined the term ‘metaphysical poetry’?

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Q3. Mention the names of some important practitioners of metaphysical poetry.

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2.4 John Donne: The Poet

Before we explore the prescribed poems of John Donne, let us gain an insight into the life and works of the poet in the following subsections so that we may gain an idea of the time and context in which he lived and wrote.

2.4.1 His Life

John Donne (22 January 1572 – 31 March 1631) was born in a Roman Catholic family at a time when members of the denomination or faith were expected to conform or follow the practices of the newly established Church of England instead of their own. You can imagine the difficulty of being in such a situation where individuals or families had to be cautious and live in the fear of being persecuted owing to their faith. His father who worked as a merchant had passed away in 1576 when Donne was barely five years old. Donne was the third among his six siblings and his mother Elizabeth Heywood who worked as warden of the Ironmongers Company later married and settled down with a prosperous widower named John Syminges.

In terms of his early education, Donne was mostly home-schooled or tutored at home. Then, he went on to pursue his studies at Hart Hall, Oxford, followed by his higher studies at the University of Cambridge which he was unfortunately unable to complete. He could not obtain his degree from the University on the grounds of his faith and his refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy in order to graduate. The Oath of Supremacy was solely based on the necessity of affirming one's faith in the power, authority and supremacy of the ruling monarch. Thus, for a brief period, he travelled to Spain and Italy before he returned home to London.

Donne found a new opportunity to study at the Thavies Inn Legal School in London and later went on to work at the Inns of Court in the year 1592. His independent life in London saw him engaging himself in new social circles, interacting with elite women, widening his reading and also practicing his writings. Although, Donne worked as a private secretary to a prominent person in England known as Sir Thomas Egerton, his career prospects had suffered after he had secretly married his employer's niece named Anne More. Owing to their secret marriage, Donne's official career had suffered as his future prospects of such privilege or official employment was sealed. The couple had to rely on financial help from Anne More's cousin and the generous help of patrons. To add to it, their family kept growing with twelve children of which five had sadly passed away. However, while looking out for new work opportunities, Donne continued working on his writings and travelled to northwest Europe with his patron Sir Robert Drury. Later, Sir Drury had also provided the couple with a home at the Drury estate where Donne and his wife lived for a while.

Then came another turning point in his life, where Donne had finally made up his mind to take the Holy Orders and priesthood in the Church of England in the year 1615. He was made a royal chaplain and with the orders of King James I, he was conferred the degree of doctor of divinity by Cambridge. Donne also took up his religious duties as the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and he carried them out to the best of his abilities. However, Donne suffered a major setback in life when he lost his dear wife in the year 1617 after she had given birth to a stillborn child.

Donne took a vow that he would never marry again and dedicated the rest of his life in the service of the Church as a leading preacher in England. During this period, he travelled on diplomatic mission to Germany with Viscount Doncaster while continuing his preaching, writing and publishing his works. At the final stages of his life, he suffered from stomach cancer and breathed his last in March 1631. Donne was laid to rest at the St. Paul's Cathedral.

Check Your Progress

Q4. What was the major problem that many like Donne had to face owing to their faith?

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Q5. Where did John Donne pursue his higher studies? Why was he unable to obtain his degree from the University of Cambridge?
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Q6. Why did Donne's career prospects suffer in his younger days?
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Q7. What was the major turning point in the life of John Donne?
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2.4.2 His Works

During his time, John Donne did not prefer print publication like most of his contemporaries. Despite the advantages of the 'printing press' that could reach out to the larger masses, Donne considered publication of (handwritten) 'manuscript' i.e., original drafts or copies for select readership. However, it was only due to his friends, patrons and well-wishers that he had given his consent to print just a few of his works. In fact, you will be surprised to note that he was also uncomfortable with the thought of being considered a professional writer and did not mind publishing his works anonymously i.e., without mentioning his own name.

Some of the important works by John Donne in the first phase of his writing journey which are namely, *Biathanos* (1608), *Pseudo Martyr* (1610), *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), *The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World* (1611) and *The Second Anniversary: Of Progress of the Soul* (1612). Also, in the second phase of his writings following his turn to a religious life were namely, *Devotions upon*

Emergent Occasions (1624), *Poems* (1633), *Juvenilia: or Certain Paradoxes and Problems* (1633), *LXXX Sermons* (1640), *Fifty Sermons* (1649), *Essays in Divinity* (1651), *Letters to Several Persons of Honour* (1651) and *XXVI Sermons* (1661).

Throughout his journey as a poet, Donne explored different strains of poetry such as religious or spiritual verses as well as the more secular kind of writings that represented worldly affairs including his love poetry. In this regard, it may be mentioned that although Donne suffered financial setbacks for a decade following his secret marriage with Anne More, yet several poems that were written during this period does reflect a sense of happiness and fulfilment in love. In this regard Achsah Guibbory mentions in his chapter in *English Poetry: Donne to Marvel* thus, “Love and salvation are not only the two great subjects of his poetry; they were also preoccupations that gave dramatic shape to his life” (125). You may also note that Donne wrote several holy sonnets and hymns or religious lyrics which we shall further discuss in the next unit.

The intellectual aspects of his writing simply sets his literary works apart from many of his contemporary poets and writers. In his time, young writers wrote and circulated their works within closed circles that often brought them new opportunities of employment i.e., in the service of influential people. However, Donne himself was aware of the nature of his writings that had every possibility of stirring unwanted controversy for he had deviated from the social and moral temperament of his age in his writings. Instead of conforming to literary traditions of the time, Donne poured his intellectual thoughts into his writing ranging from social or religious satires to political questioning, references to sexuality or moral propriety to a certain sense of dissent. However, he knew very well that publication of such writings without much thought or care would not be well received by his readers. Moreover, he was much conscious of his social privilege and position as a gentleman which he had a desire to maintain.

Donne also wrote several elegies or in simple words poems to mourn death, several of which were written in memory of his patrons and acquaintances. He also wrote letters to his friends and well-wishers that reflected his thoughts, intellectual stirrings, opinions and ideas on various aspects. In fact, Donne experimented with a new form of verse epistles which were poems written in the form of letters and

addressed to some of his friends namely Rowland Woodward, Thomas Woodward, Christopher Brooke and Henry Wotton among a few others. Arthur F. Marotti in his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne* (2006) mentions, “We find some of Donne’s most reflective and philosophical pieces of writing not only in his prose letters, but also in his verse epistles” (42).

Check Your Progress

Q8. Did John Donne prefer printed publication? Mention his choice or preference.

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Q9. Name some of the early works of John Donne.

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Q10. Name the works of Donne following his turn to a religious life.

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2.5. Explanation of Poems

After a thorough study of the concept of metaphysical poetry, the life and literary works of John Donne, let us now discuss the prescribed poems. A detailed reading of the ‘text’ of the poems will enhance your idea, interpretation, analysis, opinion and appreciation of the same. The following subsections in which the explanations of the poems are provided shall supplement and support your own reading and reference. It is important to note that the learner is free to interpret the poems in his/her own way as long as he/she can provide reasonable justification for his/her original interpretation. Let us then approach the poems with a new sense of curiosity regarding its content, ideas and reflections.

2.5.1 “The Canonization”

“The Canonization” was published in the year 1633 and is one of the widely anthologised poems of John Donne. To begin with, the term ‘canonization’ refers to the practice of the Roman Catholic Church whereby a saint is ‘canonized’ following an official declaration of sainthood by the Papal authority or the Pope. Thus, the name of a holy saint enters into the official ‘canon’ or list of highly regarded saints following the demise of a saint.

If you read the text of the poem, you will find that the reference to ‘canonization’ is to indirectly represent or highlight the natural desire of lovers to be remembered forever, to immortalise their love and thereby to simply imagine their names in the canons of time. Thus, it tries to bring out the spiritual essence of love and the possibility of immortalising one’s love through creative verses or expression. The poem opens with the line “For God’s sake hold your tongue, and let me love” which indicates that the speaker wishes to be left alone.

In expressing his displeasure, he makes it clear that the lovers desire a little space or privacy for themselves. He does not wish to be bothered by worldly affairs and rather wishes to shut out the world from intruding his personal space. Here, he dismisses the person who disturbs his peace and states that there are plenty of things for others to be bothered about. They would rather be comfortable together in their “pretty room” than step out of their private world. They feel like their entire world is shrunken and reflected in their eyes that meet. Their eyes and eyebeams or the light in their eyes reflect each other’s world and thereby becoming uniting to form one world that is filled with so much fulfilment, trust and contentment.

The speaker then declares that their mutual love and respect for each other is sincere and spontaneous as well as free from any form of superficiality. While the world is preoccupied with its own day-to-day activities, the lovers are lost in their cocoon of love. In fact, the poet notes that their souls are intertwined and that their love goes beyond physical intimacy as indicated in the following lines:

“By us; we two being one, are it.

So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.

We die and rise the same, and prove

Mysterious by this love”

(*John Donne’s Poetry* pg. 78)

It is by virtue of their true love for each other that they wish to be immortal, honoured and revered for generations to come. If history fails to “chronicle” or record, to testify their extraordinary love, then poetry would prove its worth and narrate their legacy long after they depart from this world. To them their love stems from a deep sense of dedication, sincerity and spirituality that deserves validation and high regard.

For the same reason, they are inspired by the practice of religious canonization of saints and express their desire to be similarly canonized by the world for their everlasting love. Their legendary lives or story of love would be an inspiration for young lovers who seek the true essence of love that is fulfilling, soulful and enriching. The poem contains a total of five stanzas. There are elements of paradox, conceits and striking images that projects the immediacy of the lover’s thought and expression. We shall highlight some of these aspects in the next unit while discussing aspects of style and language employed in each of the poems discussed in the unit.

Stop To Consider

Do you know that Mother Teresa was ‘canonized’ in 2016 and that she is referred to as St. Teresa of Calcutta? Mother Teresa who is also a recipient of Nobel Prize for Peace (1979) had dedicated her entire life in the service of the poor and the downtrodden in India. You could try and read more about her life and extraordinary service to humanity which is both inspiring and truly worth knowing.

Check Your Progress

Q11. What is the meaning of the term ‘canonization’? How is a saint canonized?

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Q12. What do the two lover’s wish in terms of immortalizing their true love?
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2.5.2 “The Ecstasy”

The title of this metaphysical poem is sometimes spelled as “The Extasie”. The term ‘ecstasy’ is derived from the Greek word ‘ekstasis’ and refers to a person’s extraordinary or elevating feeling and experience. The poem contains a total of nineteen ‘quatrains’ i.e., four lines in each stanza. It is certainly worth a complete reading on your part.

You may note that the opening lines of the poem presents a couple seated beside the bank of a river with blooming violets, simply soaking in the beauty of the surroundings and peaceful moment of being together. It is a picturesque place and an ideal setting where the lovers spend time with each other and thus it reads:

“Where, like a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swell’d up to rest
The violet’s reclining head
Sat we two, one another’s best”

(Donne’s Poetry pg. 100)

The speaker shares his thought that the only intimacy that they had shared so far was regarding their “firmly cemented” hands and their glancing into each other’s eyes. They spent their entire day comfortable in each other’s silence, while their souls “negotiated” without them uttering a word to each other. Such was the intensity of their love and understanding.

The speaker compares their souls to two separate armies that did not necessarily require proving their worth or winning a victory

over the other. The speaker then goes on to say that if a third person would be present in that moment he or she would witness what true love was and how rich it was in its purity. Although, such a person would have no way of knowing of the invisible exchange between the two souls, at least he or she would be transformed into a pure soul in their presence. Such was the aura that surrounded the souls of the lovers and their inspiring love. The speaker thus tries to capture the soulful, radiating, transforming and magnetic quality of love in his poetical expressions.

However, the poet also addresses the inherent natural desires of two lovers to experience physical intimacy. Thus on one hand, the speaker glorifies the union of pure souls, which is 'platonic' in terms of its thought and on the other hand, he admits the desire to consummate their soulful love through physical union as well. Therefore, while Donne agrees with Plato's concept of spiritual or soulful love, he also seems to struggle with the thought that 'soul' and the 'body' are two separate entities after all which find their final meeting ground in physical intimacy. This is evident in the following lines:

“But oh. Alas, so long, so far,
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They're ours, though they're not we; we are
Th'intelligences, they the sphere.”

(Donne's Poetry pg. 101)

The speaker notes that just like a violet transplanted into new soil would still grow beautiful and healthy, similarly when their united soul conceive a newborn, their love would grow all the more. It would also relieve any sense of loneliness and complete their sense of being in this world. Further, he states that there is nothing to be ashamed or to in admitting the importance of our bodily or physical desires. The body is likened to alloys which can be fused to form stronger and durable metals. Similarly, when the body fuses with the soul, it creates something ecstatic or extraordinary. Towards the tail end of the poem, it mentions that just like a great prince would find himself completely 'entrapped' in a prison, similarly the soul would find itself 'confined'

without the freedom of physical union as highlighted in the following lines:

“So must pure lovers; souls descend
T’affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great prince in prison lies”

(*Donne’s Poetry* pg. 102)

Thus, the poem has elements of both the spiritual and the sensuous, the soulful and the physical. If any lover like them would hear of this, he would also do well to note that their soulful love would remain unchanged despite their physical intimacy or even long after they depart from this world.

Check Your Progress

Q 13. What does the opening lines of the poem present?

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Q 14. Mention the two different aspects of love that the speaker mentions towards the end of the poem.

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Self-Asking Questions

Do you think that the two love poems “The Canonization” and “The Ecstasy” are philosophical, spiritual and even practical in terms of their reflections on love? In addition, you could ask yourself on what are the various aspects in which these two love poems are different from the usual romantic quality that we attribute to love poems.

As you may realize by now, “The Canonization” and “The Ecstasy” may also be considered Donne’s kind of love poetry. Now, the two poems or rather sonnets that follow are religious poems also referred to as Divine Poems or Holy Sonnets. Ideally, the ‘sonnet’ or a little poetical song is a structured poem of fourteen lines only. Poets like the Italian classical master, Petrarch and the English poet, William Shakespeare primarily practiced and popularised the sonnet form. Also as already mentioned, you may note that the fourteen lined poem is divided into first eight lines (octave) followed by a response in the next six lines (sestet) which is known as a Petrarchan styled sonnet.

Sir Thomas Wyatt had first brought the practice of Petrarchan sonnets to England. Thus, when Shakespeare adopted the sonnet form, he divided the fourteen lined poem into three quatrains or three stanzas of four lines each (3x4=12 lines) followed by a couplet (two more lines in response). This alteration within the prescribed structure of fourteen lines came to be referred to as the ‘Shakespearean sonnet’. Thus, the sonnet form gained new variations in the hands of other English poets that followed like John Milton and Edmund Spenser. John Donne combined elements of both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet with a more divine or religious approach. Let us then explore more about the two Holy Sonnets in the following subsections.

2.5.3 “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”

Among Donne’s nineteen Holy Sonnets, “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners” is numbered Holy Sonnet 4 and is rather written in a Petrarchan style. If we look at the opening lines of the poem, we are directed towards the Christian belief of the day of Judgement and Resurrection. The day of Judgement is supposedly to be the predestined day when all believers shall be accountable to God and His judgement. On this day, God shall hold all believers accountable.

Here, at the beginning of the poem we find the image of ‘angels’ who are called upon by the poet to blow their trumpets in order to be heard in every nook and corner of this earth. As the earth is spherical or rather round in shape, there is no corner as such but he

symbolically refers to the four corners or directions i.e., north, east, west, south. The angels are called upon to rise up and also awaken the countless souls who had departed from their physical forms or existence following their demise. The trumpet call would enable the souls to return to the physical world and to search for their scattered, lifeless bodies as reflected in the following lines:

“At the round earth’s imagin’d corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death you numberless infinities
Of souls and to your scatter’d bodies go;”

(Donne’s Poetry, pg. 137)

Ultimately, the poet as a mortal being states that none shall be spared from God’s final Judgement. Also, the speaker makes a Biblical reference (as mentioned in the Old Testament) to the myth of the Great Flood that had swept away all sinners and living beings on earth according to God’s will. Also, in the future events that shall be revealed on the final Judgement day, ‘fire’ shall also reduce life and all living things from the face of this earth. This final event is also referred to as the ‘Reckoning Day of Judgement’ (commonly referred as ‘doomsday’) as revealed at the end of the Bible.

You may note that the lines point to how the natural elements are determined and are all under the control of Almighty God. Many have already perished down the ages in wars, droughts, calamities, sufferings, diseases, degeneration, tortures, helpless circumstances and owing to verdicts of law as well. However, there is only the enlightened and ‘chosen few’ who by virtue of their service and dedication to God as well as the appropriate accountability of their deeds shall be pardoned from God’s punishment. The difference is that they shall witness the coming of God’s son with their own eyes unlike the rest of the world as reflected in the following lines:

“All whom the Flood did, and fire shall o’erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death’s woe.”

(Donne's Poetry, pg. 138)

Thus, the learner may note that Christians uphold the belief of Resurrection, which means that those who die shall be resurrected or brought to life by God's grace and their sins shall be forgiven when they finally meet their creator. Thus, the speaker makes a clear distinction between the fate of those who die for different reasons (as previously mentioned) and the fate of the enlightened who die but get to behold God in their eyes. Therefore, the latter receives the blessing of seeing God with his or her own eyes and thereby uniting with God's grace.

“But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space;
For if above all these my sins abound,
‘Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace”

(Donne's Poetry, pg. 138)

The speaker then reflects on his own thoughts and requests God to let the dead remain in their sleep for a while. He confesses the sins that he has committed in his own life, admitting that he is like most other human beings who are inclined towards sin or other wrongdoing which is forbidden. Also, he realises that perhaps it is too late in life (especially when nearing Judgement Day) to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness as he writes:

When we are there: Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
As if thou had'st sealed my pardon with thy blood.

(Donne's Poetry, pg. 138)

The closing lines of the sonnet reflects the speaker's thoughts as he considers the benevolence and generosity of God too. This is why he prays to God so that he may walk in the right path with repentance through the teachings of God. The “lowly ground” refers to earth where he wishes to atone for his sins instead of waiting until his dying day and his resurrection. Therefore, he wishes to reflect on the present and to live it well as an enlightened being with God's grace. Thus, he hopes in his heart that God would forgive and absolve him of

all his sins imagining God writing a document granting His pardon sealed with God’s own blood.

Check Your Progress

Q 15. What is a sonnet?

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Q 16. Who had brought the practice of Petrarchan sonnets to England?

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Q 17. Briefly explain the Christian belief of Resurrection in a few words.

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Q 18. What does the speaker confess to God and realise in terms of his deeds?

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2.5.4 “Batter My Heart, Three- Person’d God”

The following sonnet titled “Batter My Heart, Three- Person’d God” is numbered Holy Sonnet 10. If, you read the text of the poem, you will find that the sonnet is divided into octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines). The opening lines of the poem reflects the intensity of the speaker’s desire where he wishes his heart to be symbolically battered meaning beaten or pounded with God’s will. It again means that he wishes to be enlightened by God’s grace, to both learn and unlearn the ways of this world. This he desires with utmost sincerity even if it means learning everything the hard way.

You may know that the Christians believe in the Holy Trinity i.e., God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the speaker refers to the “three-person’d God” in the poem. Further, he request the divine powers to make him undergo the toughest tests so that he may highly improve himself, be righteous and enlightened. This it refers to his complete transformation.

As precious metals are forcibly broken, burnt and beaten in order for it to turn malleable and gain a desired shape, similarly the speaker urges God to mould and transform him all over again. Thus, it expresses the speaker’s dissatisfaction with his ‘present self’ and his ‘inherent weaknesses’ which he wishes to change seeking God’s firm discipline. He compares himself to a ‘usurped’ town or a town taken over by evil forces which needs to be undone. Therefore, the emphasis is on rectifying himself, cleansing his soul and turning towards God’s blessings as reflected in the following lines:

“Batter my heart, three-person’d God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me; and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I like an usurp’d town due t’another due,”

(Donne’s Poetry, pg. 140)

In the next few lines, the speaker notes that he has decided to labour or work hard on himself but the journey is also much difficult. Just as a Viceroy has official responsibilities towards the welfare of the people or territory, similarly God’s gift of ‘reason’ is to ensure an individual’s welfare as also indicated in the following lines:

“Labor t’admit you, but oh, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv’d and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain:”

(Donne’s Poetry, pg. 140)

However, moments of weakness and his misdeeds happens to capture and overthrow his gift of reasoning owing to which he is often

defeated in his mind. Therefore, the speaker wishes to be greatly empowered for the love of God that he holds in his heart. His love for God is so true that he dedicates his entire life in God's service and to be simply worthy of His blessings. It is as though his 'commitment to God' could be compared to 'one's commitment towards marriage'. Thus, he wishes to be punished and to be divorced from 'God's grace' if necessary, so that he can pursue and work hard to receive heavenly blessings all over again. Also, his own distractions and wavering from the path of righteousness makes it seem as though he were married to God's enemy. Therefore, he takes into account his own promised fight against God's enemy, i.e., all kinds of sin and vices.

He wishes to surrender himself to the grace and mercy of God. The speaker pleads for God's intervention so that he may be "imprisoned" or taken captive by God's power. For he feels that without the same he may be constantly overpowered by sinful distractions. Unless God "enthralls" or takes him to new heights of enlightenment and self-contentment, he could never be 'free' or 'pure' in the true sense of the word. The only way he could turn 'chaste' or pure in thought, word or deeds is through God's enforcement of discipline and obedience. The closing lines thus reflect the thoughts of the speaker who wishes to be a transformed individual, a true believer and a better version of himself in the eyes of God, declaring thus:

"Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
"But am bethroth'd unto your enemy:
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste except you ravish me."

(Donne's Poetry, pg. 140)

Check Your Progress

Q 19. Why does the speaker refer to "three-person'd God?"

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Q 20. What is it that the speaker takes into account with regard to his own promises to God?

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Self-Asking Questions

Do you agree that religious philosophy or philosophy in general as well as ethics is important for a more fulfilled and enriching life? You could reflect on the same to see how the poet in these Holy Sonnets poses for such thoughtful moments and reflections.

2.6 Summing up

After having gone through the unit, the learner will be familiar with the life and works of the poet. Also through the discussions of the prescribed poems, you will be able to provide detailed explanations of the poems and provide your own critical appreciation of the same. You will also gain a clear idea on the definition of the term and characteristics of metaphysical poetry as well as some of the important metaphysical poets. There is much scope to reflect on the various aspects of the unit in the form of questions and reflections so that you have a thorough idea of the unit.

2.7 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 3

John Donne: “The Canonization”, “The Ecstasy”, “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”, “Batter My Heart, Three-Person’d God”

Supplementary Unit

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Overview of Donne’s Work
- 3.4 Critical Reception as a Poet
- 3.5 Donne’s Poetical Style
 - 5.5.1 Poetical Style of the Prescribed Poem
- 3.6 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 Reference and Suggested reading

3.1 Objectives

The Unit is an attempt to discuss various aspects of the poems by John Donne. After going through the unit you will be able to-

- *provide* a broad overview of the works written by John Donne
- *discuss* the critical reception of Donne’s work
- *explain* the poetic style and language employed by Donne in the prescribed poems
- *gain* a holistic idea on the literary contributions and various aspects of John Donne’s writings

3.2 Introduction

In the previous unit, we gained a familiarity with the life and literary contributions of the English Metaphysical poet John Donne who lived and wrote in the 17th century. The unit had also provided

you an idea on the term ‘metaphysical poetry’ while also mentioning some of its distinct features and important practitioners. Also, the prescribed poems in the course were taken up for discussion in which we gained an insight into the basic theme and core content of these interesting poems. Besides, we had also received an idea on the sonnet form while discussing the Holy Sonnets or divine poems of John Donne.

The present unit shall provide the learner a broad overview of the works of John Donne and highlight some of his other important poetical works. We shall take up further discussion on how John Donne was received as a poet in his contemporary time and beyond. In addition, we shall also look at the poetic style of John Donne as reflected in the prescribed poems. By the end of the unit, the learner will thus be able to appreciate the literary credibility and contributions of the poet.

3.3 Overview of Donne’s Work

By now, the learner is familiar with the poet John Donne and his representative poems. However, it is also important to gain a broad overview of his literary contributions particularly his varied poetical works. You must ask yourself how to approach the poet John Donne along with his poetical works in a more comprehensive way. In this subsection, we shall try to elaborate and address the same. While discussing the works of the poet we had already learnt that John Donne had a wide range of literary contributions to his credit. To gain a broad overview on some of the various works by Donne, we shall do well to highlight some of the various types of writings that he had undertaken during his literary journey.

To start with, you will find it interesting to note that Donne wrote a couple of satires that included various observations, ideas and opinions of the poet. In simple words, satire often tends to take a dig at the society, at certain individuals or figures, varied circumstances etc. This often redirects attention of readers towards certain distinct flaws and shortcomings, problems and realities. Donne’s satires read like poetical verses owing to its tight structure in which these were written. While it included his keen observations, the satirical perspectives were presented with a sense of irony and sharp wit.

Further, Donne also wrote around 43 verse letters most of which were addressed to his close friends and acquaintances. Some of them were his dear friends like Sir Henry Wotton from his Oxford

days as well as Christopher Brooke and Rowland Woodward from his days at the Lincoln's Inn. A few of the verse letters were also addressed to the Countess of Bedford, named Lucy Harrington Russell (also his patron for around eight years) and Everard Guilpin, a poet and satirist. Besides these works, Donne also wrote several elegies, sonnets, songs, hymns (songs of worship) and divine poems that include the 'Holy Sonnets' as well. In the course of your study, you must approach these works with a fair idea of the life and times in which the poet wrote. This is precisely because it forms the basic context as well as background in question. In addition, the poems written by Donne are relatively difficult to grasp without proper annotations and references and owing to this you must refer to good text sources if possible.

Therefore, the learner would do well to read and reread both the units on John Donne thoroughly with a step-by-step approach, moving from one subsection to the other in order to gain a comprehensive idea of the poet and his poetry with a sense of appreciation. Further, you must try to explore some of these various poetical works by John Donne on your own apart from studying the prescribed poems in details. This will enable you to gain an idea on the various preoccupations of the poet, his intellectual bent of mind, stream of ideas and distinctive style of writing.

To start with, you could refer to other significant poems such as: "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", "The Good Morrow", "Go Catch a Falling Star", "Sweetest Love, I Do Not Go", "The Sun Rising", "The Triple Fool", "Lovers' Infiniteness", "Love's Growth", "Love's Exchange", "The Flea", "The Ecstasy", "Farewell to Love", "Self-Love" and "Image of Her Whom I Love" among others. As evident in the title of most of these poems, several of these reflect the themes of passionate love and ecstasy, the communion of mind and the soul as well as the significant value of the present moment and time beyond. You could also read some of the other Holy Sonnets by Donne such as "Death, Be Not Proud", "What if This Present", "Wilt Thou Love God", "I am a Little World", "Since She Whom I Loved", "Show Me, Dear Christ" or "A Hymn to God the Father" to mention a few.

Check Your Progress

Q1. Give a simple meaning of the term satire.

Q2. How many verse letters did John Donne write and to whom were they generally addressed?

Q3. Mention the names of the friends and acquaintances to whom Donne wrote his verse letters.

Q4. What are the various type of writings by John Donne?

Q5. Name some of the significant poems by John Donne apart from the ones prescribed in your course.

Q6. Mention some of the themes reflected in the poetry of John Donne.

Q7. Name some of the Holy Sonnets by John Donne apart from the ones prescribed in your course.

3.4 Critical Reception as a Poet

During his long literary journey, John Donne particularly ensured that most of his works were circulated in the form of manuscripts (as already mentioned in the previous unit). However, it is important to note that much early in his writing career, Donne had a clear idea of the general interests, preferences as well as temperament (or in other words general ‘outlook’) of the general readership of his time. Perhaps, owing to this reason he chose not to print most of his works for it had every possibility of leading towards controversy and an onslaught of harsh criticism. In other words, Donne could easily perceive the kind of reception his works would have received given the fact that most of his writings had objectionable content for his time. However, today it is perhaps his progressive thoughts or reflections combined with his distinct style of writing that adds to his credibility or worth as a poet.

Donne was conscious of being widely known as a professional writer. However, he was much keen to share his works within his immediate circle and to receive their feedback. In his heydays, Donne had gathered quite a circle of friends and acquaintances right from his Oxford days to his employment with Egerton. Also, some of the contemporary poets were his known acquaintances who had access to his poetical output. However, when his prospects suffered following Donne’s secret marriage, he had to build a new circle of noble patrons in order to sustain himself. Following this phase, he had joined the Church and there was no looking back. From then on, he continued to produce some of his best poetical works to the last days of his life. In fact, in an elegy dedicated to John Donne, the English poet Thomas Carew expressed his appreciation of the poet thus,

“Here lies a king that rul’d, as he thought fit,
The universal monarchy of wit;
Here lie two flamens, and both those, the best:
Apollo’s first, at last, the true God’s priest”

(John Donne’s Poetry, pg. 182)

While many poets and writers held Donne in high regard for his scholarship and literary merit, he was also at the receiving end of harsh criticism with regard to his radical poetry. The English poet and writer, Ben Jonson who wrote in the 16th century and was acquainted with the poet in his younger days could not even come to terms with the practice of metaphysical poetry for it was strikingly different.

In the first half of the 18th century also known as the neoclassical age, poets drew inspiration from the classical masters and adhered to their own set of structured conventions or rules of poetry. The neoclassical poets again could not relate much to the earlier practice of metaphysical poetry. However, Samuel Johnson in his reference of the metaphysical poets considered them witty in the treatment of their subject and nature of poetical reflections. At the same time, Johnson is known to have expressed serious reservations regarding such poetry. He had also extended his harsh (and perhaps, unfair) criticism of Donne and metaphysical poetry. This had further influenced the perception of many towards metaphysical poetry and new crop of poets in its entirety. Johnson had opined that metaphysical poetry seemed to be a forceful combination or compilation of unrelated and varied ideas famously stating thus,

Check Your Progress

Q8. What was one of the striking aspect of John Donne as a young writer with regard to the readers of his time?

Q9. Why was one of the major reason for which John Donne chose not to print most of his works?

Q 10. How is John Donne viewed as a poet today? What are some of the distinct qualities of Donne as a poet?

Q 11. Whom was Donne keen to share his work with despite his

being conscious of a wide readership?

Q 12. What did Donne do when his work prospects had suffered following his secret marriage?

Q 13. Who was Ben Jonson? What was his opinion on Donne's metaphysical poetry?

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t Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusion; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly brought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased” (*John Donne's Poetry*, pg. 194)

You would do well to note that these opinions were owing to the fact that Samuel Johnson belonged to a different age and practiced a different type of poetry altogether.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Have you noticed that the titles the English writers ‘Ben Jonson’ is spelled without ‘h’ and that of ‘Samuel Johnson’ with ‘h’? You would do well to take care of the same while writing or mentioning their names. As mentioned in the unit, Ben Jonson wrote during the later phase of English Renaissance i.e., 16th century and in his younger days had a cordial relation with his friend John Donne. In fact, they both appreciated the difference in their writing styles and each other's works. However, Ben Jonson could not bring himself to appreciate metaphysical poetry as such. On the other hand, Samuel Johnson who wrote in the 18th century is credited to have first formalized the term ‘metaphysical’ with reference to the metaphysical poets of the 17th century.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 14. Mention the name of the age or period by which 18th century is known in the History of English Literature.

Q 15. What did the poets practice in the first half of the 18th century? Could they relate to Metaphysical poetry?

Q 16. What was Samuel Johnson's opinion of the metaphysical poets?

Q 17. State the kind of criticism that Donne's writings had received from Samuel Johnson.

You will be interested to learn that during the Romantic Age, there was a revived interest in metaphysical poetry. Romantic poets like S.T. Coleridge and De Quincey appreciated the radical spirit and literary experimentation of the Metaphysical poets. However, the Romantics experienced a certain sense of disassociation and could not relate much to their poetical practices such as the extensive use of wit and conceits. You may know that the Romantic poets were essentially romantic, spontaneous, emotive and relatively simplistic in their poetical approach.

If you glance at the wider reception of metaphysical poetry through the ages, its philosophical essence and intellectual aspects had long been overlooked or even underestimated. This was until Modern literary critics like F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot redirected much attention to the works of John Donne. In fact, for the first time the literary world took a new approach towards metaphysical poetry. Particularly, the modern poet and critic T.S. Eliot saw through the value of metaphysical poetry and acknowledged its natural expression that captured the range and difficulty of everyday experiences.

In his work titled *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921), Eliot discussed the metaphysical poetry of 17th century and appreciated its defining qualities that were criticised in an earlier time by the likes of Samuel Johnson. Therefore, it will do well for you to know that Donne's fresh ideas, heightened reflections, thematic exploration and literary experimentation continues to draw admiration from his readers even today. John Donne was the leading proponent of metaphysical poetry and he stands tall as one of the remarkable poets of his age and beyond.

Check Your Progress

Q 18. Name any two Romantic poets who appreciated the metaphysical poets.

Q 19. What was the general perception of Romantics towards the metaphysical poets?

Q 20. What did T.S. Eliot opine in his major work on the metaphysical poets?

3.5 Donne's Poetical Style

Donne had dedicated a bunch of his significant poems to his beloved Anne Donne reflecting the magical heights of love and passion to the sublimity of soulful and spiritual reflections as also popularised in poems like “The Sunne Rising”, “The Good Morrow”, “The Flea” and “The Canonization”. In addition, the widely anthologised poem titled “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” was written referring to his wife Anne (who was pregnant at the time) when he had to embark on a journey to Europe. Another significant Holy Sonnet titled “Since She Whom I Loved” was written in memory of his beloved wife after she had passed away. If it were not for these poems and sonnets, Anne Donne would have been long forgotten by the world as there is not much in terms of records on her life.

If you analyse the style and language employed in his poetical works, you will certainly note that through the use of striking imagery and symbolical ideas, Donne created some of the most memorable verses in English poetry. He simply created pictures through words as he had a flair for the language and a sharp intellectual wit to present the same. If you go through the larger body of his poetical works, you will notice that these were concise and compact in terms of both structure and the economy of words. Donne's poetical style was very unconventional given his new experimentation with poetry, which we refer to as metaphysical poetry today. His poetry reflected wide readings and cross references to aspects of philosophy, spirituality, religion, socio-politics, contemporary culture and consciousness to mention a few. Therefore, in terms of style, language and content, Donne did not restrict himself to the conventions of his time and infused a sense of intellectual as well as bold representations of his poetical sensibilities.

Notably, Achsah Guibbory in a chapter on Donne in *John Donne's Poetry* aptly mentions thus, “Love and salvation are not only

the two great subjects of his poetry; they were also preoccupations that gave dramatic shape to his life” (125). Donne had indeed written what he lived, experienced and firmly believed in. Most of his poetical works delved on the themes of love, passion, soul, salvation, faith, divinity, the individual self and the contemporary society. In the following subsection, let us analyse the poetic style and language employed by Donne with particular reference to his prescribed poems.

3.5.1 Poetic Style in the Prescribed Poems

Let us first gain an idea on the poetical style used in the prescribed love poems titled “The Canonization” and “The Ecstasy”. Following this we shall then analyse the poetical style employed in the two prescribed Holy Sonnets entitled, “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”, “Batter My Heart, Three-Person’d God” by John Donne.

To begin with “Canonization” is presented in the form of ‘an argument’ and ‘explanation’ or ‘justification’ of the spiritual as well as passionate indulgence of the two lovers. The speaker in the poem assumes the presence of a stranger and begins with the exclamation “For Godsake”. In addition, a certain sense of exaggeration can be clearly noted in the opening lines where the speaker over-reacts at the sudden intrusion or unexpected presence of a stranger,

“Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haire, or ruin’d fortune flout”

In these lines cited above, the speaker asks the stranger to rather chide or scold anything even his medical problems like palsy (paralysis) and gout (joint pain) or to even count his ‘five strands of grey hair’ (an exaggeration) instead of disturbing him and his beloved. Donne draws varied references in his argument such as social affluence, the monarchy, the warring soldiers, lawyers, historians chronicling history, epidemics, the merchant ships venturing out for new fortunes, the arts, sciences, the mythological and the divine. Thereby, you will note the range of subjects and aspects that he draws into the poem.

The speaker also refers to the changing seasons and draws various comparisons to their love with the use of metaphors of “flye”

(fly), “Tapers” (candles), “Eagle and Dove” as well as the mythical figure ‘Phoenix’. The phoenix refers to a bird that dies and then rises up again from its ashes. Finding in themselves the “Eagle and Dove” is also a symbolical representation of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Further, just as the phoenix is believed to rise from its bits and pieces similarly the two lovers declare that they “dye and rise the same” i.e., they fall deep into and then arise again in the strength of their love as well as physical passion. The moment the speaker states, “we are Tapers too” it implies the use of a metaphor that equates two dissimilar or different things, concepts and ideas. Also, the extreme fanciful comparisons are nothing but conceits which is distinct in metaphysical poetry.

To give you an example, you may note the comparisons of love and sainthood, i.e. the symbolical comparison of two opposite aspects, the secular and the religious. Lines such as “And wee in us finds the Eagle and the Dove”, “We’ll build in sonnets pretty roomes”, “Who did the whole worlds soule extract and drove/ Into the glasses of your eyes” express the grandeur and glory attributed to the lovers and the grand love that they define. You will find several contrasting or rather opposite ideas at work in the poem as also evident in the ‘title’ of the poem referring to ‘canonization’ itself indicating or marking their love for eternity.

If you notice closely there is a repetition of words in the poem for instance, “let me love”, “so will you let me love”, “who’s injured by my love”, “Mysterious by this love”, “Us canoniz’d for Love”, “You whom reverend love” and “A pattern of your love!” What it does is that it somehow emphasises the statements made by the assertive speaker. In other words, it clearly highlights what the speaker desires to assert and establish. Besides the verses, present words from old English spelled slightly different from Modern English for eg. palsie (palsy), minde (mind), saies (says), teares (tears), warres (wars), flye (fly), wee (we), finde (find), dye (die), peece (piece), roomes (rooms), urne (urn), halfe (half), neutrall (neutral), tombes (tomb), hymnes (hymns), soule (soul), towne (towns), patterne (pattern).

If you follow the rhyming words, you will find the pattern of rhyme scheme as evident in each stanza of the poem i.e., *abbaccdd*. Therefore, there is a certain lyrical flow in each stanza and at the same time there are also contrasting or even a wide range of images/ ideas associated with ‘love’ in the poem.

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| Check Your Progress |
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Q 21. To whom did John Donne dedicate most of his love poems? Mention the names of a few love poems addressed to this special person in his life.

Q 24. What is a phoenix?

Q 25. What does finding in themselves the 'Eagle and Dove' symbolically mean?

Q 26. Mention the rhyme scheme of the poem "The Canonization"

"The Ecstasy" is yet another declaration and assertion of profound love. There is a certain sense of musicality in these verses owing to the rhyming pattern i.e., *abab* in each stanza. There is an interesting use of 'simile' (when two different things are 'likened' together to draw a parallel comparison). For an instance, in the opening lines itself you will notice that the two lovers sitting by the river bank are compared thus, "Where, like a pillow on a bed", "A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest", "The violet's reclining head" are the comparisons made by the speaker. Further, he compares themselves to "two equal armies" or "like sepulchral statues" as twin souls who intermingle and fuse into a single entity.

The mood of the poem is pensive or reflective in which the speaker tries to grasp the mystery of love and longing. There is a constant reference to and emphasis on the soul and this is again to highlight the significance and beauty of the same. To highlight several such repetitions note these lines taken from different stanzas of the poem: "Our Souls, which to advance their state"; "And whilst our souls negotiate there"; "That he soul's language understood"; "He (though he knew not which soul spake ...)"; "But as all several souls contain"; "Love, these mix'd souls doth mix again"; "Interinanimates two souls"; "We then, who are this new soul, know"; "So soul into soul may flow"; "Spirits, as like souls as it can"; "So must pure lover souls descend"; or "Love's mysteries in souls do grow". You will also find several grand metaphors or even conceits in this poem.

Look at the following lines: "Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread/ Our eyes upon one double string". It points to the symbolical union of the lovers as also further represented in the other stanzas where souls "advance their state", where there's a mention of "soul's language understood", one soul speaking to the other, souls mixing or even flowing into the other, souls controlling bodies, souls growing the mysteries of love etc. Towards the end of the poem, much emphasis is laid on the metaphor of 'body' which is compared to the

spheres (controlled by angels), to a prison, to a book that contains the soul and love's mysteries.

It extends the idea that even bodily or physical desires are as significant as the soulful or spiritual experiences. In the poem, there are certain paradoxes or opposite strands of ideas as well eg. "As 'twixt two equal armies fate/ Suspends uncertain victory", "we see, we saw not, what did move" or "Our bodies why do we forbear/ They're ours, though they're not we; we are. Once you go through the text of the love poems that are relatively easy to grasp, you will have a better idea of what has been discussed above with regard to Donne's poetical style and language.

The various structural aspects with regard to the prescribed Holy Sonnets were already discussed in details (refer to the earlier unit). However, we shall further take up some of the other nuances of these sonnets. If you note the structures of this sonnet, it is inspired by the Petrarchan sonnet structure. The rhyme scheme or pattern that you will find in "At the Round Earth's Imagin'd Corners Blow" is abba, abba, cdcd, ee. Here, the first eight lines is known as the *octet* and the next six lines as the *sestet*. The opening lines of the sonnet reveals an imagined and Biblical reference to the angels and stirs the reader's imagination on what the Christian Judgement Day might seem like.

The tone of the poem is rather gloomy as it brings to mind the pictures of war, poverty, pain, despair, misfortune and helpless circumstances. After unravelling the fate of believers, the sudden interrupting word 'but' (refer to line 9) brings us back to the present situation. It presents the prayers of the speaker who wishes to learn the way to repent and receive the grace of God. This is specially expressed and established in the last two rhyming lines of the poem which reads thus, "Teach me how to repent, for that's as good/ As if thou had'st seale'd my pardon with thy blood". The speaker brings forth a few references and Biblical images as already discussed in the explanation of the text in the previous unit.

In the sonnet "Batter My Heart, Three-Person'd God" you will find the same rhyming pattern i.e., *abba, abba, cdcd, ee*. The opening line which also forms the title of the poem itself produces a shocking effect if you look at the use of the words "Batter My Heart" which also symbolically refers to the necessity of strict discipline from God or the Holy Trinity also referred to as the "Three-Person'd God".

In fact starting from the opening lines to the body of the poem, you will find that the poem is replete with verbs or action words such as "batter", "knock", "breathe", "shine", "seek", "mend", "rise",

“stand”, “o’erthrow” (overthrow), “bend”. “force”, “break”, “blow”, “burn”, “make”, “usurp’d” (usurped), “Labor”, “admit”, “defend”, “captiv’d”, proves”, “love”, betroth’d” (betrothed or married), “divorce”, “untie”, “break”, “Take”, “imprison”, “enthrall” or “ravish”. If you read the poem carefully, you will note that the line “I like an usurp’d town” is an example of simile and “Reason, your Viceroy in me” is metaphorical. This sonnet conveys a certain sense of restlessness and desperation of a believer to be loved at the expense of being punished to the extreme, being enslaved, being swept away by God’s will as well as being overtaken with violence as evident in the closing lines.

Check Your Progress

- Q 27. Why is there a musical quality in the poem “The Ecstasy”?
- Q 30. What is the main emphasis in the last stanzas of the poem?
- Q 31. What is the extended idea as evident in the closing stanzas of “The Ecstasy”?

Check Your Progress

- Q 32. What is the rhyme scheme of the sonnet “At the Round Earth’s Imagin’d Corners Blow”? Define the tone of the poem.
- Q 33. What does the opening lines of the sonnet “At the Round Earth Imagin’d Corners Blow” reveal?
- Q 34. How does the sonnet “Batter My Heart” begin?
- Q 35. What does the sonnet “Batter My Heart, Three-Person’d God” convey to the reader?

3.6 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

1. What did Donne’s poetry reflect in terms of its concerns? State what was distinct in the presentation or expression of his poetical sensibilities.

Answer Donne's poetry reflected his wide readings and cross references to aspects of philosophy, spirituality, religion, socio-politics, contemporary culture and consciousness to mention a few. In terms of style, language and content, Donne did not restrict himself to the conventions of his time and infused a sense of intellectual as well as bold representations of his poetical sensibilities.

2. Mention some of the varied references drawn by the speaker in the poem "The Canonization".

Answer Donne draws varied references in his argument such as social affluence, the monarchy, the warring soldiers, lawyers, historians chronicling history, epidemics, the merchant ships venturing out for new fortunes, the arts, sciences, the mythological and the divine.

3. Highlight the use of simile in the poem "The Ecstasy".

Answer : There is an interesting use of 'simile' (when two different things are 'likened' together to draw a parallel comparison) in the poem. For an instance, in the opening lines itself you will notice that the lovers sitting by the river-bank are compared thus "Where, like a pillow on a bed", "A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest", "The violet's reclining head" are the comparisons made. The speaker further compares themselves to "two equal armies" or "like sepulchral statues" as twin souls who intermingle and fuse into a single entity.

4. Define the mood of the poem "The Ecstasy".

Answer : The mood of the poem is pensive or reflective in which the speaker tries to grasp the mystery of love and longing. There is a constant reference to and emphasis on the soul and this is again to highlight the significance and beauty of the same.

3.7 Summing Up

After having gone through the details of the poem, the learner will now be completely familiar with the details of John Donne's literary works. In the earlier unit, the discussion on the life and works of John Donne has already given you a detailed idea of the contemporary times and context in which the poet wrote some of his best works. The explanations of the prescribed poems had focused on supplementing your own reading and interpretations of the texts.

A detailed reading of these explanations together with the poetic style employed (as discussed in the present unit) shall benefit you with a clear conception of the content and presentation of the Donne's poetical reflections. The critical reception of the literary works by Donne will enable you to learn more about the value of his literary contributions. You may have already noted how the works of Donne had received constructive criticism as well as validation by several other great poets, writers and thinkers of his age and beyond. Therefore, you are now in a better position to appreciate Donne, his writing style and particularly his representative poems in a holistic manner. The unit will enable you to grasp the reflected thoughts and ideas in these poems and appreciate the same with a more enlightened approach.

3.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

Corns, Thomas N. (ed.) (1993). *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*. New York: Cambridge University Press

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Unit 4

George Herbert's "The Collar" and "The Pulley"

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Works of the poet

4.4 Critical reception

4.5 Context of the poem(s)

4.6 Reading the poem

4.7 Summing up

4.8 Glossary

4.9 References & Suggested reading

4.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to introduce the students with one of the renowned metaphysical poets, George Herbert. Firstly, a detail of the life events of the poet will be given. Then we will proceed to know about Herbert's position as a poet in his own times and in the succeeding periods. Thirdly, the works of the poet will be taken note of. We will engage in a discussion of both the poems by George Herbert prescribed for you. Besides reading the poems the reception of his poems also becomes crucial. So, the opinion of the critics about his poetry will also be highlighted to some extent. Therefore, the objective behind including this unit is to enable the learners to:

- acquaint themselves with George Herbert as a seventeenth century poet in accordance to the socio-political scene of that time,
- appreciate the works of Herbert as representative of metaphysical poetry,
- understand the transition in the way of writing poetry in English literature,
- know the difference of form, structure and approach of the metaphysical poets,

- develop the knack of analyzing the conceits which are a kind of hallmark of metaphysical poetry.

4.2 Introduction

A poet of the seventeenth century, George Herbert had established himself as a poet par excellence in the history of English literature. He was born in April 3, 1593 in Powys, Wales to Magdalen Newport and Richard Herbert as the fifth child of the family. His was a family that was gifted with artistic excellence. Herbert's mother had connections with great literary figures of the period like John Donne. It is evident from the fact that Donne had dedicated the *Holy Sonnets* to Magdalen Newport. Donne became the mentor of Herbert after the death of his father.

Being born into a wealthy family Herbert was largely brought up in England. The role of his mother in raising him and his nine other siblings is immense as the poet's father died when he was just three. Newport was a strong woman who determined to raise all ten of her children with dignity and nurture them as devoted Anglicans.

Around the age of twelve George Herbert went to Westminster School. His intellect earned him a scholarship to pursue his further studies at Trinity College, Cambridge. Herbert successfully earned two degrees there – Bachelor of Arts in 1613 and Master of Arts in the year 1616. He completed his post-graduation at the age 23. He was also elected as a major fellow at the Trinity College for his genius. Two years past his graduation he was appointed as a reader of Rhetoric in the same college. In 1620 he was elected as a public orator to represent the public occasions of Cambridge. It is notable that Herbert enjoyed his orator's post as he had mentioned that as "the finest place in the university". He was elected as a representative member to the Parliament in 1624 from Montgomery. Later, he resigned from his post as an orator in 1627.

In 1629 George Herbert married Jane Danvers and the next year he started to get involved with the Church of England. The rest of his life was spent as a rector of a church in Bemerton in Wiltshire. His devotion to the church can be understood from the fact that he even invested his own money to rebuild the church. He not only preached religion in that region of Salisbury but also wrote poetry. His inclination and trust in the omnipotent power of the Almighty finds expression in his poetry as well. In 1630 he married Jane Danvers after a courtship of just three days.

A change came in Herbert after the death of King James. In his mid-thirties he devoted himself completely to the church and spent the rest of his life as the rector of the rural parish at Fugglestone St. Peter, outside Salisbury. As a rector he was remarkably benevolent to his parishioners. He cared for the people of the church and served them by even attending to them and providing them food when they fell sick. However, he was not healthy himself. At the age of thirty-nine Herbert died of consumption in March 1, 1633 in Bemerton.

4.3 Works of the poet

As Herbert breathed his last at a very early age his poems were published posthumously. It seems that intuitively he sensed his impending death. This may be considered as George Herbert had sent the manuscript that consisted of his poems to Nicholas Ferrar, his friend and the clergyman. It is notable that Herbert had sent the poems to the later for consideration. He allowed Ferrar to burn the manuscript in fire if the poems were not good enough to be published according to his friend.

In 1633 Ferrar chose to publish the poems of George Herbert. The poems thus got published in a collection entitled *The Temple* sometime after the death of Herbert. This collection also bears a subtitle – *Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. History says that King James I read *The Temple* when he was on his death-bed. This collection consists of poems about childhood, expression about mother's love, care, devotion and authority. He was attached to his mother a lot as she had raised him and his siblings with great care after his father's death. Herbert's proximity and emotional attachment with his mother, Magdalen could be understood from the fact that his first two poetic renderings in the form of sonnet was sent to his mother enclosed with a note where he announced himself as a poet. *The Temple* is however, famous for the short lyrics that it constitutes of.

It becomes obvious from his affiliations and his personal experiences that Herbert deals with religious themes and subjects in his poems. Poems bearing titles "The Altar" "Prayer" and "The Easter Wings" makes it evident that the Church and things related to the Gospels dominate the tone and diction of George Herbert's poetry.

Besides writing in English, he also wrote verses in Latin. Donne is also recognised for his sermons which he has left for posterity.

Stop to consider

George Herbert was taught by Lancelot Andrews in Westminster School. Andrews was influential as a bishop and he has earned his fame also for translating King James Version of the Bible.

As Herbert belonged to a family rich in artistic endeavours he too had a pull towards music. He established himself as a good musician and had learnt to play several musical instruments along with lute.

4.3.1 Metaphysical poetry:

The term “metaphysical” has been coined by Samuel Johnson in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* to imply the group of English poets of the seventeenth century who wrote poetry by using unusual conceits, irony and complicated imageries. Among the metaphysical poets are counted – John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, Richard Crashaw and John Cleveland.

These poets, however, was recognised and praised for their artistic zeal in the 1930s and 40s because T.S. Eliot popularised metaphysical poetry through his distinguished essay, “The Metaphysical Poets”. The word ‘metaphysical’ has been derived from the term ‘metaphysics’ which refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with the relationship between mind and matter, and the complex thoughts of the human consciousness. One of the remarkable aspect of metaphysical poetry, besides the use of conceits, is the reference to the scientific inventions of that time. The unusual analogy of the various objects of the cosmos and geography is also notable. The poems that are considered to be metaphysical are, therefore, highly intellectual and the use of paradox gives rise to a network of complex thoughts. Religion, science, consummation, love and spirituality are amalgamated as a heterogeneous mixture in metaphysical poetry. Some of the widely read metaphysical poem are John Donne’ s “The Sun Rising” and “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”, Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”, George Herbert’s “Easter Wings”, and Richard Crashaw’s “Christ Crucified”.

SAQ

Did Herbert inherit the artistic taste that runs in his family? Discuss. (About 80 words)

What is the educational background of George Herbert? (About 60 words)

Why is Herbert considered to be a ‘metaphysical poet’? Give reasons. (About 100 words)

4.3.2 George Herbert’s contemporaries:

Among the contemporaries of George Herbert a few names are notable. As he is counted among the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, the other poets who contributed to the literature of the times are – John Donne, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, Richard Crashaw, and Thomas Traherne.

John Donne: When we speak about metaphysical poetry the name of John Donne comes foremost. He was not just a poet but also an Anglican cleric in the Church of England and a soldier. Donne was born in 1572 to Roman Catholic parents. He was the third child of John Donne and Elizabeth Heywood, who was of Welsh origin and a warden of the Ironmongers Company in London. His association with the royalty resulted in him being appointed as the Dean of Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London. He has contributed to the gamut of English literature immensely as he had explored several genres like songs, satires, Latin translations, elegies, sonnets besides poems. Some of his famous poems are “The Sun Rising”, “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” and “Death Be Not Proud”. Donne died in 1631 in London.

Henry Vaughan: Henry Vaughan is a Welsh poet of the Seventeenth century who has been recognised as a metaphysical poet based on the poetry that he had produced. He was also an author and translator. Vaughan was a physician by profession. He was born in 1621 in

Newton St Bridget, Brecknockshire, Wales as the eldest child of Thomas Vaughan and Denise Jenkin. The most notable of his works is a collection of religious poetry titled *Silex Scintillians* published in 1650. In 1646 another volume *Tenth Satyre of Juvenal Englished* was published. Vaughan wrote prose pieces like *Mount of Olives* and *Solitary Devotions* (1652) and also a few works of prose writing with topics related to medicine. He breathed his last in 1695 at the age of seventy three.

Andrew Marvell: Marvell was born in the year 1621 in Winestead-in-Holderness, East Riding of Yorkshire. He was related to the church closely as his father, with whom he shares the name, was a clergyman of the Church of England. He is recognised not just as a metaphysical poet but he also had a flourishing career as a politician and satirist. His earliest poems were written in Greek and Latin, the languages he had mastered during his Cambridge days. Marvell took part in the politics of the time actively, which can be found when one takes note of the fact that he was member of the House of Commons from 1659 to 1678. When there was a Commonwealth rule Marvell is also believed to have been associated with John Milton as a friend. His remarkable contributions to English literature are the poems – “To His Coy Mistress”, “Upon Appleton House”, “The Garden” and “An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland”. As a satirist his most famous political satires are – “Flecknoe” and “The Character of Holland”. Marvell became a part of the Cavalier Parliament after the restoration of Charles II and died in 1678.

Richard Crashaw: Richard Crashaw was a major metaphysical poet of the Seventeenth century. Although he was a Roman Catholic convert, he was an Anglican cleric at High Church. Crashaw is the only son of William Crashaw born in 1612 or 1613 (exact date is not known). The name of his mother is not affirmed. However, he had established himself as a writer by writing and publishing pamphlets advocating Puritan theology. Crashaw was critical of Catholicism. He published his for collection of poems entitled, *A Book of Sacred Epigrams* in 1634. During his lifetime he had published three volumes of poetry and one came in print posthumously with the title *Carmen Del Nostro* containing 33 poems. In the year 1649, Richard Crashaw suddenly met his death after being appointed as a canon of the Shrine of the Holy House at Loreto.

Thomas Traherne: Although details of his birth and parentage are not recorded, yet he is believed to have been born in and around 1636-1637 to a shoemaker name John Traherne of Hereford. Another source claim that he was the son of a local innkeeper called Philip Traherne and his third wife Mary Lane. He was a poet, Anglican cleric, and a religious writer. His writings are intense and spiritually rich. Among

all the metaphysical poets Traherne's contribution to poetry has been recognised only in the 20th century. His first collection of short paragraphs got published in 1908. It is in 1903 and 1910 respectively that his poetry collections *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* and *B.D. and Poems of Felicity* were published. As he wrote in prose as well, notable prose works are *Roman Forgeries* (1673), *Christian Ethics* (1675) and *A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation on the Mercies of God* (1699). In 1674 Traherne left this world in Middlesex, England.

Check your progress:

1. Who are the other metaphysical poets of the period to which George Herbert belonged? Discuss. (about 120 words)
(Hint: Donne, Marvell, Crashaw and Traherne.)
2. What are the themes of the poem "The Pulley"? (about 80 words)
(Hint: God's blessings, Restlessness of human beings)
3. What are the common preoccupations of metaphysical poetry? (about 70 words)
(Hint: religion, spirituality, philosophy, use of conceits, complex thoughts and imageries)
4. Justify the title of the poem "The Collar". (about 100 words)
(Hint: Literally the collar worn by a member of the clergy, a mark of honour, and figuratively it suggests submitting/being made to submit oneself to a higher authority)

4.4 Critical reception

George Herbert was highly praised during his times and the later centuries as well. But in the Twentieth century he received acclaim from T.S. Eliot for his poetry. In the essay "The Metaphysical Poets" Eliot had admired Herbert for his poetry. The former had even written a book titled *George Herbert*.

Barnabas Oley, a royalist identified Herbert as "primitive...holy and heavenly soul". The former has written a lot in praise of the latter. Oley's works *Herbert's Remains* and *A Priest to the Temple: or a Country Parson* are renderings about the pious life that Herbert led as a parson of the Church.

Izaak Walton had written the biography of Herbert in great detail. His biography was published in 1670 bearing the title *Life of Mr. George Herbert*. It was later revised in 1674 and 1675.

4.5

4.5.1 Context of the poem(s)

Both “The Collar” and “The Pulley” are poems that reflect the Christian beliefs of the poet. “The Collar” was written in 1633 when George Herbert was struggling to come to terms with his religious affiliation. The speaker here is found in an awkward position of being amidst chaotic thoughts. The choice of the title of the poem itself is suggestive of some kind of subservience on one hand and on the other hand can be considered as an object of honour for a member of the clergy. At the beginning of the poem the speaker conveys to the reader that he seeks to bring in some change in his life. He wants to live his youth once again and enjoys the pleasures of his youthful days. The speaker also expresses that in chasing his long lost dreams he shall not measure things by the parameters of right or wrong according to the society.

4.5.6 Reading the poems

The two poems prescribed for study are “The Collar” and “The Pulley”. “The Collar” is a poem written in 1633. This is a one-stanza poem written in free verse. The poem appears to be a dialogue between the speaker’s inner voices, which are believed to be the heart and one own will.

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;
I will abroad!
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.

These lines show some restlessness in the speaker. The persona seems to break free of some kind of bondage and live a life according to his wish. Through the questions he conveys that life cannot be spent by regretting and thinking about the desires not fulfilled. This be understood when he repeats the word ‘free’. Here it is implied that the speaker believes in getting the most from his life.

Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me bleed, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?

 Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
 Before my tears did drown it.

In the above lines the poet seeks the answer to the question, ‘Will he ever be able to get back that life of freedom?’. Somehow he realises that he has got trapped in the world that he himself had created. With a tone of regret the speaker says that may be he had grown a thorn bearing plant rather than one that bears corn. Now, those thorns cause injury to him. He deeply grieves over the fact that may be because of his own deeds he has been deprived of the fruits/pleasures of life which he addresses by the words “corn” and “wine”.

Is the year only lost to me?
 Have I no bays to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
 All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
 And thou hast hands.

Here the poet very emotionally interrogates about the time that he had spent in his life. No flowers or garland was offered to him as an honour and he felt that the years had rolled over unrecognised. So he was compelled to think that all the time past was “blasted” and “wasted”. The speaker, however, says that as he has his hands, he will sow and reap his desired fruit from life.

Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
 Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
 And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.

In these lines the speaker speaks to himself with words of encouragement. To the self he says that there is no use of deciding over right and wrong; neither one could undo what is done in the past. The speaker also tells himself that by restraining oneself and brooding over “what is fit and not” he should move forward and utilize his present time in the best possible way. It is also suggested that if one holds on to the past he/she will remain chained in those thoughts and will not be able to move on.

Away! take heed;
 I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;

He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load."

The above lines are in the form of a general statement that every man is accountable for his/her own deeds. In taking a step forward one has to shake of his/her fears and take the responsibility of one's own actions fearlessly.

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild

At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
And I replied *My Lord.*

The final lines of "The Collar" the poetic persona tries to tame his "wild" thoughts and premonitions. Having done that, he submits himself as a devout Christian and a parson of the Church to the ways/will of God. These lines are indicative of the fact that although the thoughts of a person may naturally go astray, but one has to follow the word of the Almighty – the power that guides life on earth.

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
"Let us," said he, "pour on him all we can.
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span."

In these lines the poet speaks about the creation of man and how God has blessed the human beings with the best of things. The words of God, as imagined by the poet, have been quoted above. According to the poet, the Creator has bestowed man with all that could make them happy and contented as if He had poured out his blessings like liquid from a glass jar. By His words the riches of the entire world was granted to man.

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

The first blessing that God poured out from the glass jar was 'strength'. Then 'beauty', 'wisdom', 'honour' 'pleasure' and others followed suit. When all the blessings were rested upon man God stopped at the last and conjectured. The creator knew that at the bottom of the container lied the most precious of His blessings.

"For if I should," said he,
"Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;

So both should losers be.

The Creator speaks in a helpless tone in the above lines by saying that the last of the blessings He cannot land upon the human beings. According to God, if that gift is given to the human, they will not acknowledge and appreciate Him. Rather, they will be mesmerized by that blessing and forget the hands that created this universe. So, the Almighty keeps that back. Although He wanted to give man a glimpse of the beautiful thing that was sculpted, yet He chose to be a loser like His creations because they would never understand its value.

“Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

In these final lines of “The Pulley” God proclaims that the mankind can enjoy all the blessing that HE had bestowed upon them. But the gift of being satisfied with whatever they had was denied to them. This is done to remind them of the fact that in every step of their life they have to bow down to the power that had created them. No riches of the world will ever bring satisfaction in them. God says that if the men do not remember Him and take shelter under His divine providence for what He had provided them with or the good deeds do not show the way to Him, he/she will bend down after being tired of trying to get the ultimate satisfaction.

4.7 Summing Up

As for “The Collar”, as the poem proceeds the poetic persona reveals how he is contained by his own thoughts and beliefs. With a heavy heart he says that the suffering he is enduring at present is his own choice. The speaker also seems to realise that his thoughts have aggravated the intensity of the adverse situation. But the poem ends with the speaker’s submission to the way of God. In the other poem “The Pulley” the pulley is the dominant nature to figuratively indicate the restless nature of human beings that leave them dissatisfied. The poem begins with God’s words where the readers are told that human beings are blessed with everything including knowledge, wealth, wisdom, relationship and so on. But one thing God keep with him so that the humans do not forget about the omnipotence of God. The imagery of pulley is used in order to show that as human beings keep on chasing their fortune they will remain restless as they will not be satisfied with what they have. This sense of dissatisfaction and the urge to have more will compel them to remember the divine power of God. Hence, they will always have a pull towards the Creator.

4.8 Glossary

Nicholas Ferrar: He led the religious community at Little Gidding (T.S. Eliot wrote about Little Gidding in his *Four Quartets*).

4.9 References & Suggested reading

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Unit 5

George Herbert's "The Collar" and "The Pulley"

Supplementary Unit:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 A Brief History of the Seventeenth Century

5.4 Herbert's contribution to metaphysical poetry

5.5 Common themes in George Herbert's poetry

5.6 The poet's style

5.7 Summing Up

5.9 Suggested reading

5.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to provide some additional information relevant to the poetry of George Herbert in general and the two prescribed poems in particular. Here, emphasis will be laid on exploring the contribution made by George Herbert to the treasure of metaphysical poetry. Besides, this unit intends explore the themes which are resonant in Herbert's poetry. The style that the poet had adopted in his poetry will also be discussed briefly. The information shared will enable the learners to:

- get acquainted with the historical events of the Seventeenth century,
- familiarize themselves with the themes that Herbert chose for his poetry,
- understand the development of the genre of poetry during that period,
- know how the form of metaphysical poetry is different from the poetry of the previous period, and
- be acquainted with the reception of the metaphysical poetry during the Seventeenth century.

5.2 Introduction

Along with other metaphysical poets George Herbert has established his name as a metaphysical poet in the history of English literature. Metaphysical poetry came out to be a different genre in a period when William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser practiced poetry which was quite distinct from the former.

Moreover, another genre of literature, that is drama too flourished alongside poetry. The greatest of the masters of drama were Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and John Dryden. Drama, both tragedy and comedy was made open for the people to witness in the theatres till the reign of Charles I, 1642. The theatres remained closed for around eighteen years in England during the rule of the Commonwealth. With the crowning of Charles II in 1660 theatres were reopened.

Coming back to metaphysical poetry, it becomes essential to mention that the metaphysical poets hardly referred to any of the political upheavals of the time in their poetry. However, it is in fact notable that the metaphysical dealt with abstract philosophical ideas in their poetry. In doing this they brought in diversified allusions of objects which can otherwise be hardly considered to be considered for comparison. The imageries are but very concretely presented with analogies even if subjects like religion, love, and consummation are versified.

5.3 A Brief History of the Seventeenth Century

The Seventeenth century that started presumably from 1603 was a period of political and social turmoil. As Queen Elizabeth was childless, after her demise James VI of Scotland became the king and came to be known as James I of England. James I was neither as popular as Elizabeth I as a monarch. But his name is engraved in history because he gave the world a new translation of the Bible that is, King James Version published in the year 1611. Unfortunately, James I could not sit on the throne of England for a long time. In 1625 he died at the age of fifty eight and his son Charles I took over the kingship of England, Ireland and Scotland.

Charles I married a Roman Catholic girl named Henrietta Maria. That time in England was favourable for the Puritans and many people were not pleased at the king's act of marrying a Catholic. Moreover, like his father he too believed in the divine rights of kings. Charles I undertook many unsuccessful expeditions and also fought wars that was lost. To incur the expenses of the unsuccessful ventures

he levied high taxes on the common people. This was opposed by the Parliament as it went against the interest of the people. Besides, a disagreement arose between the king and the Parliament on the subject of religion. In order to take control over this situation Charles I dissolved the Parliament in 1629. For eleven years he ruled over England without the Parliament. Eventually, a civil war took place between the Royalists (people who supported Charles I, the Catholics) and the Parliamentarians (supported by the middle-class and were staunch Protestants).

Though in 1640 Charles I had called for the Parliament the rift between the former and the latter could not be mended. Again in 1641 the king's clash with the Parliament became grim as he entered the House of Commons to arrest five MPs. The MPs had however fled before his arrival. As a result, from 1642 to 1651 the civil war was fought. In 1649 Charles I was executed as he was found guilty of treason. After his execution Charles II became the ruler of England. Meanwhile Oliver Cromwell headed the parliamentary troops and invaded Ireland. Although Charles II made an alliance with Ireland and Scotland, yet Cromwell defeated the king's army in 1651. With this the civil war ended and Charles II fled to France letting Oliver Cromwell to lead the country.

In 1658 Richard Cromwell took over England after his father Oliver Cromwell's death. As he did not have the leadership qualities of his father he could not lead the administration efficiently and finally resigned after being in power for only nine months.

Monarchy was established in England again with the crowning of Charles II as the king in 1660. When Oliver Cromwell came to power the theatres in England were closed from 1642 as the Puritans denounced means of entertainment like the theatre. But in the same year of Charles II's restoration to the throne the theatres were reopened.

After Charles II died in 1685, his brother, James II, took over the throne. Afraid of the policies James II might introduce, William III removed James II in 1688 and took over the English throne in 1689. This act is often referred to as the Glorious Revolution because, in comparison to the violence of the English Civil War, the shift of power was not very bloody.

During the seventeenth century, weightage was placed on the importance of human reason and on an empirical philosophy that held that knowledge about the world was acquired through the senses and by applying reason to what we perceive through our senses. Reason was a uniform yet unprecedented human characteristic that served as a guide for man. Therefore this period is often also called the Age of

Reason or Enlightenment. A remarkable characteristic of this period included observing human nature and nature itself which were considered unchanging and constant.

The age is also known as the Neoclassical period. It is due to the reason that writers of the time placed great emphasis on the original writings produced by classical Greek and Roman literature. The literature of this period imitated that of the age of Caesar Augustus, writers such as Horace and Virgil, with classical influences prevalent in poetry with the use of rhyming patterns, and in prose with its satirical form. The Augustans considered classical literature as natural and those works were the standard they should look up to to achieve in their works. Alexander Pope opines on following the Classical masters, “Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem; To copy Nature is to copy them” (*Essay on Criticism*). According to Pope and most of his contemporaries the way to study nature is to study the ancients. The styles and rules of classical literature were deemed to be the ideal ones. Closely allied with the emphasis placed on the classics and the unchanging rules of nature was the belief that reason was an unchanging and unique human quality that acted as a guiding force for man.

During this period literature was often considered to be a tool for the advancement of knowledge. Writers were often found imitating nature in their attempts to give expression to their beliefs. The nature of human beings was considered a constant that observation and reason could be applied to for the advancement of knowledge. Within these circumstances, the Age of Satire was born. Satire was the most popular literary tool that was utilized by writers of the time. With the help of satire, writers were better able to educate the public through literature. Its function was to acknowledge a problem in society and attempt to reform the problem in a comical manner while still educating the public. Its effectiveness is evident in literary pieces by Jonathan Swift such as *A Modest Proposal* where he addresses and criticizes the problem of a growing famine in Ireland. Playwrights of the time were also known to incorporate satire in their plays. By making use of satire, these writers were able to expose and critique social injustices of that time. Longman was of the opinion that, “Over the thirty years of its triumphs, Restoration comedy, in an astounding fugue of excesses and depravities, laid bare the turbulence and toxins of this culture”. Satire was a very popular literary tool that was functional in the promotion of social awareness through literature, the theatre and periodicals of the time.

5.4 Herbert's contribution to metaphysical poetry

Metaphysical poetry is a specific branch of poetry of the seventeenth century that deals with the skillful use of intellect and emotion in homogenous way. The basic custom of metaphysical poetry is to focus on the highly philosophical view of nature and the engagements that affect human life.

George Herbert wrote poetry in three languages – English, Latin and Greek. All of Herbert's English poems were published in *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, with a preface by Nicholas Ferrer in 1633. The gamut of Herbert's surviving English poems predominantly bear religious themes and display directness of expression enriched by original and apt conceits in which more than visualization the function of those imageries impact the thoughts of the readers.

Herbert's poetry is a sequence of religious poems, designed and set in the model of morality plays. The major subjects of his poetry are the incarnation, the religious passion and the redemption. He speaks about man's relation to God, of the body to the soul, and of life on earth and the afterlife. To show this Herbert frequently projects rebellion, reconciliation and the final submission. He engages in a debate with himself, with God and with other presumed audience to arrive at some transcendental reality of life.

Like all metaphysical, Herbert suffers from a sense of split personality, but he is sure of his ultimate success in reaching the spiritual heaven. Most of his poems are argumentative in nature, depict a dispute between the worldly and the unworldly pleasures, but at the end he asserts his faith in the divinity associated with a Christian life.

Moreover, the poetry of George Herbert is metaphysical by dint of its subject matter as well. His poem, 'Easter Wings', is a deliberation on the resurrection of Christ. It conveys the philosophy of the realization of man's sinfulness, the sufferings, misfortunes, grief, ailments and dismays which are the root cause of his regeneration and resurrection.

5.5 Common themes in George Herbert's poetry

One of the central themes that recur many of his poems including "The Priesthood" is the significance of holy men and the role they played in the salvation of the human soul. Priests are hold in the same position as the kings because the destiny of a human's soul depends solely on the counsel provided by a priest. It is believed that

the priest has a direct connection with the Almighty, which automatically restores power in the hands of the priests.

However, Herbert also points out that the priests should not consider themselves to be Gods or equivalent, and should always be humble in preaching and practicing the religion. In the poems like "Affliction (I)" the speaker says that it is not necessary that the life of a priest will be extraordinarily blessed by God. There is every possibility of their lives be full of struggles and sufferings. But as priests are people whom the other members of the society respect and follow, it becomes all the more important that they lead a devout life and guide the society when there is a crisis on the spiritual ground.

The form of Herbert's *The Temple* is found to have a central thematic concern: where and how one worships. The book is divided into three sections, "The Church-porch," "The Church," and "The Church-militant," thus suggesting that the book as a whole envelops the approach to a place of worship, the experience of worshipping God, and the ultimate outcome of that worship. The book is organized in such a manner that it itself appears to be a place of worship like a church or a temple: a place where the writer (and possibly the readers) goes through all the aspects related to worship and develops a collective feeling of being one with God. *The Temple* thus puts stress on the function and responsibilities of the existing churches, and also proposes that like the actual church poetry also can be considered to be a plane/space of worship.

In his poetry Herbert expresses that God's love for the mankind is infinite, and He shows that love to human beings in many ways. God uses tools like discipline and suffering to teach his creations, but that is done to bring in some restraint in the human beings which will somehow benefit them. In "The Pulley," for example, the speaker points out that without suffering and only pleasure mankind would not appreciate the blessings received from God. However, to be allowed to go to heaven and enjoy eternal peace man has to choose a life of devotion. "The Search" illustrates another tool—God's absence or silence. The poem "Love (III)" shows motivation and persuasion. The poems as a whole advocates that whatever the tool God uses, it can be ascertained that our life on earth is a indicative of God's love for mankind.

5.6 The poet's style

A close reading of Herbert's poems throws light on the fact that those are characterized by a deep sense of religious devotion, precision in language, metrically agile, and remarkably resourceful use of conceits.

Herbert's supple and open-ended juggle with structure, his genius in making patterns can bear the load of the meaning of his words, but loose enough to do away with dull predictability, is notable in the arrangement of the poems of "The Church."

Herbert's emphasis on structure is matched by his careful use of the language in his poetry. It is remarkable when posed with other works of his period. *The Temple* seems invariably simple and direct, with very little struggle in deciphering the meaning that marks so many of William Shakespeare's sonnets, and with hardly any of Donne's self-conscious coarseness and scarcely considerate clarity.

Herbert's delight in language reflects not only the deep influence of God's words, the Holy Scriptures, but also his awareness that human words, returned to God in prayer, praise, song, and poetry, are at least an acceptable celebration of God's Word made flesh in Christ.

Besides, Herbert's humility enables him to exploit the affluence of the English language. Modern readers who believe that puns are a low form of wit need to be pointed out that Herbert, like most of the seventeenth century poets, made use of puns and word-play not only for humorous effects but also for much more serious purposes: to imply deep correspondences between different things in the world, between language and reality and between different stages of experience.

Herbert on the *Religious Spectrum* examines the controversial area of study that places his work on the religious spectrum between Presbyterianism and what would later be called Anglo-Catholicism. Herbert and Bacon starts each other's mutual admiration and looks into how both men's works use nature to talk about God in complex ways. On the other hand Herbert and Donne examines the assumptions and biases enclosing Herbert's coupling with John Donne, the fellow poet-priest and founder of the metaphysical school. Herbert was considered to be a member of the same metaphysical school by many critics from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

John Donne and George Herbert: A comparison

George Herbert's poetry shows that to a large extent he followed the footprints left by Donne, but he also made contributions which were quite distinct. The distinct characteristic of Herbert's poetry is the simplicity of diction and metaphor. Throughout his poetry the language is remarkably colloquial, and, to an extent, the logical persuasive demonstration of ideas, but he draws his metaphors from everyday domestic experience, employing a range of simple commonplace imagery in contrast to the sophisticated

imagery of Donne. 'Conceits' are not significant part of Herbert's poetry and his appeal is not so intellectual as Donne's. A technique Herbert introduced was the ending of a poem with two quiet lines which resolve the conflicts in the poem without answering the specific issues raised by it, and this stands as quite a dramatic deviation from Donne. Donne expresses his doubts in intellectual terms, and answers them in the same way. Herbert occasionally explores his doubts in intellectual terms, but answers them with emotion. In this way Herbert instills the insight that one cannot quarrel or reason with God; one either accepts God's presence, or prefers to remain a non-believer. In these respects Herbert may be considered to have made a breakthrough and explored new visions, into which Henry Vaughan followed thereafter.

Unlike Donne, Herbert wrote no love poetry, having decided, when he began writing poetry at Cambridge, to devote his poetic works to God. He seems to have had less difficulty in adjusting from court life to a religious life than did Donne, and his faith seems to have been more secure than that of Donne. Herbert's poetry is of a more instructive kind; preaching by example rather than precept. He writes for the people, recording the obstacles he had encountered in his life in order that others may find an example in him. The propositions in Herbert's poems can be seen as a continuation of the thought in his sermons, and this objective behind his poetry largely determines his style.

The arguments are of quite different kinds. Donne's thought process is more intellectual, his way of reasoning mirrors a rigorously disciplined mind. However, Herbert's logical analogies relate more to feelings, the type of feeling with which every human being can identify themselves.

Donne began his poetic career writing mostly love poems which depict the ingenuity of thought, and originality of the 'conceits' were the main criteria by which the poems could be remarked. Donne had utilised the same methods when he started writing religious poetry. Instead of putting emphasis on conceits, exotic imageries, and ingenious thought George Herbert looks to another source for stylistic inspiration that is, the *Bible*, or, more specifically, the words of Christ and the Christian Parables. Where Donne deviates from the mundane to find an exotic or fascinating image - a globe, beaten gold, a pair of compasses are examples. Whereas, Herbert seeks for the homeliest commonplace image he can find. In 'The Collar' for example we have a thorn, wine, fruit, and cable which are common things of the day to day life.

It is interesting to note the way in which Herbert's career contrasts with Donne's. Donne was exiled from the court for marrying his patron's niece secretly, takes holy orders to get into

the good graces of King James again, and keeps on working until he was made the dean of St. Paul's. Herbert was hardly inclined to Donne's sort of temptation. The former enjoyed the consistent rise through the academy, a chaste, pious, duty bound and responsible fulfilling the obligations

5.7 Summing Up

In praise of George Herbert's poetic diction Samuel Taylor Coleridge had commented that, "Nothing can be more pure, manly, or unaffected". He is positioned with John Donne as one of the greatest metaphysical poets.

Izaak Walton records that Herbert was considered to be a saintly figure by those that knew him. Herbert's poetry is certainly about struggles of a religious fraternity, but the struggles are neither so despondent nor as personal as Donne's.

5.8 Suggested reading

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Unit 6

ANDREW MARVELL: “To His Coy Mistress”, “The Garden”, “Upon Appleton House”

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Overview of His Works
- 6.4 Critical Reception as a Poet
- 6.5
 - 6.5.1 Context of the Poems
 - 6.5.2 Reading the Poems
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 Glossary
- 6.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

6.1 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to

- familiarize you with Andrew Marvell and his works.
- Enable you to learn about the literary and political scenes of 17th Century England in general.
- Make you trace the trajectory of Marvell’s writings
- Offer you a close reading of some of Marvell’s most celebrated works.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) is one of the towering literary figures of the 17th Century England. Besides being a poet, he was also a renowned politician and a prominent civil servant of his time. Marvel was born in a village named Winestead which is located in the

Holderness region of East Riding, Yorkshire. East Riding of Yorkshire, or simply East Yorkshire, is a county in Northern England. Marvell's mother was Anne Pease Marvell, and his father, who was a clergyman for the Church of England, was also called Andrew Marvell. When Marvell junior was around three years old, the family moved from Winestead to Kingston-upon-Hull where Marvell senior was appointed a Lecturer at the Holy Trinity Church. There, in Hull Grammar School, Marvell junior obtained his secondary education. At the age of 13, Marvell enrolled into Trinity College, Cambridge from where he eventually completed his B.A. Degree. Although it is not proven, many claim that during his youth, Marvell was converted by a group of Jesuits, and ran away from Cambridge. He was eventually brought back home by his father after much coaxing. In 1641, after the death of his father by drowning, Marvell decided to stop pursuing his Masters degree, and dropped out of college.

In the subsequent years, Marvell travelled a lot across many places in Europe like France, Holland, Spain and Italy, and in course of his travels, he learnt many languages. Some say that he toured to avoid going to the Civil War (1642-1651), while others claimed that he was a government agent. Many of Marvell's writings are reflective of his travel experiences.

Around the 1650s, Marvell became the tutor to Mary, the daughter of Lord General Thomas Fairfax who was the Parliamentary Commander-in-Chief during the English Civil War. He [Marvel] then also became a tutor to William Dutton, one of Oliver Cromwell's wards. By then, Marvell had befriended John Milton, and was appointed as Milton's Latin Secretary to the Cromwellian government's Council of States in 1657. In 1659, he was elected as an MP for the constituency of Hull. He represented this constituency until his death. In 1660, after the Restoration of King Charles II, when Milton was arrested for being a defender of the Commonwealth, Marvell is said to have used his political influence to release Milton from his imprisonment. In 1678, after serving in the Parliament for around 18 years, Marvell passed away rather suddenly from a fever. One of the many conspiracy theories around his death suggests that Marvell was poisoned by the Jesuits, and this poisoning is what resulted in his death. Marvell rests in the church of St. Giles-in-the-fields, London.

Three years after his death, some of Marvell's poems were published in a collection called *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681) by a lady by the

name of Mary Marvell who claimed to be Marvell's wife. Mary Marvell even wrote a preface to *Miscellaneous Poems*. Later on, however, it was found that Mary Marvell is actually Mary Palmer, Marvell's housekeeper who posed as his wife.

6.3 OVERVIEW OF HIS WORKS

In this section of the unit, you will be introduced to some of the major works of Andrew Marvell. Marvell wrote not only poetry, but also prose pieces. He is known for his political satires and his lyrical poetry. He is regarded as one of the greatest Metaphysical poets today. His poetry is replete with metaphysical conceits, allusions, and metaphors. Along with Metaphysical wit, in his poetry we also find the grace of the Cavaliers. Elaboration upon the terms "Metaphysical" and "Cavalier" in the context of 17th century poetry will be provided in the supplementary unit of this chapter. In Marvell's works we also find a reflection of his shifting political allegiances.

The earliest of Marvell's poetry was published in 1637 while he was still at Cambridge. Two of his poems, one in Greek and the other in Latin was published in the "Musa Cantabrigiensis". In 1646, he wrote a satire called "Fleckno, the English Priest at Rome" where he ridiculed Richard Flecknoe's wit and poverty. He was conscious and sensitive about the socio-political events of his time, and wrote poems lamenting the outbreak of the Plague and celebrating the birth of a child to King Charles-I. In 1649, King Charles-I was tried and executed. This marked the abolition of Monarchy in England, and the establishment of the Commonwealth of England, with Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. In 1650, Marvell wrote his famous "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland." This poem brings out Marvell's ability to deal with issues like the Civil War without making his political position clear. To this day, the poem is regarded as one of the best political poems in English history. In this ode, he not only praises Cromwell, but also is sympathetic and even appreciative towards King Charles-I. When the Cromwellian government completed one year, Marvell composed the panegyric "The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness, the Lord Protector". The poem comprised over two hundred lines in heroic couplets. Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, and was succeeded by his son Richard Cromwell. Marvell wrote an elegy in honour of Oliver

Cromwell called “A Poem upon the Death of his Late Highness the Lord Proctor.”

Although he was well acquainted with the Parliamentarians, held offices under the parliamentary government, and wrote his poetry in honour of Cromwell, some of his poems like “An Elegy Upon the Death of My To Lord Francis Villiers”, “To his Noble Friend Mr. Richard Lovelace” and “Upon the Death of Lord Hastings” bespeak of his Royalist associations.

Circa 1651, during the period he tutored Mary Fairfax, Marvell lived in Nun Appleton House, near York. This period is generally regarded as the most productive period in Marvell’s poetic career. Most of his lyrical poetry is believed to have been written during this period. It was during this time that he wrote “Upon Appleton House, To my Lord Fairfax” and his most celebrated poem, “To His Coy Mistress”. Both these poems will be discussed at length in a subsequent section of this unit. To this period also belong some of his other notable lyrics like “The Definition of Love” and “The Unfortunate Lover”. In “The Definition of Love”, Marvell talks about the unattainable nature of love by comparing lovers with opposite poles of the globe. This poem is often compared to John Donne’s “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”. “The Unfortunate Lover”, which depicts a shipwreck, is believed to have been inspired by the death of Marvell’s mother. Marvell’s four pastoral poems which are collectively known as the Mower-Poems are also attributed to this period. The Mower-Poems include “The Mower against Gardens”, “Damon the Mower”, “Mower to the Glo-worms” and “The Mower’s Song”. In these poems we come across the complex character of Damon, the mower. Damon is a character full of contradictions. On the one hand he is simple, easy going, rustic soul; and on the other hand, his profession of being a mower leads him to being compared to the sinister figure of Death who carries a scythe. “The Fair Singer” is another poem that Marvell composed during this period. This poem is a love-lyric that makes use of metaphysical conceits.

Around the time of the First Anglo-Dutch war of 1652, Marvell wrote the satirical burlesque called “Character of Holland” in which he mocked the Dutch army and supported the Commonwealth. In 1667, he wrote his longest verse satire - “The Last Instruction to a Painter”, in which he satirized the circumstances that led to the second Anglo-Dutch war, and the corruption rampant in England during those times which led to the defeat of the English army in this war. He also wrote

his “On Milton’s *Paradise Lost*”, a poem in seven verse paragraphs of fifty four iambic pentameter lines. In this poem, Marvell praises John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). He also discusses the topic of Milton’s blindness in this poem. This poem was published with the second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674.

Marvell also wrote a few religious or quasi-religious poems of which “Clorinda and Damon”, “A Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda”, “Bermudas” and “The Coronet” are note worthy. “A Dialogue, Between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure”, “A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body” and “One Drop of Dew” are poems which are known for their deep philosophical insights and meditative tones.

Amongst the prose pieces of Marvell, the most noteworthy are *The Rehearsal Transpos’d*, which is a satire on Reverend Samuel Parker a Puritan who afterwards converted to Tory Anglican, published in two parts- in 1672 and 1673, *Mr, Smirk or the Divine Mode* (1676) which again is a satire on Anglican intolerance; and *An Account of the Growth of Poppery and Arbitrary Government in England* (1678), political tract about the increasing influence of Catholicism and France in the English Court which initially was published anonymously. He is also credited as the author of *Remarks Upon a Late Disingenuous Discourse* (1678), a treatise which talks about religion and divine justice.

This by no means is an exhausting list of Andrew Marvell’s works. Apart from the ones mentioned above, there are also some relatively lesser known work. It is worth mentioning here is that because most of Marvell’s works were published posthumously, the exact years of composition of many of them is not known.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Marvell lived through the English Civil Wars, the Interregnum during which the Parliamentarians ruled, and Restoration. The dominant political ideologies of the state were different in these different phases.

Look into how Marvell’s writing also underwent ideological shifts during these different political phases.

6.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION AS A POET

Marvell is one of the most famous and most read poets of the 17th century today. However, it wasn't the case during his lifetime. Marvell, during his lifetime was known more as a political figure than as a literary one. It was mainly his prose pieces and pamphlets that found readership those days. Most of his poems were published in 1681, three years after his death. Even after the posthumous publication, his works received indifference at best. It was only in the 19th Century that Marvell's lyrics began drawing some amount of attention after Charles Lamb mentioned Marvell in one of his 1818 essays. On 31st March, 1921, on the tercentenary birth anniversary of Marvell, T.S. Eliot, one of the biggest names in 20th Century Modernist literature and criticism, released an essay on him [Marvell]. It was after the publication of this essay that Marvell began to be read and studied seriously as one of the most influential poets of the 17th Century. In the recent years, Postmodernist theory has taken up a renewed interest in the politics of Marvellian lyrics. Marvell's poetry today is often read from multiple perspectives including New-Historicist and Eco-critical readings.

6.5

6.5.1 CONTEXT OF THE POEMS

You have been prescribed three of Marvell's most celebrated and evergreen poems- "To His Coy Mistress", "The Garden" and "Upon Appleton House". In this section of the unit you will be briefly introduced to the contexts under which these poems were written.

To His Coy Mistress

"To His Coy Mistress" was published posthumously in 1681, and the date of composition of the poem therefore cannot be known. Yet, as per popular belief, this poem was written in the early 1650s, during the period when Marvell stayed at Appleton House and tutored Mary Fairfax, around the time when the English Civil Wars came to a close. It was the time when **Puritanism** was gaining grounds in England.

The political turmoil and instability of the period is perhaps what inspired Marvell to make use of the *carpe diem* philosophy in this poem, making this poem one of the most quintessential examples of **Metaphysical** poetry.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Puritanism advocated and practiced abstinence from sensual pleasures. They believed in stringent living. The *carpe-diem* philosophy, however, encourages living life to its fullest, in flamboyance and in extravagance.

Do you think Marvell was able to strike a balance between these two contradictory philosophies in his writings?

The Garden

Like “To his Coy Mistress”, “The Garden” was also published posthumously in *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681). Most scholars studying Marvell believe that it was composed somewhere in between 1650 and 1652, during the period when Marvell was serving as a tutor to Lady Fairfax. As mentioned earlier, some of Marvell’s early poems showed his support towards the Royalists. His Royalist ideology placed Marvell at a perilous position when Charles-I was executed, and the Parliamentary form of government came into power. It was during this period that, as is popularly believed, Marvell considered retiring from public life. He also considered retiring from being the tutor of Lady Fairfax. The poem “The Garden” is believed to have been written during this phase in Marvell’s life. But of course we know that Marvell did not actually retire, but shifted his allegiance to the Parliamentary cause to suit the changing times. In fact, thereafter, he went on to compose the famous “Horatian Ode” in honour of Oliver Cromwell.

Upon Appleton House, To my Lord Fairfax

“Upon Appleton House” too appeared in 1681 in *Miscellaneous Poems*. The poem is dedicated to Lord Fairfax, the father of Mary Fairfax whom Marvell tutored. The poem is titled after the estate in which the Fairfax family lived. Nun Appleton House, located in North Yorkshire, was a monastery before it was acquired by the Fairfax family. Thomas Fairfax, the dedicatee of the poem, is the second Lord Fairfax, the first being his father, William Fairfax.

6.5.2 READING THE POEMS

To His Coy Mistress

The poem has 46 lines, divided in three stanzas. The stanzas are of 20, 12, and 14 lines respectively. It is composed in iambic tetrameter, that is, each line comprises four **iambic** feet. It is a lyrical poem written as a **dramatic monologue**. The lines are arranged in rhyming couplets, that is, the last words of each pair of lines rhyme. The rhyme scheme is, therefore, **AABBC**. The poem is **sylogistic**- with two premises and a conclusion.

“To His Coy Mistress” is a Metaphysical poem where a man tries to convince his lover into an act of sexual intimacy. He says that if they had all the time in the world, he would undoubtedly have no problem in taking their relationship slow. However, as mortals, the couple has limited time on their hands. Hence, they must hurry and consummate their relationship before they run out of time, and fall victims to Death. The poem thus serves dual purpose- on the one hand, it is a love-song, and on the other hand, it philosophises upon mortality and death. Through each of the three stanzas, the poet succinctly builds up his argument as to why they should “seize the day”.

In the **first stanza**, the poet says if they had “world enough, and time,” (1) then the coyness (i.e. the shyness and the unwillingness) of the lady would not have been considered a crime. Then, he goes on to make a series of **hyperbolic** expressions as to how they would spend their time if they had the eternity at their disposal. Their love would flourish, he says, even if they were separated by distance and space. Even if the lady were to be in India, walking by the river Ganga, collecting rubies, whilst he was in his homeland, by the riversides of Humber in Hull, their love would thrive still. He then makes some Biblical **allusions**, and says that he would have loved and pursued her from the time of ten years before the Great Flood that Noah outlasted, and she would have the luxury to keep on refusing him till “the conversion of the Jews” (10) to Christianity. He then makes use of a **metaphor**- “vegetable love” (11) to emphasise upon how his love for the lady would grow- He says that his love for her would grow slow and steady like a vegetable patch, and would expand to become “vaster than empires” (12). He would leisurely spend a hundred years praising just the lady’s eyes, two hundred years adoring each of her breasts, and

thirty thousand years appreciating the rest of her body. He says that he would gladly have dedicated “an age at least to every part” (17). And only in the last age before the end of the world, as prophesied in the bible, will “show your heart”, i.e., the lady would have the luxury of revealing the intentions of her heart only before the end of the world. The poet ends the stanza by asserting that “For, Lady, you deserve this state;/Nor would I love you at lower rate.” (19-20) In other words, he expresses his adoration for the lady by stating that she deserves to be loved and celebrated in this magnanimous way, and he would not have given her anything lesser, had they the luxury of time.

The **second stanza** of the poem begins with a “but”, and brings the readers back from the ideal but unattainable state of the courtship to the reality where time is finite, and swiftly passing by. The poet talks about the transient nature of life, and says that though he would want nothing better than to pursue his mistress in an unhurried manner, morbid thoughts about the inevitability of death always lurks at the back of his mind: “But at the back I always hear/Time’s winged chariot hurrying near.” Here, the term “time’s winged Chariot” is an allusion to Roman mythology. As per mythology, Apollo, the Sun god rides a chariot called Helios across the sky every day. Here the figures of Apollo and Helios are used to indicate the passage of time. From the exuberant tone in the first stanza, it switches to a bleak and miserable one in the second stanza where the poet talks about death. He says that the mistress’s beauty would “shall no more be found” (25) as she gradually ages and eventually dies. The poet says that the persuasive song of her lover will not reach her when she is lying alone in her grave- “in thy marble vault” (26). Once she is dead, all her “quaint honour” (29) will “turn to dust”, and it will only be the worms crawling upon her carcass that will try to devour her “long-preserved virginity”. (28) by then, the poet’s desire for her too would have perished- “into ashes all my lust” (32). The stanza ends with a beautiful but eerie and cold couplet- “The grave’s a fine and private place./But none, I think, do there embrace.” (31/32) With these lines, the poet reinforces the tone of urgency that runs through the poem, and brings the second premise of the syllogism to an end- that death is inevitable and fast approaching, and hence they must seize the day- make the most out of the time they have, and engage in acts of sexual intimacy, before either or both of them are lying alone, in the cold privacy of their graves, with no one to warm them with embraces of love and lust.

In the **third** and concluding stanza of the poem, the tone once again shifts from being bleak to optimistic. In this stanza, the poet the philosophy of carpe-diem is once again reiterated. You may notice here that the stanza begins with a “now”, and the word is repeated two more times in the subsequent lines. The use of the word “now” thrice- in line 33, 37, and 38, consolidates the philosophy of carpe-diem. The poet makes use of a **simile**- he compares the “youthful hue” (33) of the lady with the “morning dew” (34). By this point of the poem, the poet has assumed that his coy mistress succumbed to his passionate persuasions, and has consented to engage in acts of sexual intimacy with him. With a tone of urgency, the poet tells her that while her youth is still in its prime, and her “willing soul” (35) is ablaze with desire, they must “sport us while we may” (38) like “amorous birds of prey” (38). They must yield to one another, and devour time before time devours them. He talks about uniting their love and passion for one another and their strength into a ball that will tear through “the iron gates of life.” (44), ie, their love and desire for one another shall enable them to overcome the struggles of life. The poem ends in a hopeful note where Marvell states that “Thus, though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still, yet we will make him run.” (45-46) In other words, even though the couple cannot pause time, they can make time fly by merrily by indulging in their amorous adventure.

SAQ

What literary devices have been used in “To His Coy Mistress”? Give examples from the poem. (50 words)

What does “Time’s winged chariot” mean? (20 words)

Marvell’s poem is in the form of a syllogism. There are two premises and one conclusion. What are these two premises, and what is the conclusion? (30 words)

The Garden

“The Garden” is considered to be one of the most complex poems in the Marvellian corpus. It is a poem of 72 lines, divided into nine stanzas, with each stanza being of eight lines. The lines in the stanza are divided into four rhyming **heroic couplets**. The rhyme scheme of the poem is AABBCDD. The poem is complex because it is Romantic in its expression, metaphysical in its use of language, and also classical in its use of rhyme and rhythm. It is a poem that is rich in **symbolism**. The poem draws from the long and rich tradition of garden poems which even includes compositions of classical poets like Virgil and Horace. While Horace saw gardens as a spot for epicurean pleasures, for Virgil, gardens were sources of wisdom. In “The Garden”, the poet compares and sharply draws contrasts between nature and human society, and asserts that only in nature can one find tranquillity and completeness in the true sense.

The **first stanza** begins with Marvell wittily expressing his disdain for the busy life of men. He says, “How vainly men themselves amaze/To win the Palm, The Oak, or Bays” (1-2) Here, palm symbolizes the military virtues, oak symbolizes civic virtues, and bays symbolize poetic virtues. Collectively, they symbolize the public life of men. Marvell criticizes how men, throughout their lives, pursue shallow victories and achievements which only offer “short and narrow verged shade” (4)- that is temporary joys, while neglecting the pursuit of nature. He says that these pursuits are only “crowned from a single herb or tree” (4), but retirement brings the entire garden- “all flow’rs and all trees” (7) to us. Retirement brings one closer to nature. And only in nature is woven “the garlands of repose” (8)

In the **second stanza**, Marvell **personifies** quietness and innocence. He calls Quiet to be fair, (9) and addresses Innocence as his sister (10), and says that after much searching for the longest time in wrong places, has he found them. He admits being misled into believing that quietness and innocence can be found “In busy companies of men.” (12). He metaphorically compares retreat to the garden with a divine experience by calling plants to be sacred (13). In the concluding couplet he contrasts the chaos of social life with the tranquillity in private life, and says, “Society is all but rude,/ To this delicious solitude.” (15-16). After spending a considerable span of time amidst people, he has come to the realization that society is indeed rude, whilst solitude is “delicious” in the sense that it offers peace and relief.

The **third stanza** finds Marvell vehemently declaring that no other colour, “no white nor red was ever seen/ So am’rous as this lovely green.” (17-18). Red and white are the colours that poets most frequently use to draw **imageries** of love, lust and passion. But for Marvell, more than the usual reds and whites, it is the green (indicating nature) that is more sexually appealing. In lines 19 to 22, Marvell ridicules and disapproves of “fond lovers” (19) who etch their beloved’s name on trees. He calls such lovers cruel, and says that these young lovers, overridden with passion, do not realize that the beauty of nature is by far superior to the beauty of their mistresses – “Little, alas, they know or heed/ How far these beauties hers exceed!” (21-22).

In the **fourth stanza**, Marvell asserts that once man tires of his materialistic pursuits, when the vigour of youth abandons him, he seeks haven in Nature. Even the gods are no different:

When we have run our passion’s heat

Love hither makes retreat.

The gods, that mortal beauty chase,

Still in a tree that end their race. (25-28)

He then alludes to the mythological figures of Apollo, Daphne, Pan, and Syrinx. Apollo turned his lover, Daphne, into a laurel, and Pan turned Syrinx into a reed. This mythological evocation is done to establish that fulfilment lies not in the pursuit of women, but in the pursuit of the “Garden”.

In the **fifth stanza**, the poet talks about the pleasures he enjoyed in the garden. The stanza is replete with fruit-imagery. A number of delectable fruits, ripe and juicy, have been mentioned here, giving a rather exotic touch to Marvell’s garden experience. He narrates how “ripe apples dropped about my [Marvell’s] head” (33), the “luscious clusters of the vine” (34) oozed wine into his mouth, the “nectarine and curious peach” (37) landed on his hands on their own, and how he stumbled upon melons as he walked in the garden. Furthermore, he narrates how he falls on the grass, “ensnar’d with flow’rs” (40). The pristine and abundant fruitfulness in Marvell’s garden reminds one of the biblical Garden of Eden, and the Marvell undergoes an exquisite sensual experience in the bounty of the garden.

STOP TO CONSIDER

In the fifth stanza, we find depictions of how epicurean pleasures in the form of exotic fruits, flowers and herbs come to the poet easily effortlessly and abundantly. The imagery in this stanza is hyperbolic and far-fetched?

Do you think Marvell, in this stanza, was satirical in his depiction of his experience in the garden?

In the **sixth and seventh stanzas**, Marvell continues to uphold his argument about the superiority of nature over society by talking about how the garden has not only ensnared his senses, but has also enriched his mind. While his physical body and senses were immersed in the pleasurable experiences in the garden, his mind had also reaped its own share of benefits from the garden. Once away from the cacophony of society, the poet's mind "withdraws into its happiness" (42)- in other words, the poet has come to the realization that once one disengages from the busy social routines, the person is exposed to a new kind of happiness and tranquillity in his/her own company. He metaphorically compares the mind to an ocean (43) and expresses how creative vistas are opened in seclusion (45-46). The creative mind goes on to "annihilating all that's made/ To a green thought in a green shade." (47-48) This stanza brings out metaphysical aspects of the open where the poet philosophizes that the human mind contains its own unique world and garden within it. The seventh stanza continues the use metaphysical imagination where the visualizes the soul's flight into the endless universe: "Casting the body's best aside/ My soul into the boughs does glide." (51-52). He compares the soul to be "like a bird" (53) that is preparing for a "longer flight" (55)

The **eighth stanza** contains allusion to the biblical story of Origin of Man. Marvell explicitly refers to Adam in the Garden of Eden who "there walk'd without a mate" (58). Despite being all by himself, Adam, in the Garden of Eden was not lonely, Marvell claims. Instead, according to Marvell, to be living alone in Paradise is twice as paradisiacal- "Two paradises 'twere in one / to live in paradise alone." (63-64). This stanza highlights how retreating from public life and society doesn't induce loneliness or sadness in man, but does rather the opposite.

The **ninth** and the final stanza of the poem ends in a truly metaphysical fashion where the poet imagines the Garden as an independent, alternate universe which was by a “skilful gard’ner drew” (65). This alternate and private universe, with its own “fragrant zodiac” has its own timeline. Unlike the human society, this universe has “sweet and wholesome hours” (71). Here, there is no frenzy, no clocks. Instead, “th’ industrious bee/Computes its time.” (71) Existence in this ideal universe is blissful, and its inhabitant(s) spend their time in the company of “herbs and flow’rs” (72)

In a truly metaphysical fashion, Andrew Marvell, in “The Garden”, makes use of conceit, wit, and far-fetched imagination. A fine balance between intellect and emotion has been maintained throughout the poem. Marvell makes use of this theme of a garden as an escape from human society in some of his other works as well, including the poem “The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn” and “The Emigrants in the Bermudas”. The garden-theme is explored in his Mower poems as well.

SAQ

Why does Marvell say that “solitude” is “delicious”? (30 words)

What is the significance of the bird metaphor in the 7th stanza of the poem? (40 words)

Do you think the garden is a metaphor? If yes, what does the garden represent? (30 words)

Upon Appleton House, To My Lord Fairfax

“Upon Appleton House” is a **country house poem**. It is a long poem consisting 97 octave stanzas. Each stanza has eight octosyllabic lines. The lines are written in iambic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme is AABBCDD. For analytical purposes, the poem is divided into six sections. The sections have been discussed below:

Stanza 1-10: In this section, we find a depiction of the architecture of the house. Marvell says that unlike many estates owned by the rich and aristocratic families which have a loud and extravagant architecture, the Appleton House is humble, and of a “sober frame” (1). The estate is an abode for “sober Age and Mind” (28), according to Marvell.

Stanza 11-35: In this section, the poet talks about the history of the estate. He narrates the story of Isabella Thwaite, a nun who lived in the Appleton Priory, before it was demolished and turned into a private property. He calls Isabella “the blooming virgin Thwates/ Fair beyond Measure” (90-91) and describes how she “Spent the Summer Sunns/Discoursing with the Suttle Nuns” (93-94) Marvell narrates how the nuns live a pious life, abstaining from all kinds of sexual pleasures in order to uphold their virtues as god’s brides- “... our chast Lamps we hourly trim/ Lest the great Bridegroom find them dim.” (115-116). William Fairfax, the father of Thomas Fairfax, wanted to rescue Isabella from the nunnery and marry her. Lord Fairfax is convinced that the nuns have brainwashed and misled Isabella away from her beautiful future with him as Lady Fairfax- “The Nuns smooth Tongue has suckt her in.” (192). Marvell goes ahead with his critique of Christianity in this poem, and calls the nuns “Hypocrite Witches” (197). He says that such religious institutions cannot hold people imprisoned forever- “But sure those Buildings last not long/ Founded by Folly, kept by Wrong.” (217-218) The section also contains descriptions of the Dissolution of the Appleton Nunnery by the Fairfaxian raid.

Stanza 36-46: The section begins with the a union between Isabella and Lord Fairfax- “From that blest Bed the Heroe came/ Whom France and Poland yet does fame.” (281-282) This union led to the birth of Thomas Fairfax, the great hero of the English Civil War who would reside in the Appleton house post his retirement. Then we find a depiction of the gardens, the flowers, trees and herbs in the estate. The section also contains military references to showcase Thomas Fairfax’s prowess as a war-hero. He calls Appleton House to a flower-fort

because Fairfax has fortified his estate and its garden. The section also finds Marvell lamenting about the sorry political state of England.

Stanza 47-60: In this section, the narrative of the poem shifts from the story of the Fairfaxes to a depiction of the fields and meadows around the Appleton estate. From the flower-fort, one could see the meadows. From the Appleton fortress, people down in the meadows appeared as tiny as grasshoppers. He also depicts how a flood ravages the meadows. This, scholars believe, is a political **allegory** for the war-ravaged England. A mower-narrative is also found here where the mowers are seen massacring the grass in the meadows. The mowers are perhaps representative of the Parliamentary Army.

Stanza 61-81: In these stanzas, the poet talk about the woods and rivers around the estate. The woods are seen as a safe haven. The section is replete with imageries of birds.

Stanza 82-96: These stanzas are mostly about Mary Fairfax whom Marvell began tutoring when she was about twelve years old. He shows Maria in an almost divine light. Maria enjoying herself in the gardens of Appleton House is reminiscent of Eve in the Garden of Eden. The plants, flowers, animals, and birds all reciprocate to Maria's pleasant presence in the garden. The grass provides a carpet for her to walk upon, the flowers wreath her crown, and the water in the rivers reflect her image like a mirror. The presence of Maria has turned the Appleton House into a "Domestick Heaven". In Stanza 92, he compares Mary to mistletoe. He says that she is not the "Fairfacian oak" (732), i.e. the male heir, but is a "sprig of Misleto" (721) which will eventually be cut of by some Priest for some noble purpose- in other words, she will eventually be given away in matrimony. In the meantime, "the Fields, Springs, Bushes, Flowr's" (745) find ways to enjoy in her company.

Besides talking about the estate, the poem also meditates upon politics and religion. Unlike in "The Garden" where Marvell advocates retirement from public life, in "Upon Appleton House, Marvell is in favour of active engagement in social life and activities.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Based on Marvell's depiction of the Appleton House and its history, do you think Marvell enjoyed his stay there?

Do you think it is possible that Marvell had amorous feelings for Mary Fairfax?

6.6 SUMMING UP

- Andrew Marvell is a 17th century English poet, writer, and politician.
- He is known for his lyric poetry and political satires.
- He belongs to the Metaphysical school of poetry.
- There is much enigma, uncertainties and contradictions surrounding his life.
- Most of his works were published posthumously in 1681.
- “To His Coy Mistress” is Marvell’s most anthologized poem. It is a metaphysical poem which manifests the carpe-diem tradition. Here, a lover is trying to coax his shy and virgin mistress into sexual intimacy.
- “The Garden” draws from a long tradition of garden poems. In this poem, the poet talks about how retreating from human society into solitude leads one to paradisiacal experiences.
- “Upon Appleton House” praises Lord Thomas Fairfax, a war veteran. It also talks about the corrupting influence of religion and the political conditions of England, and celebrates the beauty and virtues of Mary Fairfax.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Comment on Marvell’s use of literary devices.
- Elaborate upon the theme of “time” in “To His Coy Mistress.”
- Compare the poet’s attitude towards society in the poems “The Garden” and “Upon Appleton House”.
- What are the main themes that you can identify in Marvell’s poems?
- Comment on Marvell’s use of Metaphysical conceit in his poems.

6.7 GLOSSARY

- **Puritanism:** A religious reform movement that took place in the Church of England in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Puritans sought to “purify” the English Christianity from the influences of Roman Catholicism. In Roman Catholicism, the head of the hierarchy is the Pope. The Puritans sought to do away with this “popery” or “popish idolatry”. They believed that they had direct covenant with

god, and the Pope is but a corrupt influence. The Puritans, also called Roundheads, followed high moral principles like self-control, moderation, abstinence from sensual pleasures, gluttony, epicurean lifestyles etc. Oliver Cromwell was a Puritan

- **Carpe-diem:** A Latin term that means “pluck the day” or “seize the day” which is used to mean to express the idea that one should enjoy life to the fullest whilst one can. The term became popular after Horace used it in his Odes in 23BC. In his injunction to the Odes, Horace says “carpe diem quam minimum credula postero”, which means “pluck the day, trusting the next day as little as is possible.”
- **Metaphysical Poetry:** A kind of poetry written by a group of 17th century English poets. This kind of poetry is known for its use of conceits, complex intellectuality and emotions, paradoxes, and far-fetched images and symbols. John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan and Abraham Cowley are some of the best known metaphysical poets.
- **Syllogism:** An argument where the conclusion is derived on the basis of two premises. It is a type of deductive reasoning.
- **Iamb:** A metrical foot used in poetry where there are two syllables- an unstressed syllable, followed by a stressed syllable.
- **Dramatic monologue:** A type of lyrical poetry where the poet or the speaker addresses a silent listener. Dramatic Monologue is also called a Persona Poem. Poet Robert Browning is best known for his use of the Dramatic Monologue.
- **Hyperbole:** Comes from a Greek word meaning “excess”. In the context of literature, it is a figure of speech that makes use of deliberate exaggerations in order to establish a point or to emphasize upon something. Example: I am so hungry that I could eat an elephant.
- **Allusion:** A figure of speech that carries reference to a person, event, statement, literary work, etc. with which the reader is presumed to be familiar with. It allows a writer to incorporate deeper meaning into his work. However, allusions are effective only if they are recognized and understood by the reader. Otherwise, it becomes redundant and misleading.
- **Metaphor:** Comes from the Greek word to mean “to transfer”. It is a figure of speech where a comparison or association between two different and distinct concepts/things/events etc is done without using a connective word to link the two concepts/things. Example: The child is a lamb.

- **Simile:** Like metaphor, a simile is also a figure of speech which compares or forms associations between two different and distinct concepts/things/events etc. The difference between the two is that while in the case of a metaphor, no connective words are used, in the case of a simile, connective words such as “like” and “as” are used. Example: The child is like a lamb.
- **Heroic Couplet:** It is a rhyming couplet that is written in iambic pentameter. Geoffrey Chaucer, who used heroic couplet in *Legend of Good Women* is usually credited as the pioneer of the heroic couplet. But it was Dryden and Pope who popularized and perfected the heroic couplet. Heroic couplets are usually used in narrative poetry that deals with heroes or heroism as its primary themes.
- **Symbolism:** A literary device which makes use of symbols. A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. A symbol is connotative of other meanings besides its literal and most obvious meaning.
- **Personification:** A figure of speech in which human characteristics are bestowed upon something that is non-human.
- **Imagery:** A figure of speech in which figurative language is used to evoke images in the mind of the readers. Imagery is not limited to visual representations also, but also includes the conjuring of emotions and sensations through the use of language.
- **Country house poem:** a poem where the poet praises his/her patron by appreciating the house/estate of the patron. It grew somewhat into prominence in the 17th century. Ben Jonson’s “To Penhurst” (1616) was mostly used as the model for writing country house poems.
- **Allegory:** A literary device where a narrative is used to represent or talk about some other event or idea.

6.8 Reference and Suggested reading

- Berthoff, A.E. *The Resolved Soul: A Study of Marvell’s Major Poems*. (1970)
- Craze, Michael. *The Life and Lyrics of Andrew Marvell*. (1979)
- Hyman, Lawrence W. “Politics and Poetry in Andrew Marvell” (1958)

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Unit 7

ANDREW MARVELL: “TO HIS COY MISTRESS”, “THE GARDEN”, “UPON APPLETON HOUSE” (SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT)

7.1. OBJECTIVE

7.2 INTRODUCTION

7.3 SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS

7.4 CONTEMPORARIES OF ANDREW MARVEL

7.5 SOME IMPORTANT POEMS BY ANDREW MARVELL

7.6 CRITICS ON ANDREW MARVEL

7.7 SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO PROBABLE QUESTIONS

7.8 SUMMING UP

7.9 REFERENCE AND SUGGESTED READING

7.1. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this chapter is to enable the learner to place Andrew Marvel in his socio-political milieu. Upon reading this chapter, the learner will know more about Marvel, his place amongst his contemporaries, and will be able to have a more nuanced approach to and understanding of Marvel’s corpus and his distinctive styles and preoccupations. The unit will also introduce the learners to some of the other important poems of Marvel apart from the ones prescribed. The chapter will also introduce the learner to some of the literary criticism surrounding Andrew Marvell. Suggested answers to some probable questions will also be discussed in this unit.

7.2. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the 17th Century English Literature, Andrew Marvell is one of the biggest names. The very essence of the age is captured in

Marvell's work. During his lifetime, Marvell witnessed the English Civil Wars, Interregnum, and Restoration, and the impacts of these events are reflected in his works. In order to understand Marvell's writings, it therefore becomes essential that we have a basic understanding of these political events that shaped the course of history in England. So in the subsequent portion of the unit you will be introduced to some of the landmark historical events.

7.3 SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS

- **English Civil Wars:** The English Civil Wars are a series of three intra-state wars that were fought in the British Isles from 1642 to 1651. Though the causes of the war were multiple and multi-layered, the most primary causes were regarding issues of governance of England and religious differences. There were two dominant groups in this war- the Royalists and the Parliamentarians. The Royalists supported the monarchy of Charles-I and his successors and the Parliamentarians supported a Parliamentary form of government. The Covenanters in Scotland and the Confederates of Ireland also contributed substantially in these wars.

King Charles-I ascended the throne in 1625, and within a few years of his coronation, there grew discontent and disagreements between the king and the Parliament regarding the political, military, economic and religious policies of the state. Charles-I believed in the "Divine Right of King", and accordingly, he began running the country on his own, without taking into consideration the opinion and advice of the members of the Parliament, leaving them feeling excluded from governance. King Charles-I also began arbitrarily levying taxes on the masses which burdened the common people and enraged them. Furthermore, it was felt that Charles-I favoured the Catholics, even though the Church of England was Protestant. His marriage to Princess Henrietta of France, who was a follower of Roman Catholicism and the introduction of 'popish' practices in the Church of England created mistrust for the king in the minds of the populace.

In the *First Civil War* that broke out in August 1642, the Royalists and the Parliamentarians (also known as the Cavaliers and Roundheads respectively) fought for the control of the country. Though initially the Royalists were gaining grounds, eventually, the Parliamentarians, led

by Oliver Cromwell won the war. In June 1645, the New Model Army of the Parliamentarians, led by Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell, defeated the Royalist Army in the decisive Battle of Naseby.

Though the Royalists were defeated in the First Civil War, King Charles and his Royalist followers continued to strive for regaining power. They capitalized on differences in the religious and political ideologies of his opponents, and gained the sympathies and support of some of them. In 1648, there occurred a series of Royalist uprisings in different places across England and Wales. These uprisings marked the beginning of the *Second Civil War*. The uprisings were all brought down by the New Model Army of the Parliamentarians. As a consequence of these uprisings, the Parliament brought King Charles-I to trial for treason for levying war against the Parliament and the people. He was found guilty, and was executed on 30 January 1649 at Whitehall. King Charles remains the only English monarch to be executed on grounds of treason. After the execution of Charles-I, England was declared a Republican Commonwealth which was governed by the Parliament and the Council of State.

The *Third Civil War*, also known as the Anglo-Scottish War, was the final conflict in the Battle of the Three Kingdoms. Charles-II, the son of Charles-I, was exiled from England, but was crowned as the King of Scotland, and tried to reclaim England. In 1650, he signed a treaty with the Covenanters of Scotland where he agreed to introduce and impose Presbyterianism in the Church of England in exchange of the Scottish Army. Upon knowing this, the Parliamentary government of England, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, launched an attack on Scotland, and defeated the Covenanters in Dunbar and marched northwards towards Fife. Meanwhile, Charles-II, aided by the Scots-Royalist army, invaded England, but was defeated by Cromwell in the Battle of Worcester in September 1651. Charles-II narrowly escaped captured, and was forced back into exile, and with this victory of Cromwell, the Third Civil War came to an end, and Scotland was merged into the Commonwealth along with England and Ireland.

- **Interregnum:** The word “interregnum” means “between reigns”. In the history of Great Britain, the period between the execution of Charles-I in January 1649 to the restoration of Charles-II to the throne of England in May 1660 is generally regarded as the Interregnum. It is the period during which there was no king on the throne of England. During this period, England became a Republic.

The monarchy and the House of Lords were abolished and the Council of the States replaced the House of Lords. The Council and the Rump Parliament, led by Oliver Cromwell, ran the state during this period.

- **Restoration:** Restoration refers to that point in the timeline of English history when monarchy was restored in England. After over 11 years of Republican rule, on 14th May, 1660, Charles-II of the House of Stuart was formally reinstated to the throne of England. The term “Restoration” is mostly used to cover the period from 1660 to 1688. This span of time includes the reign of Charles-II from 1660 to 1685, and the short reign of his brother, James II, from 1685 to 1688. However, in certain contexts, the word “Restoration” is used to refer to the whole period of the late Stuart reign, right up to the death of Queen Anne and the accession of George-I of the House of Hanover in 1741. After the death of Oliver Cromwell, his son, Richard Cromwell became the leader of the Republican England. But Richard lacked the leadership skills of his father, and this bred discontent amongst the nobles of England who eventually began plotting to remove Richard Cromwell and reinstate Charles-II as the ruler of England. Thus the seeds of Restoration were sown. Once Charles-II ascended the throne, he sought to avenge the execution of his father. He ordered Oliver Cromwell’s corpse to be dug up. The head of the corpse was then severed and hung on a spike and put to display at Westminster Hall for around twenty years.

With the reinstating of Charles-II, many of the Puritan restrictions were lifted. The Church of England was once again made the National Church of England. The theatres that were closed down during the proctorship of Oliver Cromwell were reopened. In London, two theatre companies- The Kings and The Dukes Company were established, and for the first time in English history, women were allowed to perform on stage. Modes of entertainment like music, dance, drama etc began to flourish once again. Charles-II also founded the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge in by signing a royal charter in 1660. Giants in the field of science like Robert Boyle, John Evelyn, and Sir Issac Newton were members of the Royal Society.

In 1685, following the death of Charles-II, his brother, James-II succeeded him, and reigned up to 1688 when the arrival of William of Orange from Holland to England caused James-II to flee. Thereafter began the co-monarchy of William of Orange and his wife, Queen Mary II.

In the context of literature, the term “Restoration” is, for most parts, a matter of convention, and the dates differ across genres. In case of drama, Restoration is generally believed to have lasted till 170, while for Restoration poetry, the period considered to be up to 1666, and in the case of prose, it is usually believed to have ended in 1688. During the period of Restoration, literatures that are extremely different and in contrast with each other was produced. For example, we have works of high seriousness and piousness like Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and something as supposedly “obscene” works like the Earl of Rochester’s *Sodom* written in the same period. During the Restoration period, there emerged two political groups- the Whigs and the Tories. Both these groups supported and patronized men of high literary abilities which led to the production of a large number of literary works of great merit. Restoration literature is best known for its poetry. Poetry was the most popular form of literature, During this period, lyric poetry, historical poetry, and epic poetry developed. In the world of theatre and drama, comedies rose to prominence. A new literary movement- the Neo Classical Movement also gained momentum during this period.

7.4 CONTEMPORARIES OF ANDREW MARVEL

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) lived and wrote in the 17th Century England. Marvell’s lifetime, due to the many political shifts of power that took place within the span, fell under three different political eras or periods-

- **Caroline Era** (1625-1649)- the era where Charles-I ruled England,
- **Cromwellian era** (1649-1660)- the era where a Parliamentary form of Government, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell and his son Richard Cromwell, ran the country.
- **Era of Restoration** (1660-1688)- the era that followed after the restoration of Charles-II to throne.

During these periods, three predominant schools of poetry emerged- **Cavalier Poetry**, **Puritan Poetry**, and **Metaphysical Poetry**. Each of these schools had their own ideological, religious, and political allegiances and affinities, and produced some of the stalwarts of English poetry.

The Cavalier Poets were mostly aristocrat gentlemen who were Royalists. They supported the reign of King Charles-I, and their poetry

reflected their affinity with the royals. The Cavaliers chiefly wrote lyrical poetry that dealt with themes of love and war. **Robert Herrick** (1591-1674), **Richard Lovelace** (1618-1658), **John Suckling** (1609-1642), and **Thomas Carew** (1595-1640) are some of the most well known Cavalier poets.

Amongst the Puritan poets, the most well known are **John Milton** (1608-1674), **Anne Bradstreet** (1612-1672), **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691), **John Dryden** (1631-1700), **John Winthrop** (1588-1649), and **Edward Taylor** (1642-1729). The Puritans were believers of leading simple, righteous, and pious lives, and their poetry reflected their beliefs. Puritan poetry dealt with religious and spiritual themes. Puritan poets relied heavily on Biblical allusions. They favoured “plain language”, as opposed to ornate languages adorned with complex figures of speech like metaphors.

The metaphysical poets are a group of poets who are known for their intellectual prowess. Their poetry is characterized by the use of figurative language, paradoxes and conceits. Their poetry is chiefly lyrical, and contain philosophical explorations. The themes of metaphysical poetry include amorous, spiritual and satirical. **John Donne** (1572-1631), **Andrew Marvell** (1621-1678), **George Herbert** (1593-1633), **Richard Crashaw** (1613-1649), **Henry Vaughan** (1622-1695) **Abraham Cowley** (1618-1667) and **John Cleveland** (1613-1658) are amongst the best know metaphysical poets of the century.

Though Andrew Marvell is primarily classified as a Metaphysical poet, studies have revealed that many of his works also contain Cavalier and Puritan strains.

7.5 SOME IMPORTANT POEMS BY ANDREW MARVELL

Andrew Marvell’s poetic corpus is huge. In the previous unit, three of Andrew Marvell’s most celebrated poems have been discussed at length. These are “To his Coy Mistress”, “The Garden”, and “Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax”. Besides these poems, there are some also other poems which bring forth the poetic genius. Some of them will be discussed in this section of the unit.

- **The Cromwellian poems:** Marvell wrote a number of poems that show his allegiance and service to the cause of the Proctorate. He wrote a number of poems showing his allegiance to Cromwell. The

most famous amongst them is “**An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland**”. This poem chronicles the victorious return of Oliver Cromwell from Ireland in 1649. The poem is known for its contrasting ideology wherein Marvell while appreciating Cromwell’s Puritan politics, also simultaneously expresses his sympathies for the executed King Charles-I. This poem made it difficult to identify Marvell’s personal political leanings- whether he actually supported the Parliamentarians or the Royalists remains ambiguous to this day. The poem is written in the form of a Horatian ode. Each stanza has four lines- a rhyming couplet in iambic tetrameter, followed by a rhyming couplet in iambic trimeter. When the Proctorate completed one year, Marvell wrote an panegyric comprising two hundred lines in heroic couplets, called “**The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness, the Lord Proctor**”. In this poem, Marvell makes use of familiar analogies like comparing Cromwell with the Sun-god and Amphion. The poem is studied for its use of grand imageries and comparisons. “**A Poem Upon the Death of His late Highness the Lord Proctor**” was the elegy that Marvell wrote upon the death Oliver Cromwell. In order to express his grief, in this poem, he evokes lines from Shakespeare’s Henry IV.

- **The Royalist Poems:** Marvell’s politics is of an ambiguous nature, and is often laden with shifting allegiances. Some of his early poems like “**An Elegy Upon the Death of My Lord Francis Villiers**”, “**Upon the death of Lord Hastings**” and “**To His Noble Friend, Mr. Richard Lovelace**” places him amongst the Royalists who were staunchly opposing Cromwell.

- **The Definition of Love:** This poem has eight stanzas with four alternately rhyming octosyllabic lines each stanza. In the poem, Marvell explores the nature of his love for his beloved. He calls his love to be of a rare birth because “It was begotten by Despair/ Upon impossibility.” Marvell develops the poem in the form of a logical argument where he reasons out why his beloved and he cannot unite. Marvell’s metaphysical wit finds expression in this poem, and it is often compared to John Donne’s “The Good Morrow” and “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”. Just like Donne makes use of the famous compass metaphor to compare the souls of two lovers, Marvell, in this poem, compares his lover and himself with the two

poles of the Earth- the North Pole and the South Pole- which can never meet and be together.

- **The Unfortunate Lover:** This poem compliments “The Definition of Love”. It has eight stanzas, each stanza containing eight lines. It presents an account of the misfortunes that befall a man from before his birth to his death. The man was born in that unfortunate moment when his mother was caught in a shipwreck. He was raised by guardians who were cruel to him. As a young man, he fell in love with a lady who too did not reciprocate his love. Marvell compares the plight of the unfortunate lover with that of Ajax, the Greek mythological hero who had to face the wrath and hostility of the gods. The poem is replete with vivid imageries of infant lovers, of tempestuous shipwrecks, and of the lover lying dead, soaking in his own blood.

- **The Mower Poems:** A series of four pastorals are together known as the Mower Poems of Andrew Marvell. The Mower- Poems include “**The Mower, against Gardens**”, “**Damon the Mower**”, “**Mower to the Glo-worms**” and “**The Mower’s Song**”. In the first Mower poem, we come across a modern “luxurious man” who harms, manipulates, and misuses nature. He tampers and violates nature by trying to create unnatural and hybrid species out of the natural resources. Marvell says that just like man exploits a brothel for his own pleasures and gratification, man also exploits nature for his own advantage. In the second Mower poem, we come across the character of Damon the Mower, singing about his lady love, Juliana. Marvell says that his sorrows are as sharp as the scythe he is holding, and his hopes are just as withered as the grass he is mowing. Marvell compares Damon’s emotional turmoil with the summer heat Damon is exposed to while working. In the third Mower pastoral, we come across Damon talking to the glow-worms whom he addresses as “living lamps”. He appreciates the glow-worms for providing light in the fields, but also laments that the light is wasted- for he is unable to concentrate in the task of mowing, and is preoccupied by the thoughts of Julianna instead. Here, we come across Marvell’s use of metaphysical conceit once again where he compares the passion burning in the hearts of unrequited lovers with “foolish fires”. The poem ends in an expression of pain where the poet says that no matter how well the glow-worms light up the path, they will not be able to

lead him to Julianna. In the fourth and final entry to the Mower poems, we find Damon expressing his lamentations over his unrequited love for Julianna. The poem reflects Damon's tussle with his love and resentment for Julianna for being unreceptive to his love.

- **The Coronet:** This poem alludes to the Biblical story of the crucifixion of Christ. The speaker of this poem, a shepherd, says that the crown of thorns that was placed on Christ's head has been there for way too long, and he wishes to replace it with a coronet of flowers. He goes about collecting flowers from "every mead" and even went on to dismantle the flowers that "once adorned by shepherdesses head". He then realizes that his act is indeed foolish because his act will only lead to Christ's divine crown being replaced by his earthly coronet, and will only "debase" the glory of the Lord. In a truly metaphysical fashion, Marvell uses the metaphor of the garland that the shepherd is weaving to represent the poem that he is writing. Thus, the coronet actually symbolizes the poem itself. The structure of this poem is complex with Marvell drawing from Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets.

- **Character of Holland:** This is a satirical poem that Marvell wrote during the reign of Charles-II. In this poem, Marvell tries to uphold English nationalism while slandering that of the Dutch. The poem begins with a rather harsh statement where Marvell says "Holland, that scarce deserve the name of a Land". He goes on to say that Holland possesses nothing and has nothing that qualifies it to be a land on its own. Instead, it should be considered a mere, insignificant part of England. He also lambasts Holland for practicing religious tolerance instead of adhering to strict Protestantism. The poem is one of Marvell's most well known political satires.

- **The Last Instructions to a Painter:** This poem is regarded as Marvell's longest verse satire. The poem satirizes the circumstances that led to the Second Anglo-Dutch war of 1667 which forced the beaten Dutch to flee. It is also a polemic attack on the corrupt and debauched practices of the court. This poem is considered to be an influence in Alexander Pope's Dunciad, even though Marvell and Pope had very different political visions.

7.6 CRITICS ON ANDREW MARVELL

Andrew Marvell happens to be one of the most frequently read, studied, and critiqued poets of 17th century England. Thereby, it goes without saying that a lot of study has been done on Marvell and his poetic corpus by different scholars across different periods of time, and on different perspectives. In this section of the unit, the learner will be introduced to some of the critical works on Andrew Marvell.

T.S. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) is one of the most important studies in genre. He begins by emphasizing on the difficulties of defining metaphysical poetry, and goes on to talk about the different metaphysical poets of the 17th century England. As a mark of celebration of the birth tercentenary of Marvell, Eliot also wrote another essay called "Andrew Marvell" (1921) in which he discussed Marvell's poetic style at length. He says that Marvell's best works are an outcome of the Latin influence on him. According to Eliot, "Out of that high style developed from Marlowe through Jonson, the seventeenth century separated two qualities: wit and magniloquence... The actual poetry of Marvell, of Cowley, of Milton, and of others, is a blend [of wit and magniloquence] in varying proportions." Marvell, according to Eliot, could make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.

Philip Larkin, a celebrated English poet himself, also talked extensively about Andrew Marvell. In his essay "The Changing Face of Andrew Marvell", Larkin refers to Eliot's essays and says that Eliot's views on Marvell, supported by the likes of Ezra Pound and F.R. Leavis, placed Marvell as a favourite subject of twentieth century criticism. Larkin, in his essay, establishes how, critics across different centuries have read and analysed Marvell through different lenses-while the 18th century predominantly saw Marvell as a satirist, the nineteenth century as a pastoral poet, the twentieth century saw Marvell as a master of camouflaged meanings and ambiguities. The ambiguities laden in Marvell's poetry has been a matter of debate and contestation amongst twentieth century critics: "Certainly critics quarrelled with critics on what could or should be read into Marvell's lines: Leavis with Bateson, Douglas Bush with Cleanth Brooks, Pierre Legouis with William Empson... The whole situation was summarized by Cleanth Brooks with an irony as devastating as it was unintentional: "Marvell was too good a poet to resolve the ambiguity.'" (Larkin 152)

William Empson, a twentieth century critic, best known for putting forward the seven types of ambiguities, wrote an essay called “The Marriage of Marvell” (1938) which was a part of his book *Using Biography*. In this essay, he sought to establish that Mary Marvell, who claimed to be Andrew Marvell’s widow was actually an imposter. At best, Empson feels, it was a marriage of convenience, for in Marvell, Empson saw indications of homosexuality. Empson was one of the pioneers who set the pitch for queer study of Marvell’s works by foregrounding the homosexual subtexts in Marvell’s Mower poems. This line of study was later on carried forward by many including **Paul Hammond**, who, in his essay “Marvel’s Sexuality” (1996) discusses many of Marvell’s poems and biographical details through queer lenses. He concludes by saying that “whatever may, or may not, have happened in his [Marvell’s] own private life, he took English poetry into a new territory by finding a language for the ambiguities of sexuality- including homoerotic desire.” (Dummond 117)

7.7 SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO PROBABLE QUESTIONS

In this section of the unit, some frequently asked questions on Andrew Marvell will be discussed. The hints and points provided beneath each question will help the learner in constructing answers to the given question.

a. Discuss the Marvell’s use of Metaphysical elements in his poetry.

- Marvel makes use of Metaphysical conceits
- His poems contain witty and strange comparisons.
- He deals with abstract concepts like love, religion, time, human soul, etc.
- There is a blend of rational thoughts and passionate emotions in his poems, that is, his poems have “unified sensibility”
- His poems are intellectual in nature.
- He makes use of colloquial language that can be easily understood.

b. How does Marvell treat the theme of love in his poems.

- Love is one of the predominant occupations in many of Marvell's poems.
- Many of his celebrated poems like "To his Coy Mistress", "The Definition of Love", "The Unfortunate Lover", "The Fair Singer". and the "Mower Poems" deal with issues of love.
- In many of his love poems, he drew from Petrarch.
- The poems usually contain eloquent depictions of the beloved's beauty.
- Unrequited love and disappointment in love are also frequently talked about in the love poems of Marvell.
- Marvell talks about love, in its spiritual as well as physical manifestations. For example, in "To his Coy Mistress", the sexual aspect of love serves as the central theme, whereas, in "Definition of Love", the kind of love that he talks about is rather spiritual.

c. How is "time" a significant theme in Marvell's poems?

- Marvell's treatment of time is most well highlighted in "To his Coy Mistress."
- He advocates for "carpe diem", which means "seize the day".
- Passing of time is associated with loss of opportunity and deterioration of the human body.
- In other poems like "The Garden", Marvell talks about how time as a resource, and laments that people, throughout their lives misuse this resource in pursuit of shallow pleasures and gains.

d. What are the characteristics of Marvell's poems?

- Marvell's poems are diverse in form, structure, genre, and theme. Yet, there are some traits that are common to most of his poems.
- He makes use of metaphysical conceits.
- There is duality and ambivalence of meanings in his poems.
- There is a fusion of intellect and emotions in his poems.
- Love is a core theme in his poems- be it love for a beloved, a ruler, or a nation.
- He creates Concordia discors: i.e he often brings together to opposing elements within the same framework. For example, in his "Horatian Ode", he simultaneously lauds Cromwell and praises Charles-I.
- He makes use of simple and conversational language.

7.8 SUMMING UP

- Andrew Marvell lived through the English Civil Wars, the Interregnum, and the Restoration.
- His works are reflective of the historical contexts in which he lived.
- He was a poet, satirist, dramatist, a politician, and a public servant.
- He is regarded as a Metaphysical poet, the obvious successor of John Donne.
- His poems are replete with Metaphysical conceits.
- His famous poems include “To his Coy Mistress”, “The Garden”, “Upon Appleton House”, “An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland”, “Definition of Love”, “The Unfortunate Lover”, “The Coronet”, “The Fair Singer” and the Mower Poems.
- He wrote lyrical poetry, pastorals, satires, elegies, prose and drama.
- His political allegiance shifted from being a Royalist to a Parliamentarian. Though his initial poetry was supportive of the Royalists, later on, he went on to compose poems in favour of Oliver Cromwell.
- His poems are known their intellectual themes, spiritual quest, and for their ambivalence of meanings.

7.9 REFERENCE AND SUGGESTED READING

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Unit 1

Aemilia Lanyer: The Description of Cook-Ham

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Emilia Lanyer as a Poet

1.4

1.4.1 Context of the poem

1.4.2 Reading the Poem

1.5 Critical Reception

1.6 Glossary

1.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objective:

By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- Learn about Aemilia Lanyer's poetic works
- Understand Lanyer's significance as a woman poet in Shakespeare's age
- Appreciate the poem "The Description of Cook-Ham"
- Evaluate the ideas informed in the poem.

1.2 Introduction

Aemilia Lanyer was one of the first Englishwomen to publish a volume of original verse. She has long been linked with Shakespeare as his 'beautiful but treacherous' *dark lady*. She was 18 when she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain, who was also the patron of Shakespeare's theatre company. Lanyer exalted female virtue and spirituality, she was a devotional poet, intensely conscious of her unusual status as a woman

writing of ‘divinest things’. She bodily transformed biblical sources to rewrite the place of women in history and culture, in her lengthy religious poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which was published in 1611.

Aemilia was the daughter of Venetian-born court musician Baptista Bassano and his English wife Margaret Johnson. She grew up as a member of the minor gentry who had access to the royal court and had a classical humanist education including studies in history, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy.

Stop to Consider: *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is a lengthy religious poem that talks about suffering, tyranny and the defense of women.

Check your progress: what were the time and circumstances of Lanyer’s times? How is it relevant in the poem?

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1.3 Emilia Lanyer as a Poet:

It is believed that Lanyer may have served as the music tutor to Anne Clifford, the teenage daughter of Margaret Clifford, the Countess of Cumberland, between the period of 1604-05. The Countess of Clifford was estranged from her husband before being widowed. She went on to have a lengthy and bitter battle against the society- including King James I, to claim the rightful inheritance for her daughter. It is

Margaret Clifford's political and religious views that are honored by Lanyer in her poetry. It was during Lanyer's sojourn at Cookeham—an estate leased to Margaret's brother—that she composed her 2000-line poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (at Margaret's request). The poem was printed six years later, to which Lanyer had added ten prefatory dedications to powerful female courtiers and a concluding 200-line elegiac paean (lyric poem) to the women's time at Cookeham.

Stop to Consider:

- *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, is a meditation on the Passion of Christ, which allows the poet to combine the sufferings of Christ on the Cross with those of both Margaret Clifford, who was '*plunged in waves of woe*', and the poet herself, '*clos'd up in Sorrowes cell*'.
- Lanyer writes that, just as Christ's sufferings are redeemed, so would Margaret's patience, faith, long suffering be rewarded with '*comforts from above*'.

Check your Progress: 1. What role does religion play in Lanyer's work?

2. How does Lanyer represent Margaret Clifford in her poem? Does the poet glorify her inspiration?

The central idea of the poem deals with the struggles of the Clifford women against the patriarchal system. Lanyer's narrative builds upon biblical accounts where tyrannical men like Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, who are responsible for the plight of women like Pilate's wife, the daughters of Jerusalem, the Virgin; while going through the suffering the women can only plead, cry or mourn their terrible fate. Lanyer also includes a defence of Eve, where she gives the reason for Eve's considered sin to be due to her being naïve and childlike and also her desire for knowledge, which Lanyer considered praiseworthy.

Stop to Consider:

- The poem deals with the acquittal of women, which places it under the genre of *querelle des femmes*. It means 'the woman question' a situation where a controversy is generated bringing about both attacks and defences of women.
- Lanyer's dedications are made towards powerful women of the court, that also included Queen Anne.

Check your progress: try and find out more about the men in history mentioned in Lanyer's poem.

: what are the major concerns of Lanyer that governs her writings?

1.4

1.4.1 Context of the poem

The Description of Cooke-ham is the concluding poem in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. It has a distinctively different

form and tone; it is written in rhyming couplets which differs from the main poem written in eight-line stanzas of *ottava rima*. Cooke-ham is considered to be a bittersweet ode by Lanyer to Margaret Clifford and her daughter, in remembrance of the shared intellectual and spiritual pleasures.

1.4.2 Reading the Poem

The poem is in praise of the spiritual power of a woman whose ultimate landowner is the Creator himself. Margaret Clifford is presented as a female Moses or David (or as a new Eve, who resides in the garden of liberating knowledge and communes with Christ. Christ here is represented by a 'stately Tree' that serves as a sanctuary presented by the spiritually imbued idyllic setting. Though there is praise for Margaret Clifford and the 'paradise', yet there is a melancholic sense which has a shade of umbrage.

At Cooke-ham, the poet was always 'did alwaies beare a part' the shared pleasure of the company of women, yet, now she writes from the standpoint of the house, and the landscape, which has been cast off. The poet recounts an incident where upon the hour of departure, Margaret Clifford had sadly looked upon the Tree and conferred a kiss on it, and the poet takes her revenge by stealing that kiss and refusing to return it. Margaret is warned by Lanyer not to ignore her, she does this without bringing in variabilities or blaming class divisions, wealth or affluence.

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Check your Progress: what are references to Greek Mythology mentioned in the poem?</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The poet initially identifies herself with Ovid's Philomela, the ravished woman transformed into a nightingale that 'warbles forth her paine', by the end of the poem she is silenced: 'Drownd in dead sleepe, yet can procure no pittie'. The self-erasure that Lanyer writes about is to make Margaret Clifford remember that the poet has the power to immortalise her name, and write about her virtues, though the words are in her 'unworthy breast', they would be recorded in the text of the poem. The skill and ambition of Lanyer is evident in *Salve Deux Rex Judaeorum*, even though it is never known if she received the patronage of the Lifford women or not.

Stop to consider: the poet warns Margaret Clifford of the dangers of neglecting her, even though she states the reasons to be change, Fortune and the division of the class system.

Ameilia Lanyer's (1611) poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham" predates "To Penshurst" (1616) by Ben Jonson, and has been credited as the first country house poem. The poem draws on classical generic features, with Lanyer expressing the virtues of Margaret, countess of Cumberland. Lanyer creates imagery which honours the plants and animals of the estate. The poem finds great interest in the critical feminist circles because of its focus on the customs that did not allow women to inherit property. The poem describes the countess and her daughter, Anne Clifford, leaving their home instead of describing how they had found sojourn in the estate.

The ownership of the estate became a point of contention after the death of the earl, George Clifford, leading to a lengthy legal battle between Margaret Clifford and George Clifford's brother and nephew, who sought to deny Anne Clifford's claim to her own father's estates. The existence of women of Lanyer's day depended on the generosity of male heirs. As with other of Lanyer's works, "The Description of Cooke-ham" offers a vision of an all-female community where there is little need for traditional male authority. Her opposition of the gender hierarchy presaged her own later legal battles with her dead husband's brothers as she fought for an income from his former business that was promised to her by her in-laws.

Though Lanyer's country poem is compared to that of Jonson, they did not work with the same rulebooks regarding inheritance of property. According to critic Marshall Grossman, Jonson may have been credited improperly for the first country house poem due to fact that males received preference in matters of ownership. His idea was that the country-house genre itself "was gendered at its inception,". Jonson in his poem has suggested a relationship between the order of nature and man, rather than between nature and all of humankind. Lanyer's poem paints an elegant picture of a female paradise that greys

and wastes away when the inhabitants are forced to leave. The poem also carries suggestions that informs the readers that Lanyer may have begun her career as a poet because of the influence of the Countess of Cumberland.

Stop to consider: The speaker opens with praise, bidding farewell to "sweet Cooke-ham" and *remained*". This suggests that she gained favour from the virtuous Margaret, countess of Cumberland, who dwelled in Cooke-ham.

she acknowledges that she *"first obtained / Grace from the grace where perfect grace*

The voice in the poem speaks about the grounds of Cooke-ham, that glowed in response to the presence of the countess:

"From whose desires did spring this work of grace."

Stop to consider: The theme of the poem is Grace, or conferred merit, a term that is repeated multiple times.

Lanyer uses symbolic language of representation in the poem to make her point that Cooke-ham was nothing without the presence of the charismatic countess.

*The very hills right humbly did descend,
When you to tread upon them did intend.
And as you set your feet, they still did rise,
Glad that they could receive so rich a prize.
The gentle winds did take delight to be*

*Among those woods that were so graced by thee.
And in sad murmur uttered pleasing sound,
That pleasure in that place might more abound:
The swelling banks delivered all their pride,
When such a Phoenix once they had espied.*

Lanyer adds imagery of the countess's studying her Bible in the gracious environment, which further emphasized her pious purity:

In these sweet woods how often did you walk,

With Christ and his Apostles there to talk;
Placing his holy writ in some fair tree,
To meditate what you therein did see.

The poet shows Countess communicating with Moses, David, and Joseph, seeking them out for their heavenly counsel. Lanyer next references the countess's daughter, Anne Clifford; she writes about Anne Clifford's legal struggles with her family, which provided invaluable information to later feminist critics. Clifford was referred to as a "sweet lady," "noble," "honorable," with a "fair breast" that housed "true virtue."

Lanyer establishes the natural elements of Cooke-Ham was in tune with the countess, who later express their sadness upon learning she would have to leave. The trees, that previously "so glorious,"

*"Forsook both flowers and fruit, when once they knew
of your depart, their very leaves did wither."*

All the nature of Cooke-Ham, plead to the countess and her daughter not to leave, but when they found that their pleas were in vain, "they cast their leaves away".

The nightingale, "Fair Philomela," which had sang joyfully before,
"leaves her mournful ditty,

Drowned in dead sleep, yet can procure no pity"

While the trees had turned "bare and desolate" and even:

"The sun grew weak, his beams no comfort gave."

At the end of the verse, Lanyer writes her hopes:

"When I am dead thy name in this may live"

She expresses the predictable desire for immortality for her patron, that literature could afford. While the influence of the countess on her

estate proved great, it was greater on the poet, as Lanyer closes her poem about her subject,

"Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remains,
Tying my heart to her by those rich chains"

Check your progress:

Is it possible that perhaps Lanyer is mourning someone who was more than a friend to her? Could it be that the poem is really about a woman whom Aemilia had fallen in love with?

Stop to Consider: The poem paints Cookham as paradise, lost by the departure of Clifford, Lanyer's dear friend. As the two are separated, suddenly winter invades, pushing life down in death.

The poem does not talk much about regret, though there is a sense of destiny behind the departure that averts the poem from being languished in regrets. The poem is not about substituting the thoughts or wanting someone back; it is more like a challenge to accept the idea of the reality of their absence, without specifically thinking about why that absence happened; making it somewhat matter-of-fact.

Lanyer, by confessing about her love and her unexplainable sadness in Clifford's absence, Lanyer hoped to immortalize her friend.

(All references are from the modern edition of Aemilia Lanyer's work, ed. by Susanne Woods, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (Oxford University Press, 1993))

1.5 Critical Reception

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum attracted little or no attention upon its publication in 1611. Lanyer has remained an obscure minor poet until recently. A. L. Rowse had identified Lanyer as the "Dark Lady" in Shakespeare's sonnets in 1973, which was a theory refuted by other Shakespearean scholars. This controversy brought attention to Lanyer's poems, and critics began to look into her feminist interpretation of Christianity and also the sociological value of her work was explored. Her work, seen from the point of view of an

outsider, who was a woman of lower socioeconomic rank; and her views on an aristocratic, patriarchal society that tried to marginalize women became important for being an essential historical and sociological evaluation. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is regarded as a valuable cultural document that develops our understanding of women's religious roles.

Stop to consider: Preceding the publication of Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" by five years, Aemilia Lanyer's "The Description of Cooke-Ham" has a strong argument to make as being the very first example of the "country house poem" genre which achieved its greatest prominence in the century following Jonson's publication.

Lanyer's countenance of uncertainty towards the power of the patronage system is considered a noteworthy observation on the custom of patronage in the arts. Another topic of discussion is the influence of the Jacobean court on Lanyer's life and work. Focus has been given on the homoerotic aspects of her poetry and they have been examined to bring out the aspects of the attachments between women during the Jacobean period, recognising that these bonds were a way for women to rise above class differences to create a community of women. Lanyer has been praised for her vivid imagery and mastery of rhyme and meter, and "The Description of Cooke-ham" plays a critical role in defining the precepts of the country-house poetic genre. In the past few decades, critical evaluations of her work have deemed Lanyer has been deemed a major author in the past few decades, and critical evaluations of her works have paved the way for her inclusion in the canon of significant English writers.

The speaker of the poem is the poet herself, Aemilia Lanyer. The speaker does not directly address herself as Lanyer, it can be seen that it is autobiographical in its content and references, as there are various degrees of references to actual real life historical figures.

The title of the poem indicates that it is a poem which is dedicated to the description of Cooke-Ham with a sense of devotion attached to it. Making Cooke-Ham sound like a person, while it is a country estate at where Lanyer had stayed for a brief period of time.

The dimensions of words that are devoted to the description of the home efficiently converts it into a major character.

The poem's second line contains the word "grace" twice; once capitalized and once not. This capitalization references the proper etiquette for addressing a Countess (Your Grace) and is one of the more indirect means of identification. Margaret Clifford was the older sister of Francis, the "grace" without the capitalization refers to Margaret Clifford's being a benefactor of Lanyer.

Lanyer identifies Margaret's daughter Anne Clifford in the lines
"And that *sweet Lady sprung from Clifford's race,*

Of noble Bedford's blood, fair stem of grace,

To honorable Dorset now espoused."

She is identified by her paternal bloodline, while Bedford references the bloodline of the family of the countess. Anne Clifford was later married to Richard Sackville, the third earl of Dorset.

Because of Aemilia's decision to dedicate this poem to paper and the way she treats the act of writing it, it becomes clear that the poem itself is intended as a metaphor for the perseverance of love, past the limits of death or separation. Because death and separation are given the central status in the poem, it is poetry itself that that is used to answer these questions.

Check your Progress: The poem is also an example of the "pathetic fallacy", what are attributes of the fallacy poem found in the poem?

Stop to Consider: The impetus behind the writing of "The Description of Cooke-Ham" was Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland and that royal estate on which she lived.

Check your Progress: The poet, Lanyer, takes as her theme the time she herself spent on the Cookeham estate, how had that time led both to the poet's religious conversion and her blossoming into a writer?

Check your Progress: What is the Motif that recurs in the poem?

Stop to Consider: the notable fact expressed in the poem that women were not allowed at the time to inherit such claims to property ownership.

1.6 Summing up

‘The Description of Cooke-ham’ is Lanyer’s bittersweet ode to the intellectual and spiritual pleasures she shared with Margaret Clifford and her daughter. Unlike Ben Jonson’s poem ‘To Penshurst’, a ‘country house poem’ that celebrates the worldly power of a generous landowner, Lanyer’s poem praises the spiritual power of a woman for whom the Creator is the ultimate landowner. As a female Moses or David – or as a new Eve in a garden of emancipating knowledge – Margaret Clifford’s connection with Christ, is represented by the ‘stately Tree’ that serves as her refuge in the spiritually imbued pastoral landscape. Yet, one can feel that Lanyer’s praises of Margaret Clifford and this idea of an Edenic Paradise, are haunted by an elegiac sense of loss coloured with bitterness.

Lanyer describes Margaret Clifford as an exemplary Christian, who is constantly meditating upon the Old Testament heroes and imitating them in her behaviour, Lanyer moves on to sing the praises of her daughter and only surviving child Anne, later on married to the Earl of Dorset. Lanyer mourns Anne’s marriage which separated them, but she can always love her from afar, the same as we lowly-born can love God. She can always rely on her memory of the time they spent together. She continues to describe Cooke-ham’s grief after the women leave, which is basically just the first part of the poem in reverse: *the trees lose their leaves, birds sing only sad songs, the whole house is covered with dust and silence*. One affecting episode is when Margaret Clifford kisses her favourite oak goodbye, and then Lanyer “steals” the kiss from the tree. She herself does not kiss the tree, because she is afraid, she might lose the precious kiss. The poem ends with Lanyer expressing hope that this poem may preserve the memory of Margaret Clifford’s virtues for all future generations.

1.7 Glossary

Indite: (rarely used today) compose or put down in writing

Vouchsafe: grant, award

Dim: gloomy, lacklustre

Celestial: heavenly, divine

Spangles: glittering materials, sequin

Philomela: In Greek mythology, Philomela was the daughter of Pandion, a legendary king of Athens. Her brother-in-law Tereus raped her and cut her tongue off. While fleeing from him, she turned into a nightingale.

Sundry: miscellaneous, diverse

Arbor: Axle, the pivotal centre on which a device revolves

Phoebus: Greek Mythological name for Apollo, the Sun-God.

Hoary: Hackneyed, Something overused and therefore very commonplace

Chide: Scold, Rebuke.

Ditty: A short, simple song.

Brier, Bramble: Prickly scrambling rose-like shrubs.

HolyWrit: The Bible

"In some fair tree": The idea that God does this is sometimes called "natural revelation" or "general revelation," God's revelation to everybody in general. The Bible is special revelation that comes to some people in a supernatural manner.

"BlindFortune": Fortune was often pictured as being blind, as well as having the famous wheel. Fortune turned against them by making

leave their paradise. They weren't expelled for their own sin, as happened to Adam and Eve.

"The sun grew weak": in the winter, the sun is weak. The green plants lost their color.

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Unit 2

Aemilia Lanyer: The Description of Cook-Ham

Supplementary Unit

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 How to Approach the Poet

2.4 Works of Lanyer

2.5 Themes

2.6 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers:

2.7 Summing Up

2.8 Reference and suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives:

In this unit, you will be able to

- Learn how to approach the poem
- Evaluate the themes of Lanyer's work
- Answer questions relating to the poem

2.2 Introduction

Aemilia Lanyer was one of the first Englishwomen to publish a volume of original verse. She has long been linked with Shakespeare as his 'beautiful but treacherous' *dark lady*. She was 18 when she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain, who was also the patron of Shakespeare's theatre company. Lanyer exalted

female virtue and spirituality, she was a devotional poet, intensely conscious of her unusual status as a woman writing of 'divinest things'. She bodily transformed biblical sources to rewrite the place of women in history and culture, in her lengthy religious poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which was published in 1611.

Aemilia was the daughter of Venetian-born court musician Baptista Bassano and his English wife Margaret Johnson. She grew up as a member of the minor gentry who had access to the royal court and had a classical humanist education including studies in history, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy.

2.3 How to Approach the Poet

Give attention to how this passage in the poem begins:

"And with a chaste, yet loving kiss."

This line comes after a passage detailing specific moments that Aemilia recalls from their time, concluding in one final kiss, a true last kiss, on the mouth. How do we know it was on the mouth? Because Aemilia says:

"No other kiss it could receive from me
For fear to give back what it took of thee,"

or in other words, "I'll never kiss again because I don't want to lose what you gave to me in that kiss."

This shows that the relationship that she had with the countess meant a great deal for her, this also portrays her feminist perspectives and her resistance to a society which was unfair to women.

You will also come across dedications to powerful women of the court (including Queen Anne). This shows both the modesty claimed by classical authors as ground for authority and the Christian virtue of

humility. Lanyer's claim to divine grace becomes a powerful means of persuading other women to reveal their own state of grace by granting their 'grace' – favour – to Lanyer herself, i.e. to patronise her. Meaning that if they showed their support to a divinely chosen poet to write their 'never-dying fame' on earth, they can advertise their own pious selection to gain deliverance.

But in spite of all the compliments that Lanyer showers on those she mentions, she never flatters them. Her work was actually a mirror to the minds of her patrons, showing them not only who they are but also who they should be.

For example, in Lanyer's dedication to Anne Clifford, the young woman is advised to live up to the virtues of her noble ancestors. We see that Lanyer continually instructs her patrons even as she praises them.

We can also approach Lanyer's work as a powerful political statement, as it was pro-woman at a time when a quasi-tyrannical king with misogynistic tendencies ruled England, and imposed his indiscriminate force on the Church and state. Therefore, we can view the work as both a concern that Lanyer had about the unmediated relationship that the faithful believer had with Christ, while paying homage to Margaret Clifford's Puritan concerns; and about necessary limits given to monarchical power so that it doesn't turn into tyranny.

2.4 Works of Lanyer

At the age of 42, Aemelia Lanyer published her first and only volume of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, or 'Hail God, King of the Jews'. The book was largely inspired by religion and her connections to members of Queen Elizabeth's Court, like the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter. The book includes 8 poems addressed to noble ladies who were potential patrons: Anne of Denmark (James I's Queen),

Elizabeth Stuart (their daughter), Lady Arabella Stuart, Susan Bertie (Countess Dowager of Kent), Lady Mary Sidney (Countess Dowager of Pembroke), Lady Lucy Russell (Countess of Bedford), Lady Katherine Howard (Countess of Suffolk), and Lady Anne Clifford (Countess of Dorset). These efforts to gain patronage make Lanyer the first Englishwoman to overtly attempt to become a professional poet.

2.5 Themes:

2.5.1 *Nature poem*

“A Description of Cookham”, a nature poem of both praise and lament, celebrates precisely the existence and, at the same time, mourns the loss of a unique paradise:

Farewell, sweet place, where virtue then did rest,

And all delights did harbour in her breast;

Never shall my sad eyes again behold

Those pleasures which my thoughts did then unfold.

The estate, the personified natural surroundings, and indeed the women of the place, including the patroness, blend into a locus amoenus (literally, a ‘mild place’):

The walks put on their summer liveries,

And all things else did hold like similes:

The trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,

Embraced each other, seeming to be glad,

Turning themselves to beauteous canopies

To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes;

2.5.2 Friendship

The poem is arranged in the manner of a paradise lost, where attention is given to the source of life. Lanyer finds the meaning of her life in the friendships of the women in her life. Even when the women are separated, and death begins to occur in the estate, it is their friendship that gives a new meaning to Lanyer's life

2.5.3. Separation equated to death.

Lanyer compares separation to death. When her friends the Ladies Clifford depart, the earth itself starts to give way to winter, withering away as the time passes since their last time together. This death is the root of the poem, and the significance of the poem is an effort to find a solace for this loss.

2.5.4. Poetry endures

Lanyer finds her answer for immortality in poetry and writing. By dedicating her thoughts to paper, and by conversing openly about her affection for this woman, Lanyer wishes to exalt her love, even as they separate with time. The proof of this immortality lies in the fact that even though the poem was written hundreds of years ago, it's still read by us. We're reading and remembering about Clifford, even after all this time.

2.6 Suggested questions and answers

1. Explain the presence of religious imagery in the poem.

The narrator compares her departure from Cookham with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden. The

narrator gives us details about the poem's religious feel and portraying the narrator as a religious person. The reason why the narrator does this is because she wanted to communicate the pain she felt when she had to leave Cooke-ham. The pain she felt is described in images because of its association with the exclusion from the Garden of Eden, thus conveying the idea that for the narrator it was a disturbing occurrence.

2. How is Margaret Clifford described?

It is clear from the beginning of the poem that the narrator and Clifford were extremely close and that the narrator suffered greatly because she had to leave her friend. Clifford is portrayed in a way that generates comparison with the Garden of Eden to show how she virtuous a person she was and how much the narrator was affected when they had to separate. The narrator talks about Clifford's friends and she mentions Jesus Christ, the apostles and other important characters in the Bible. The narrator wanted to convey the idea that Clifford was an exceptional woman. She was portrayed as someone who was sought out by many as a friend and a close associate

The ending of the poem:

The poet concludes the poem with the description of the coming of winter and with it, the death of nature. The imagery presented emphasises on the dilapidation of the natural world while also transmitting the idea that the narrator no longer feels hope about the future. The imagery presented at the end is supposed to help the reader understand the pain the narrator feels because she is no longer with her friend and the lack of hope of ever seeing her again. Through this, the narrator highlighted how much a person can suffer and miss another person but how also it is possible to find consolation because the narrator still expresses her hope about the future and about finding a new meaning in life.

The central points in the poem

The poem is arranged in a form based on an idea of paradise lost, where the women in the poem are separated and friendship becomes a source of life. We can also see how the idea of separation from dear one is presented as a kind of death. The meaning of the poem centres around the idea of separation and consolation from it. Lanyer, by writing out her feelings of affection for the Clifford women, finds her consolation in poetry. She states that her poetry has made Clifford immortal, for the poem will always remain.

Make a point of understanding the symbols given in the poem

The last kiss (try and find out the biblical connotations)

The motif of death and winter

Sainthood as a symbol

Paradise lost as a motif

Poetry as a symbolic victory over time.

Summing up Aemilia Lanyer (supplementary unit)

Lanyer's poem has the honour to be the very first country house poem published. (Ben Jonson's "Penshurst" may have been written at the same time or earlier, but it was published later.) It is a rather bitter-sweet nostalgic look back at Cooke-ham, where Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, spent some time and it seems it was a very important period for Lanyer too. We do not have the knowledge of how she came to stay there and in what capacity, but she indicates she dates the reception of her "grace" – meaning both her religious conversion and her poetical talent – from "Her Grace", i.e. Clifford. Now that they were leaving, the poet is remembering about how they came first here in spring and how the whole house and the surrounding countryside seemed to dress itself up in its finery to celebrate the Countess. The most beautiful place in the whole estate is a big oak on a hill, which Lanyer compares to cedars or palms, trying perhaps to induce biblical elements. The image is not a successful one, since the

oak is portrayed as spreading its great arms, desirous to hide the lady from the sun, while palms are notoriously bad for giving shade. This is the area where the Countess liked to wander, and the beauty of nature around her inspired her to meditate upon its Creator. She also read often the Bible there.

The conclusion is somewhat ironic, and in a double sense too: The poet seems to imply that it is not likely that either she or the countess will ever see that place again, and that the only consolation that is left for them is that this ‘experience of place’ will be perpetuated through a feminine text and not a masculine one.

2.7 Summing Up

The Description ofCooke-ham’ is Lanyer’s bittersweet ode to the intellectual and spiritual pleasures she shared with Margaret Clifford and her daughter. Unlike Ben Jonson’s poem ‘To Penshurst’, a ‘country house poem’ that celebrates the worldly power of a generous landowner, Lanyer’s poem praises the spiritual power of a woman for whom the Creator is the ultimate landowner. As a female Moses or David – or as a new Eve in a garden of emancipating knowledge – Margaret Clifford connection with Christ, is represented by the ‘stately Tree’ that serves as her refuge in the spiritually imbued pastoral landscape. Yet, one can feel that Lanyer’s praises of Margaret Clifford and this idea of an Edenic Paradise, are haunted by an elegiac sense of loss coloured with bitterness.

2.8 Reference and Suggested readings:

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Unit 3

Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book 1)

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 His Works
- 3.4 Critical Reception
- 3.5 Context of the Poem
- 3.6 Reading the poem
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 References & Suggested Reading

3.1 Objectives :

The unit proposes to introduce you to John Milton, the seventeenth-century poet. After a brief survey of his life, times and works, we will proceed to take up in details the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. We shall also go through a survey of the critical reception of this English epic. At the end of this unit, you are expected to

be familiar with John Milton, the poet and pamphleteer.

relate Milton's life and contemporary events to the text prescribed.

place the poet in the English literary tradition.

appreciate the range of critical issues within the text.

weigh the text vis-à-vis other similar texts, and

develop your own critical perspective.

3.2 Introduction :

(A Brief biographical Sketch and the Various Influences)

John Milton was born on Dec 9, 1608 in London. Milton completed his formal education first, at St Paul's School (1620-25), and then at Christ's College, Cambridge (1625-32). After leaving Cambridge with an M.A. in 1632, he spent the next six years at his father's country-house in Horton, Buckinghamshire. He dedicated these years to an

intense and rigorous study of European Literature to such an extent that English Literature has not seen a better scholar of European Classics.

In May 1638, Milton embarked on a grand tour of the Continent, but disturbances back home forced his return in July 1639. He joined the imminent Civil War and threw his weight behind the Presbyterians/Republicans by publication of prose pamphlets. In 1649, he was made the Secretary of Foreign Tongues, a reward for his fierce defense of the execution of Charles I. However, in later years, he saw his ideals of Republican polity and Puritan theocracy crumble gradually. The Restoration of 1660 even saw Milton undergoing a brief period of imprisonment.

Touring the Continent

Till the first half of the nineteenth century, an average English Gentleman's formal education was incomplete without a trip to the Continent. Italy had been a favourite destination till the seventeenth century. Chaucer had toured Italy on numerous occasions and so did others like Thomas Wyatt, Earl of Surrey and Philip Sidney. Milton's tour to the Continent mostly centered around Italy. He toured extensively through Florence, Rome, Venice and Naples, and in the process, came across many personalities and landmarks. especially, Galileo Galili and the tomb of Virgil. This tour was also artistically gratifying as he found an eager and appreciative audience for his Latin verses. This is said to be the best period of his life. Interestingly, Milton's engagement with Italy may be viewed as paradoxical: while he was awed and charmed by its heritage, literature and art, he was antipathetic to its religion, Catholicism.

Post- Restoration, Milton led a solitary and reclusive life with his third wife and two daughters. After the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, the aged and blind poet enjoyed the privilege of visits by peers and friends, most notably Dryden. John Milton died on Nov 8, 1674, and was buried in St. Giles' Church, Cripplegate, London.

This brief life-sketch of Milton should lead you to a better appreciation of the text. Now, let us very briefly view some of the seminal influences on his personality, thinking and poetry.

The curriculum of St. Paul's, which prescribed a study of early Christian writers, exerted tremendous influence on Milton's choice of subjects for his poems. Then, the literatures of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Italian languages also influenced him a lot. Writers like Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Ovid, Cicero and Spenser shaped his writings at different stages. To be specific, Dante influenced the descriptions of Hell, Virgil the diction, and Cicero, the rhetoric of Satan's speeches in *Paradise Lost*.

Stop to Consider

Milton's Home

The small biographical sketch and the influences outlined above carve out a mammoth domain for Milton. But his home had acted as the initiator on many occasions. His father, also named John, had a progressive bent of mind and was instrumental in instilling in him, love and admiration for literature and learning. His conviction in religious faith was inherited at home. His grandfather, a devout Catholic, had disinherited his father for turning a protestant. The most significant fact, however, is that Milton's father was an accomplished musician and a noted writer of madrigals. Milton certainly owed to this fact his sharp and acute ear for music. Readers of *Paradise Lost* may do well to remember that he was totally blind when he wrote this epic.

At Cambridge, Milton gradually developed a bias towards Puritanism. His religious sympathies were strengthened very early by two gentleman, Richard Stock and Thomas Young. Moreover, he was moved by Calvinism as it opposed ritual and affirmed the supremacy of Scriptures and individual faith. His sympathy for Puritans and Presbyterians also led him to support the Republican cause as the overwhelming majority of Republicans were either Puritans or Presbyterians.

SAQ

1. Is Milton's life fairly well-documented considering that he is only a seventeenth-century writer? (30 words)

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.....
.....
.....

2. Were the foreign influences that mark Milton's personality and writing exceptions to him or were they generic? (50 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Was Milton more involved in contemporary affairs than a writer normally is? Who were the contemporaries that influenced him? (60 words)

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.....

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.....
.....
4. What was the target audience for his writings? (30 words)
.....
.....
.....
.....

3.3 His Works

In this section we aim to introduce to you some of the different works of John Milton, poet and pamphleteer.

Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity (1629) is commonly known as 'Nativity Ode', being a remarkable poem that celebrates the victory of Christ over evil. The broad doctrinal base of the ode is decidedly protestant. The opening is Pindaric and the poem adopts a heroic style that is celebratory. At Cambridge, Milton wrote a series of seven elegies in Latin based on Ovid. He also wrote sonnets in both Italian and English. Some of his memorable sonnets in English are "On Shakespeare", "On His Blindness", "On the Massacres in Piedmont" etc. Milton's sonnets are important from a historical perspective although he had discarded the Shakespearean as well as the Spenserian models in favour of the Petrarchan. When sonneteering was revived by the Romantics, they followed the model adopted by Milton.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso (1631/32) composed either at Cambridge or Horton, they are companion poems. While "L'Allegro" -meaning the 'cheerful man' in Italian- is an invocation to the goddess Mirth, "Il Penseroso" -the 'contemplative man'- is an invocation to the goddess Melancholy. Both the poems represent an ideal or specimen day in the poet's life. Written in rhyming octosyllabics, these poems abound in gaiety and mirth to such an extent that to a reader of *Paradise Lost*, they might seem to be characteristically unMiltonic.

Comus (1634): In this masque, Comus is a pagan god who tries to win over a young Christian lady by administering her a magic potion. The lady staunchly defends her virginity and chastity, and is finally rescued by her two brothers. For its effect, "Comus" relies on spectacle, song and dialogue, and therefore, it has been aptly called a 'pastoral drama'. Lycidas (1637) is an elegy on the death of Milton's Cambridge companion, Edward King. It is in the pastoral tradition and both the mourner and the mourned are depicted as shepherds. It is significant as it contains a stinging outburst against the clergy whose 'hungry sheep look up and are not fed'.

Epitaphium Damonis (1639) is a Latin elegy written on the death of his friend, Charles Diodati. Like "Lycidas", it is also in the pastoral mode, but the emotions expressed are far more personal.

Paradise Lost (1667) is an epic poem in twelve books. It is about 'man's first disobedience' and 'loss of Eden'. However, in its mammoth sweep, it encompasses action beginning with Satan's revolt against God to the ouster of Adam and Eve from Paradise. The narrative also incorporates a vision of events till the Second Coming. The diction of the epic is characterized by the use of blank verse and innumerable epic similes, apart from some new coinages. Paradise Regained (1670) is a four-book sequel to Paradise Lost. In it, Satan tries to tempt Christ in the wilderness but Christ's resistance leads to the defeat of Satan's evil designs. Considered a short epic, *Paradise Regained* is markedly different from its predecessor in splendour, language, diction and the portraiture of Satan.

Compared often to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Samson Agonistes* (1670) is a tragedy modelled strictly on Greek tragedy. It is about the last phase of Samson's life when, old and blind, he was held a prisoner by the philistines. It has been often read as an expression of the poet's own situation because Samson's old age, blindness and imprisonment resonate with the last part of Milton's life.

Stop to Consider

Milton's Contribution to Pastoralism

The extent of Milton's engagement with Italy meant that he would surely try his hand at the pastorals. It began with 'Arcades', an entertainment/performance presented to the Countess Dowager of Darby. It is marked by the appearance of nymphs and shepherds. The companion poems 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' are splashed lavishly with pastoral elements. In 'Comus', the setting is purely pastoral. Moreover, it has a Genius of the Woods disguised as a shepherd. Pastoralism in Milton culminated in 'Lycidas', an elegy on the death of Edward King. It firmly established the pastoral elegiac form in English with conventions drawn from Theocritus onwards. It is also notable for a mix of the Pagan with the Christian, and the pastoral with the political.

You can also now observe John Milton, the prose pamphleteer. You might be surprised to know that during 1640s and 50s, he hardly composed poetry, but wrote many prose pamphlets. Milton began his pamphleteering career with "Of Reformation touching Church-Discipline in England" (1641). This was a response occasioned by Bishop Hall's pamphlet in support of episcopacy. He follows it up with "Of Prelatical Episcopacy", "Animadversions" and "The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelacy". "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" is rare in the sense that it was occasioned by something intensely personal- desertion by his first wife. Expression of

frank and liberal views on Marriage -a sacred institution- and Divorce -a taboo- had alienated his allies, the Presbyterians. "Areopagitica" (1644), an impassioned plea to Parliament for abolishing censorship and upholding the freedom of speech, is Milton's best-known prose work. The tone here is hortatory and the style rhetorical with a touch of the poignant. "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates" (1649), which defends the execution of Charles I, is the most radical political statement of Milton. Here, he refers to Kingship as a social contract thereby challenging the divine right theory of Kings championed by the Cavaliers.

There are other pamphlets also, but at this stage I would like to refer to two different works- *History of Britain* and *De Doctrina Christina*. The first one, in six books, covers British history only up to the Norman Conquest of 1066. The second is a theological work in Latin whose manuscript was discovered by Charles Summers in 1825. You would find it interesting to note that some beliefs held by Milton in *Doctrine* almost amount to heresy. For instance, he thinks that the Holy Trinity are not coequal, but hierarchical, and that God created Universe out of something, not out of nothing.

SAQ

1. What idea is to be gained from the knowledge of Milton's works ?
How do we now understand his preoccupations ? (80 words)

.....

2.What does this tell us of his poetic abilities ? (50 words)

.....

3.4 Critical Reception :

Paradise lost has had a deservedly long tradition of critical reception. At different times, critics have deliberated upon diverse aspects of this English epic. This section will take you through some of the lively and engaging criticism and will endeavour to touch upon as many issues as possible. The idea is to show to you the possibilities so that you also develop a critical perspective of your own.

To begin chronologically, Dryden and John Dennis were among the first to comment upon Milton and *Paradise Lost*. Dryden had composed an epigram on Milton that ensured Milton's stature as second only to Shakespeare in English Literature. John Dennis, a critic, had praised *Paradise Lost* for its sublimity. In subsequent centuries, Voltaire, Dr. Johnson and Coleridge also sang the same tune. However, at such a nascent stage, Dennis found that the language of the epic had impurities and that the devils were invested with qualities "allied to Goodness". These two issues have been the sites of fierce critical contestation ever since.

Joseph Addison joined issue with Dennis when he remarked that the language (English) had sunk under Milton. Dr. Johnson opined that Milton was highly influenced by the Italians while Keats called *Paradise Lost* a "corruption of our language". He even went to the extent of proclaiming that "life to him (Milton) would be death to me". In the twentieth century, Eliot and Leavis have lambasted Milton for his language. In an article in the journal *Scrutiny*, Leavis announced that "Milton's dislodgement in the past decade after his two centuries of predominance, was effected with little fuss". In his celebrated essay "The Metaphysical Poets", Eliot held Milton's overriding preoccupation with language chiefly responsible for the onset of what he famously termed "dissociation of sensibility". Moreover, Eliot thought that in his epic, Milton had unusually favoured the auditory imagination over the visual and the tactile. However, Milton's language has had its share of admirers. Macaulay wrote encomiastically about it while the grand Victorian persona of Matthew Arnold had found virtue in it and termed it the 'Grand Style'. In the twentieth century, Mark Pattison has words of praise while Christopher Reeks, in his book *Milton's Grand Style*, wrote a subtle critique of it.

The second issue raised by Dennis largely dominated discussions of *Paradise Lost* through the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. This was specially the case after William Blake's paradoxical comment:

"The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of
Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and
Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil's
party without knowing it."

(The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.)

The Romantics were quick to seize the initiative this comment had unleashed: Shelley found Milton's Devil far superior to his God morally while Hazlitt found "Satan the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem". Walter Raleigh opined that Milton had intended Satan as the hero of the epic. This camp did not go unchallenged. The strongest defense of Milton came from C. S. Lewis, who read *Paradise Lost* on the terms that, according to him, Milton had laid down. His "A Preface to *Paradise Lost*" is, till date, the flag-

bearer of Miltonism. Some others like Charles Williams had also viewed Satan as more a fool than a hero.

Stop to Consider

Paradise Lost has occasioned lively debates among poets and critics.

One can hardly think of another text in English that has elicited opinions as diverse as this epic has. Take, for instance, Stanley Fish's brilliant book *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. There are other such instances, but the most engaging debates were generated by E M W Tillyard and C S Lewis. Tillyard, in his *Milton*, set out to recover the true meaning of Milton's epic. And, according to him, what the poem is really about could be known by knowing "the true state of Milton's mind when he wrote it." This was nonetheless a blatant instance of expressionistic criticism, especially if one takes into account the fact that at nearly the same time, Eliot had formulated his 'Impersonality Theory of Poetry'. C S Lewis objected to this, and to many other premises on which Tillyard had based his thesis. A controversy raged for some time that finally resulted in *The Personal Heresy* (1939), a book by Tillyard on determining a writer's true state of mind through his works.

B. Rajan, in his influential study *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader*, has dealt with this issue differently. He finds preconceived notions useless in appreciating Satan. Rather, he calls for jettisoning the dichotomy of 'the hero' and 'the fool' (set up by Raleigh) as these terms carry the baggage of the ethical system that the reader judges from. Satan, for him, is first a poetic representation and hence, who or what he is in the poem is circumstantial and functional. In the same breath, Rajan disagrees with critics who see in Satan, a contradiction between his head and heart, between the Protestant and the Poet.

Discussions about Satan must be reassuring to you for he simply straddles the first two books. But you know that there is much to *Paradise Lost* and I shall touch upon some other important issues raised. When Blake made the above-mentioned comment, he was also pointing towards some sort of a 'slippage' between the poet's intention and the ultimate creation. This insight has been the source of some significant criticism, most notably the perspective on Narrative. Concerns have been raised as to the suitability of the Christian story to the epic form. A J A Waldock, in *Paradise Lost and its Critics*, has succinctly argued how the small fissures and the crevices in the Genesis story were inflated into unmanageable proportions once Milton chose it as the subject of his epic. He is of the opinion that while writing the epic, Milton had realized this. E M W Tillyard takes up the chronology of 'the fall' and through reference to specific instances in the text, concludes that Adam and Eve must be fallen even before they had eaten the apple. Difficulties allegedly encountered by

Milton in the portrayures of God, the Angels, Adam and Eve, Heaven, etc. have also been raised by critics.

Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* is a classic instance of Reader-Response Criticism. Fish discusses Milton as a master-rhetorician engaged in playing games with reader. Taking this as central to the epic, Fish establishes how the reader, in reading *Paradise Lost*, is led on to an acceptance of his own guilty conscience. Fish's analysis was a response to the anti-Miltonism of some critics, especially William Empson's book *Milton's God*. In his book, Empson combines sharp critical insights with polemics to argue that Milton had laid bare the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in Christianity, and by extension, the Christian God. The portrayal of God has also generated lively criticism with Satanist critics rejoicing at the apparent tyranny of Milton's God. The portrait and dialogues of God in *Paradise Lost* are closely linked to Predestination and exercise of Free Will, a much-debated topic in Philosophy and one that brought out sharp contradictions within Milton.

Since the 1970s, contemporary critical trends have dominated discussions of *Paradise Lost*. Critical Theory also has had its fair share as Milton's epic has been subjected to Marxist, Historicist, Feminist and Postcolonial interrogations. Two classic historicist critiques of *Paradise Lost* were written by Christopher Hill and Andrew Milner. Both the critics discuss Milton's contemporary social position vis-à-vis sects and factions like the Levellers, Diggers and Independents. They also read into the epic contemporary events, developments and crises. Frederic Jameson takes a classic Marxist standpoint when he discusses Adam as the new bourgeois individual and Satan as a Feudal Baron in war with his liege, God the father. In *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power*, Catherine Belsey offers a deconstructive and feminist reading of the epic. Feminist readings of the epic have been particularly illuminating as Milton is alleged to be a misogynist. Sandra Gilbert discusses the response to *Paradise Lost* of nineteenth-century women readers. In her reading, she takes to task the grand masculinist bogey and offers two novel trinities- Eve, Satan and Sin against God, the Son and Adam. Mary Nyqvist, in a scintillating essay titled "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity of *Paradise Lost*", demonstrates through Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the construction of a domesticated and feeble Femininity that is subservient to Patriarchy. Very recently, this epic has been read from a postcolonial perspective, and the best example is Martin Evans' *Milton's Imperial Epic: Paradise Lost and the Discourse of Colonialism*. The numerous pagan and non-Western references that Milton had employed while dealing with the fallen angels and Hell have opened up possibilities for postcolonial criticism.

Check Your Progress

1. Why, do you think, did *Paradise Lost* evoke so much critical debate?

(Hint: This answer will lead to the significance of the work.)

2. Which aspects of *Paradise Lost* have been the topics of such debate?
(Hint: Satan, the descriptions of Hell, Eve, among others.)
3. Write a brief note on the Romantic interpretation of Milton's Satan.
(Hint: Connect Romanticism with social revolution.)
4. What estimate of Milton's Christian beliefs emerges from contemporary criticism?
(Hint: Recent critics have been willing to accept Milton's version of Christianity).

3.5 Context of the Poem:

From a very early age, Milton intuitively knew that he was destined for something great, something that the world "would not willingly let die". In the pamphlet "The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelacy", Milton states his desire to write a poem that would be "doctrinal and exemplary for a nation" and one that would match the achievements of other European languages. In a way, this forms the basic context of the poem. Growing nationalism across Europe also provided Milton with the necessary impetus to take up the writing of an epic. The choice of 'the Fall' as the subject must have been influenced by his desire to attempt "things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme". Interestingly, Milton had pondered over legends like the Arthurian Legend as the possible subject of his would-be epic. It seems very likely that the failure of the Republican Government as well as Puritan Theocracy had forced Milton to search for a safe subject. He chose one that would have justified the ways of God to men and also to himself. Sadly, he failed to notice the hazards that his subject had in store for him.

Theology and *Paradise Lost*

Paradise Lost is a Christian epic and there can be no doubt that the fundamental argument of the poem is theological. Milton's inheritance of a religious stubbornness and the prevailing social and religious situation indeed proved prophetic. In fact, during Milton's time, young men looked upon the Church as a profession and a career. Milton was no different, but the rigidity and corruption of the Anglican Church forced a change of thinking. He gradually moved towards Puritanism, and we find that the theological base of his epic is decidedly Puritan. One can discern this streak as early as the 'Nativity Ode', and every composition of his till *Samson Agonistes* may be viewed as developing an argument. Milton's Christian faith is succinctly expressed in 'De Doctrina Christina', which many consider as a prose gloss on his epic. The arguments in these two texts sometimes run counter to the trends of conventional theology. For instance, Milton was much moved by

Calvinism, but certainly he didn't go along with its doctrine of Predestination as it clashed with the exercise of Free Will. Readers of 'Areopagitica' and *Paradise Lost* will vouch for the fact that the their writer vehemently stood for the exercise of Free Will.

3.6 Reading The Poem

When *Paradise Lost* was first published in 1667, it had ten books. In the next edition, two books were split and the number of books was raised to twelve. You have been prescribed only the first two books for your study. We may begin with a brief summary of the two books:

The setting for the first two books is Hell. When the narrative begins, Satan, the fallen archangel, is discovered lying prostate with his companions in a burning lake. At Satan's exhortation, they rise and assemble on nearby "dry land". Through fiery speeches, he tries to uplift the morale of his followers, and to deliberate on the future course of action, he calls for a full council. Within moments, fallen angels led by Mammon, build a huge structure called "Pandemonium". At the end of the first book, "the great consul begins".

In the second book, Moloch, Belial, Mammon and Beelzebub take part in the great debate in Hell. Open war is discarded in favour of indirect revenge to be taken upon God's favoured creature, Man. Satan volunteers to journey through chaos in search of the new world, the dwelling place of mankind. He passes through the gates of Hell guarded by Sin and Death, and after journeying through the "wild abyss", he finally eyes Paradise hanging on a golden chain.

This brief summary should facilitate your entry into the text. There are other parameters also, knowledge of which would ensure a smooth sailing through the text. Let us take these up in different paragraphs:

The genre of a literary piece is significant for a better understanding of the text. *Paradise Lost* is an epic, --rather, it is the only epic in English. There are some epic conventions which have been transmitted from Homer through Virgil. Some of these that you would come across in the opening books of this epic are – statement of the subject; invocation of the Muse; beginnings of the action " in medias res"; catalogue of names, etc.

Moreover, you should bear in mind that an epic is essentially a narrative with a narrative/narratorial voice. The narrative voice in *Paradise Lost* can be safely taken to be that of John Milton. But you must be on your guard as the 'narrative voice' is intrusive and makes occasional comments and interventions. Waldock was almost livid at the constant authorial intrusions in *Paradise Lost*. Stanley Fish, discussing " Milton's programme of reader harassment", takes up the instance sited by Waldock. It comes immediately after Satan's first speech (I, 84-124). When the authorial voice intrudes :

" So spake th' Apostate Angel, though in pain,

Vaunting aloud, but ractt with deep despair" (125-6)

Critics like Waldock opine that Milton does this deliberately to correct in excess while Fish considers it as an authorial device by which the reader is steadily brought face to face with his own guilty conscience. The amount of significance that you decide to attach to authorial intrusions like the one cited above will determine to a large extent your reading of *Paradise Lost*. In this connection, you may find Chaucer's *Prologue* interesting as it also has lots of narratorial intrusions.

Stop to Consider

Cosmology and *Paradise Lost*

Have you ever wondered how important knowledge of cosmology is for a proper understanding of *Paradise Lost*? Actually, cosmology is central to the whole design of this epic.

Milton's universe is medieval, and mostly drawn from the early Christian apocalyptic works. It contains Heaven (also called 'Empyream'), chaos, Earth or the world, and Hell. The relationship is hierarchical and vertical. Heaven in *Paradise Lost* is vast, but not infinite. It has battlements, long unbroken walls, and doors that open into chaos. Before Satan fell, there were only Heaven and chaos. Variouslly called as "the wasteful deep", "the hoary deep", and "the wild abyss"; chaos has been described as "a dark illimitable ocean, without bound". It is ruled by the God of Chaos alongwith his consort 'Night'. 'Orcus', 'Ades', 'Demogorgon', 'Runiour', 'Tumult' etc. are some of the inhabitants of "chaos".

Immediately before the fall of Satan, Hell was carved out of the nethermost region of chaos. It has a gate guarded by Sin and Death. The world, created after Satan's expulsion from Heaven is a globe that is suspended in chaos. It is linked to Heaven by a golden chain and a golden staircase.

Heaven is inhabited by God the Father, Messiah the son and Angels. God sits on the throne of Heaven which is on the Holy Mount. The angelic beings are divided into three hierarchies, each hierarchy subdivided into three orders or choices. Seraphin, Cherubin and Thrones comprised the first hierarchy; Dominations, Virtues and Powers, the second: Principalities, Archangels and Angels formed the third hierarchy.

Diction and language are two important parameters for appreciating *Paradise Lost*. You already know that both these have been the cause of some scathing criticism of Milton. His diction in his epic has often been pejoratively branded as 'Latiniate', and it is not wide off the mark. Surely, some of his grammatical constructions like lines 44-47 of Book I, are based on Latin. Then, he shows a penchant for using words with their old or original meanings.

Like most other epics, Milton's epic is also characterized by countless allusions and epic similes. These help enlarge the scope and dimensions of an epic, and matches, in part, the immensity of the epic action. In Milton's epic, they also attest to the scholarship of Milton, mainly the six years at Horton that he had dedicated to a study of European classics.

One thing that you should never lose track of is that you have been prescribed only two books out of twelve. The first two books are, in a sense, quite different from the rest. The context for this statement is certainly Satan. In Books I & II, he steadily grows in stature, both in the eyes of his companions as well as Milton's readers. Therefore, caution is recommended with regard to opinions of Satan, his heroism, and his place in the epic. There is a danger of biased opinion being formed because of partial reading of *Paradise Lost*. Hence it is suggested that you read through the "Arguments" that precede each book. Now, we may begin with the text proper.

SAQ

1. Can Milton be called a nationalist ? Can we speculate on this question ?(70 words)

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2. Is the context of *Paradise Lost* biased towards the personal rather than the political and the religious ? (80 words)

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3. What kind of expectations are aroused by the use of the label "epic" for a literary work considering that *Paradise Lost* has also been seen as 'drama' ? (150 words)

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4. To what extent was Milton's conception of the Universe influenced by seventeenth-century science ? (100 words)

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The Verse

Added in 1668 at the insistence of the publishee, Milton here replies to popular opinion on "why the poem rhymes not." Via references to Homer and Virgil, he explicitly states that verse without rhymes is the true measure of heroic poetry. In the 'Preface' to *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe had argued almost along the same lines. In fact, the similarities are interesting. However, far more interesting was the response of Dryden. Apparently peeved at Milton's low opinion of rhyme. Dryden explains the actual reason for Milton not using rhyme : " rhyme was not his (Milton's) talent".

Book I: The Argument

Also added in 1668, it serves as a brief summary of the action in Book I. Actually, every book is preceded by one 'Argument'.

Lines 1 - 26

Among the most important lines in the whole poem, they serve as the statement of the subject and invocation of the Muse. The first five lines state the subject. Notice that Milton includes within the ambit of his subject, getting back of "the blissful seat." But the poem proper has only Visions of it. You may also notice how the cumulative effect of words like 'disobedience' 'Forbidden', 'mortal', 'Death', 'Woe' and 'loss' is partly offset by 'Restore' and 'regain'.

In lines 6-26, Milton invokes the muse to his aid. This is a statement in epic convention, but he turns it upside down. Instead of choosing one of the nine Muses that reside on Mt. Helicon, he appeals to the creative Power (called 'Urania' in Book VII) that inspired Muses and other prophets. This break in convention was certainly a play to accommodate the Christian story/subject within an otherwise pagan

form of the epic. This story, once accommodated, yields space to Puritanical theology by lines 17-18.

" And chiefly thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure."

Finally, this section closes with the statement of the objective to "assert Eternal Providence/ And justify the ways of God to man."

Lines 27-83

These lines are significant as they employ another epic convention : beginning of the action in 'medias res'.

At the beginning of the action, Satan is bound in "adamantive chains", is seen lying along with companions in a "fierly Deluge". At the end of this section, Satan is ready to address his deputy Beelzebub. These lines are important for many reasons. Notice the Subject-verb-Object invention in lines 44-45. It is a good example of Milton's penchant for Latin construction. The oxymoron "darkness visible" is certainly one of the most cited example of rhetorical devices. Again, this section also contains a lot of objective information. For instance, line 50 informs that the fall of Satan and his companions lasted nine days. While line 75 informs that the distance between Hell and Heaven is thrice that between the centre of the Earth and the Pole.

Description of Hell

Hell is a very important site in *Paradise Lost*. Hence, it needed to be objectively as well as subjectively created for the readers. In Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Mephistopheles had described Hell, albeit very subjectively. But, that definitely would not have sufficed for Milton's epic. So, he describes Hell as a "fiery Gulf" or "fiery Deluge", that is surrounded on all sides by a wall of fire. The fire in Hell is fed by "ever burning Sulphur unconsumed." He locates Hell at the farthest possible point from Heaven, a distance that is thrice the distance that exists between the centre of the earth and the farthest pole. The

Check Your Progress:

1. Comment on Milton's choice of matter for his epic.
2. Bring out the significance of Milton's description of Hell.
3. Explore the functions of the epic similes and allusions.
4. Outline the cosmology which underlies the poem.
5. Show the contestation between the 'epic' and 'Christian' elements in the poem.

Lines 84-124

Satan's first speech in *Paradise Lost* is addressed to his deputy, Beelzebub. Initially, he struggled to recognize his fallen colleague. This could have led Satan to express his own despair at the loss of

Heaven. However, his pride intervenes, and the speech becomes symptomatic of the defiance that characterize him throughout the first two books. For the readers of this epic, this speech sets the record straight on many counts : "sense of injured merit" (98) had led Satan to rebel against God when the Son was anointed the successor to the throne of Heaven; the rebellion was a "Glorious Enterprise" (89) joined by "innumerable force of spirits around" (101); and, the loss was due to 'Thunder', a secret weapon unleashed by God, who "holds the Tyranny of Heaven" (124). All this is of course, Satan's version and you should be gingerly in accepting them. For instance, Satan's "Glorious Enterprise" is only an "impious war" (43) according to the narrator.

There are two things that Satan proclaims here, and they are to be hardly doubted. He talks of possessing an "unconquerable will" (106). Observe in later stages, how the element of 'quile' dictates the path of their revenge. This section would conclude with a remark on Heaven. Satan refers to Heaven as "the happy Realms of Light" (85), and his use of expressions like "transcendent brightness", "outshine", and "bright" help reinforce the impression. Throughout the epic, Heaven is portrayed in images of Light and brightness, a fact full of poignancy because Milton was blind when he wrote this epic.

Lines 125-127

Observe how the narrative voice tries to reverse or falsify the effect of Satan's speech by the use of the expression "but rack't with deep despair". Narrational intrusions like this are common in *Paradise Lost*.

Lines 128-191

Beelzebub begins his reply under the influence of his Chief's rhetoric by offering praises to his Chief for having "endangered Heaven's perpetual king". However, he soon slips into dependency as he considers their defeat to be ample proof of omnipotence of their conquerors, the "Almighty". This view, alongwith a tone of moderation, will be consistently preserved in Beelzebub's later speeches. This speech touches a core issue of the poem when Beelzebub ponders as to what - "strength, or chance, or Fate" - upholds God's supremacy.

Satan retorts swiftly to the apparent obsequency of his deputy's reply and declares that

"To be aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight." (159-60)

He furthers this aim in lines 162-66, lines that state Milton's theme, Satan's project of eternal evil, and lines that look forward to the course of human history as an eternal tug-of-war between good and evil. Mark the apparent democratic tone that is introduced with the use of the verb "consult" (187).

Stop to Consider

Satan's Democratic Ideals

As leader, Satan adopts a lot of democratic postures. He tries to give his revolt the tint of a popular uprising (I, 100-02); he calls for consultation to decide the future course of action (I,185-87, 659-60); and he grounds his claims to leadership on popular consent (II, 19-24). The feather in the cap is of course his voluntary offer to undertake the journey in search of the 'new world'. These postures gain importance on two counts - Milton's republican antecedents, and the view held by many critics - mainly Satanists - that Milton's sympathies in *Paradise Lost* lie with Satan. Did Milton portray in Satan a true democratic leader that the English Revolution failed to produce?

I can understand the temptation to say 'yes'. However, close scrutiny of Satan's speeches resists such a view. In his first speech, he resolves to wage eternal war (I, 120-1), while in the second, he declares his project of evil (I, 159-60). Even in his address to his assembled followers, he charts out a course of action concerning the 'new world'. Thus Satan has already drawn the battlelines before consulting his council. However, narratorial interventions strengthen in the readers the impression that Satan is a despot, a charge that he and his followers level at God. You may, therefore, alternatively consider Satan's democratic postures as instances of ironic parody.

The choice is yours.

Lines 192-241

Milton introduces another epic convention here, the epic simile. An epic simile is an extended comparison where the 'vehicle' (the object introduced for the sake of comparison) is developed far beyond its original points of signification and likeness. The first epic simile of *Paradise Lost* gives an impression of the physical immensity of Satan (192-202). While the comparisons with Titans and Leviathan points to the immensity of Satan, the following anecdote of "the Pilot" (203-08) subtly hints at Satan's potential for deceit, and anticipates Eve's deception by Satan. This simile establishes a pattern within the epic : Milton does not literally describe personages and places, but gives impressions through comparisons and anecdotes. He follows up his first simile with another (230-37) where the contours of Hell are likened to a place devastated by earthquake or volcanic activity. The sense-pattern recurs in the descriptions of Heaven and chaos. T.S. Eliot - who took Milton to task for a defective visual imagination - thought that Milton excelled in the "imagery suggestive of vast size, limitless space, abysmal depth, and light and darkness", a quality that the theme and setting of *Paradise Lost* demanded.

In this section, Milton makes an intervention through the image of an omniscient God (210-20), who also has foreknowledge . This keeps recurring repeatedly (e.g., at the beginning of Book III), and it has been a favourite tool at the hands of Satanists and other critics like

Empson who view God as a tyrant. The question, --"why such a God sanctioned the escape of Satan, the fall of mankind-etc?"----, rankles throughout the epic. A smarter narrational intervention is, however, made in lines 238-41.

SAQ

1. Was Milton writing a Christian epic? (80 words)

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2. To what extent does Milton address the norms of epic conventions? (70 words)

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3. How much weightage is to be given to the narratorial interventions? (100 words)

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3. Is the description of Hell more subjective than objective? (60 words)

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4. Does the introduction of the figure of omniscient God hamper the natural progress of the narrative? (80 words)

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Lines 242-521

Satan's third speech (242-70) is the most significant of all. He bids formal adieu to the abode of "celestial light", appeals to Hell to receive its "new possessor", and continues the argument which stresses that only Thunder had made God greater. In a sentence that smacks of political trickery, he tries to come to terms with the loss of Heaven :

"The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n." (254-5)

Of course, this reaffirms the old belief that Hell and Heaven are psychological states, a streak that runs through the descriptions of both. Satan also utters those words that have since become the manifesto of rebellion :

"To reign is worth ambition though in Hell :
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n." (262-3)

Beelzebub, in his reply (272-82), urges Satan to rouse their fallen mates by giving a clarion call. Satan does accordingly, and his exhortation (315-30) ends in a breathtaking crescendo :

"Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen." (330)

Meanwhile, Milton continues to employ similes to describe Satan's shield and spear. While the shield is compared to the moon as seen through Galileo's telescope (284-91), the spear is compared to the tallest pine :

"His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the Mast
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand," (292-4).

Notice specially the deliberate manner in which Milton delays the climax through a different arrangement of words. This is a characteristic feature of *Paradise Lost's* syntax; he follows up this dual

comparison with another simile where Satan's fallen 'Legions' are compared to the autumnal leaves on the brooks in Vollombrosa, near Florence. The comparison of a multitude of fallen leaves had precedents in Homer, Virgil, Dante, etc., but here it is loaded with the baggage of Milton's Italian journey, probably the happiest period of his life. Interestingly, Milton had also visited Galileo at Fesole.

Roused by their General's voice, the innumerable fallen angels arise, fly and assemble in front of their leader. Milton employs two rapid similes (338-55) to capture their flight and their subsequent assembly. Through a master stroke, Milton arranges the four similes relating to the fallen angels in such a way that they rise to a crescendo. The comparison begins with plant imagery (Vollombrosa and sedge on Red-Sea), moves through insect imagery (armies of Huns, etc.). This sort of heightened tempo is a characteristic of Milton's 'Grand Style'. Commentators from A.W. Verity onwards, have pointed to the implicit denigration and moral judgment that accompany these similes. In fact, one can observe a deliberate pattern whereby Milton employs oriental and pagan similes while dealing with Satan, his followers, and Hell.

Milton and Colonialism

By the time *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, England had grown into a major colonial power. Certainly, Milton could not have remained insulated from contemporary developments. Though there seems to be no direct connection between this epic and colonialism, it has been put under the scanner like some other texts. Most notable is Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Even a text like Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* has been read from a postcolonial perspective by Edward Said.

Milton's text lends itself to a postcolonial critique mainly on account of the oriental references it contains. In Book I, 294, Milton uses the word 'Ammiral' while describing Satan's spear. Etymologically, this word is derived from 'amir', an Arabic word meaning ruler. Milton's propensity to portray Satan as an oriental despot is again observed in I, 348 when he refers to Satan as 'Sultan', when the angels reduce their size to enter Pandemonium, they are compared to pygmies beyond the Himalayas. Again, this propensity recurs at the beginning of Book II, when Satan is described seated on a royal throne. Apart from these, the first two books abound in numerous pagan and heathen references, the best instance being the catalogue of evils. It is disturbing to note that Milton has described Satan, his followers and Hell almost entirely in oriental and pagan terms. Needless to say, most of these references carry connotations of debasement, debauchery and denigration.

In Homer, there is a catalogue of ships and their captains who took part in the Trojan war; in Virgil, there is a catalogue of Warriors; and in Milton, there is a catalogue of Devils (356-522). This is an epic convention and so is the invocation of the Muse (376) at intervals. Milton encountered a problem because the names of the fallen angels

were struck off from the "heavenly Records" (361-3). He adopts the prevalent view that the wandering Devils were absorbed into the heathen pantheon (364-75), and, accordingly, catalogues the names and respective genealogy of the Devil's leaders. The twelve names of Satan's generals are from the idolatry of Heathenism, an obvious continuation of the pattern already discussed.

The first, Moloch, an Ammonite Sun-God, whose worship required infant sacrifice. The second is Chemos, a moabite Sun-God, whose worship necessitated very crude and obscene rites. The catalogue is made up by Baalim and Ashtaroth, Thammuz, Dagon, Rimmon, the Egyptian gods - Orisis, Isis and Oras, and Ionian gods. The last was Belial, a lewd spirit who had no temples dedicated to him, but dwelt in courts, palaces and luxurious cities. You may do well to notice the debasement that accompanies each genealogy.

Roused by the clarion call of their leader, the fallen angels swiftly arrange themselves into a formidable army. To the sound of "Dorian music", they move silently "in perfect phalanx", a battle formation reminiscent of Milton's contemporary times. They brandish banners, spears and helmets, while Azazel, a Cherub, unfurls "Th' Imperial Ensigns". Through rapid comparisons to the great armies in human history (573-87). Milton gives his readers an impression of the size and strength of the army that stood on the plains of Hell in front of their towering leader, Satan. Association of such splendour with Satan's army is intriguing as Milton had ended the catalogue of Devils with the verb "flocking" (522). The animal connotations of this verb does not sit easily with the grandeur of Satan's army.

Check Your Progress

1. Do you think Milton's choice of blank verse for his epic was justified ?
2. Milton makes very intriguing use of a couple of epic conventions. Would you call them ironic ?
3. "The hallmark of Satan's speeches is their consistency". Comment on this remark.
4. What purpose do epic similes serve in an epic narrative?
5. Comment on the use of proper names by Milton.

Lines 588-667

The focus now shifts to the commander, Satan. Under close scrutiny of the narrator's lenses, Satan, for the first time, is shown to express remorse at having wrought the downfall of his followers. It is a very rare moment in the epic, and is perhaps matched only by his soliloquy on Mt. Niphates in Book IV. However, you may consider it as a narratorial intrusion into Satan's psyche. Satan prepares to speak,

falters thrice, weeps, and, finally, holding back the surge of emotions, begins his long anticipated address to his followers.

He begins by expressing incredulity at the defeat of such a "united force of Gods", and ascribes the loss to a lack of knowledge on their part about God's secret weapon, 'Thunder'. Through a pun "tempted our attempts", (642), Satan hints that their ignorance about the secret weapon might be the best course of their rebellion, subsequent defeat, and ultimate expulsion from Hell (By pitting Satan's 'lack of knowledge' against God's 'foreknowledge', Milton might be playing a malicious trick on God's adversary). Chastened by their dire encounter with God's strength, Satan discards force in favour of "fraud or quile" (645-7), and again calls for war (661-2). To sound politically correct, he calls for a "Full counsel".

Satan's address has a singular importance within the epic : it introduces the human element into the story. In his speech, he alludes to an earlier prophecy made in Heaven concerning the creation of a new world to be inhabited by a favoured "generation". Satan hints that this world, if already created, may be the first target of their revenge. Notice how this determines the adversarial course of human history.

Lines 663-798

Satan's war cry is greeted with cheers and the sound of swords clashing against shields (663-9). Then, led on by Mammon, the fallen angels build a magnificent structure called "Pandemonium", which has since come to mean confusion and disorder, was a coinage of Milton. Designed by Mulciber (Hephaestus in Greece), the architecture of Pandemonium (710-17) has been speculated to bear striking resemblances to St. Peter's Basilica at Rome. The speculation is bolstered by the comparison of the fallen angels to 'bees' (768-75). 'Bee' was the emblem of Pope Urban VIII; the founder of St. Peter's and his followers were generally nicknamed 'bees'.

I would like to end Book I with a couple of questions. The first relates to the fact that the devils are transformed into dwarfs so as to facilitate their entry into Pandemonium (775-92). To say the least, it sounds mock-heroic, especially after the splendid fashion in which they erect the Pandemonium. Christopher Ricks thinks that Milton's play on the words "smallest" (989) and "large" (990) constitute 'a superbly contemptuous pun'. It is of interest to note that while the followers are reduced in size, Satan and other leaders retain their sizes. Was Milton subtly but deliberately falsifying the democratic postures of Satan? The second concerns Mammon, who, even in heaven, had his "looks and thoughts" "clorenward bent" so as to admire the gold-trodden pavement. Now, this raises the question : was Mammon already fallen before his fall? You may refer back to Tillyard's criticism included in the section on critical reception.

Check Your Progress

1. Do you think Milton made adjustments to fit his Christian theme into an essentially pagan form, the epic? If yes, what were those adjustments?
2. Descriptions of the Devils and Hell have elicited opposite critical responses. What would be your response?
3. Make a critical estimate of Satan and Beelzebub vis-à-vis each other.
4. The use of proper names is a favourite device of Milton. What function, do you think, they perform?
5. Commenting on lines 619-20, Herbert Grierson had posed the question - "Is there even in Shakespeare a greater moment?" In the light of the above, critically estimate Satan's address (622-62) vis-à-vis his other speeches.
6. The erection of Pandemonium and the cataloguing of the Devils point to a possible contradiction within Milton. Do you agree?

3.7 Summing up

Let me begin this section by posing to you a question - 'Do you feel that different ideas, opinions, ideology, concepts etc. are floating around in your head?' In this section, our energies would be channelised to recapitulate, and then, put in order, the information, critical opinions, analyses etc. that we have so far come across.

John Milton, the seventeenth century epic poet, shared one thing with his epic - a chequered history. At a relatively early age, Milton had intuitions of writing something great. To realize these intuitions, he chose the epic, a genre that is massive, grand, encyclopaedic and conventional. Since England and the English literary tradition had hardly anything to offer, he sought poetic inspiration on the first two books of his epic.

"*Paradise Lost* is great because it is objectionable. It spurs us to protest" (John Carey in Milton). In the vast body of critical literature on *Paradise Lost* that has accumulated over three and a half centuries, many critics have voiced their reservations about different aspects of the poem. On the other hand, appreciation has also flowed in equal measure. Language and Diction were the first to attract attention, but the focus gradually shifted to Satan and the Devils. Post William Blake, they dominated the nineteenth century critical sensibility. They even found favoured with nineteenth century critics, but the trend was partly reversed in the twentieth century. This century saw the introduction of new perspectives - narrative, reader-response, Marxist, feminist etc. Vary recently, *Paradise Lost* has even been put under the colonial scanner.

The first two books of *Paradise Lost* serve as introductions Milton's epic in particular, and epic in general. The way Milton employs some epic conventions point to a problem in his subject. Epic demands a hero and a heroic action, but, what is heroic about the 'fall of Man' - the subject of Milton's epic. You already know that a sizeable number of critics and commentators see Satan as the hero of Milton's epic. The first two books might even lead you into believing this. But before jumping to hasty conclusions, remember that (i) *Paradise Lost* has ten more books that follow the first two, and (ii) the narrative voice constantly dissuades us against considering Satan a hero.

There are a lot of other features that characterize the first two books. One of them is the abundance of similes, allusions, references and proper names. They help create an impression of an encyclopaedic sweep, a quality integral to any epic narrative. Consistency is another standout feature of these two books. It is at work in the description of different locations, in the portraits of the Devils, in the speeches of Satan, and over all, in the debate in Hell. Lastly, the first two books have a lot of contemporary significance, a fact that can be immensely helpful in placing the text in its context.

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Unit 4

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst"

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Ben Jonson the poet

4.4 The Work of Ben Jonson

4.5 Critical Reception

4.6

4.6.1 Context of the Poem

4.6.2 Reading the poem

4.7 Summing Up

4.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

4.1 Objectives

This unit will enable you to

- connect the life of the poet to the work we are going to discuss;
- understand the poet's contribution to English Poetry of the Renaissance Period
- place the poet in the historical and literary context;
- in exploring the range of meanings possible in the text ; and
- in appreciating the prescribed poem as being one of the foremost of its kind in the English Language.

4.2 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the Renaissance poet-dramatist Ben Jonson who rose to fame in the early seventeenth century. This unit will attempt to familiarize you with his background and some of his

personal details. It will shed some light on the period he lived in and the various literary and larger social and cultural concerns that informed his life. The unit will discuss in detail the poem prescribed in your syllabus with reference to its context. His reputation as a poet rests solely on the poems and the epigrams he wrote for his patrons and friends and his dejection, disappointments, envy, ecstasy and passion find the profoundest expression in these poetic works.

4.3 Ben Jonson The Poet:

Benjamin Jonson, more popularly known as Ben Jonson, was born in the year 1572 a month after his father, a clergyman, died. He was therefore a posthumous child. His mother married a master bricklayer, perhaps Robert Brett (Warden and Master of the Tile and Bricklayers Company), whose trade Ben as a child did not like much. He received his education at Westminster School under the tutelage of the antiquarian scholar William Camden and was imbibed with humanist values. Later on with the influence of William Camden, he attended the prestigious Royal College of St. Peter in Westminster and became personally acquainted with several of Camden's influential friends and scholarly contemporaries - members of the Sidney family, with his future patron, William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, and with scholars such as Sir Henry Savile (Provost of Eton, Warden of Merton College, editor of St Chrysostom, translator of Tacitus) and the great Dutch classicist and poet Daniel Heinsius. Though he claimed that his grandfather was a gentleman who served Henry VIII, he enjoyed no advantage of any rank or any connections to aristocratic families owing to his father's bankruptcy and then death. From an early age he understood the necessity of friendships and acquaintances with the influential families, his fellow writers, men who led the intellectual life he valued, and powerful aristocratic men and women who were his readers and patrons. These friendships played a very important part of his art: when pleased with his friends he wrote poems of praises,

affection and respect for them; any loss, failure or betrayal of friendship drove him into passionate anger and he created poems of betrayal, fury and jealousy.

Stop to Consider

This information that is being given to you will let you gather an idea of the kind of childhood and background that Jonson had. The company of the people he grew around contributed to his standing as a poet.

Ben Jonson is usually considered to be the most important contemporary of William Shakespeare. He succeeded in establishing himself as a man of letters and a prominent playwright dabbling in every form of the literary medium to address private, public, and courtly audiences. According to *Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, he, perhaps, was the first Englishman to have earned his livelihood through writing alone. However, among his works there are few personal lyrics which tell us about his life and much about him as a man. He is known only by the words of his associates, friends and acquaintances especially William Drummond's *Conversations with Drummond*. William Drummond's own account of Ben Jonson is not very flattering. He writes

He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a condemner and scorner of others, given rather to lose a friend than a jest, jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth), a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well but what either he himself, or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done. He is passionately kind and angry, careless either to gaine or keep, vindicative, but, if he be well answered, at himself.

(Donaldson 611)

Jonson's close acquaintances and friends included many men and women of letters of the day and we know about those numerous friends from his epigrams and poems that he dedicated to them. Critics

have discerned three groups of his friends to whom he dedicated his poems- the first being the Sidney-Pembroke circle, the most important aristocratic circle of literary patrons in England at the time, the second group included his fellow professionals who depended on public sales and private patronage and the third group comprised of scholars, men of humanist learning who translated classical texts and published their own (and others) scholarly works. These three groups should not, however, be considered mutually exclusive of each other as members recognised to belong to one group sometimes belonged to another as well. For example, many members of the Pembroke circle, the newly professional writers, and the men of learning were associates at the Inns of Court. Many of Jonson's friends were accomplished writers who (including Jonson) circuited their written works in the court in the form of manuscripts.

Stop to Consider

This section informs you about the various patrons and acquaintances he came in contact with while trying to become successful as a dramatist. Ben Jonson was competitive in nature and also boastful. He was envious of his contemporary dramatists attaining more success. How do you think, this nature of his, affected his poetry?

Drummond's critical assessment of Jonson was influenced by his violent deed of having killed his fellow actor named Gabriel Spencer in a brawl and escaped execution narrowly. He is also known for his involvement in the so-called **War of the Theatres** (christened Poetomachia by Thomas Dekker) which was a conflict emerging from his personal and professional quarrels with two playwrights- John Marston and Thomas Dekker. This resulted in a number of plays to be put up on stage by each of the playwrights trying to demean and ridicule their literary rival. Dekker resented the murder of Gabriel Spencer and attacked Jonson in *Satiromastix*. In *What You Will*, Marston ridiculed Jonson. Jonson ridiculed Marson in *Every Man in*

his Humour and again in *Cynthia's Revels*. Their rivalry gave the audience more plays if not anything else.

He rose as a playwright and canonically, he is remembered mostly as a dramatist- he preferred to use the theatre to launch his attacks against his friends-turned-foes, thereby making his works a chronicle of his many failed friendships and his angst at his rivals. One example from many such friendships and quarrels is with Inigo Jones, a set and costume designer. They had collaborated in few masques for the court especially *The Masque of Blackness* in 1605 after which Jones made rapid professional leaps superseding the poet. Their relationship was fruitful and gave the audience several works of art but was also fraught with artistic and professional jealousies which eventually erupted in public. Jones remained in the favour of Charles I, Jonson on the whole did not. Jonson referring to Jones' act of betrayal wrote "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben" and held a deep grudge against Jones for the rest of his life continuing their professional feuds. He also wrote two poems "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones" and "To Inigo, Marquis Would-Be A Corollary" further attacking him.

His better relationships with peers and acquaintances can also be fathomed from his epigrams and other poems. He wrote a lavish epigram thanking his school headmaster William Camden whom he hails as "Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe/ All that I am in arts, all that I know..." John Donne was also is contemporary and Jonson's good relation with this poet can be gathered from the fact that he sent his epigrams to be assessed by the poet, and also wrote an epigram namely *Epigram XXIII* praising Donne, "Donne, the delight of Phoebus, and each Muse". In regard of his relationships with men and women of his times, his *Epigrams* are very elaborate.

JONSON'S CLASSICISM

Ben Jonson's classicism spanned from the literary to the philosophical. He believed in the maintenance of and attention to

form, decorum, fidelity, imitation, consistency etc. Also, he acknowledged that the best of classicism is exemplified in the works of ancient Greece and Rome and that any author wishing to replicate them should look toward these classics. Jonson was Influenced by Renaissance Humanism which was spreading through Europe starting in Italy, characterised by devotion to Greek and Roman classics and to restructure every literary genre on the models of the classical ones- epic, satire, lyric, drama, elegy etc. Jonson by his adaptations of Martial's epigrams and translation of Criticism of Horace is attributed of bringing them closer to the English reading Public. Apart from his own contributions to classicism, Jonson inspired the "Tribe of Ben" - Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, Sir John Suckling and others - to continue experiments in adapting Catullus, Horace, Tibullus, Ovid and Propertius to the English language. Thus the whole tradition of carpe diem poems in the seventeenth century stems from Jonson. This is the same process that Jonson himself followed. Even when he was incorporating the classical forms he made changes of his own to make his works more relatable to his contemporary times.

Jonson has been found to subscribe to Aristotle's ideas of poetry and imitation and they lie in the heart of his classicism and as a result, he is somewhat perceived as unoriginal. John Dryden, in his "An Essay of Dramatic Poesie," criticises the poet with veiled praise, when he refers to Jonson as a "learned Plagiary" of Horace and "all the other" ancient authors.

Jonson's works are replete with his huge knowledge of the classics in the form of classical allusions, imagery and mythology.

Jonson's most fruitful period in terms of his career markedly began in the year 1606 when he wrote his first artistic masterpiece *Volpone*. He soon wrote *Epicoene* in 1609, *The Alchemist* in 1610, *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614 and *The Devil is an Ass* in 1616 and attained considerable success. In 1616 he published the first folio of his *Works* which was a carefully edited collection of those of his plays that he wanted to be

remembered. The King also gave recognition to Jonson as a man of letters in 1616 by granting him royal pension, making him in effect, **if not in name**, the first Poet Laureate. In 1618 he was awarded an honorary masters' degree from Oxford University, a rare recognition then. After 1616 he had retired from the stage, and then it was a slow decline for Jonson in terms of professional and personal losses. In 1623 his library and a number of works in progress were burned down in a fire adding to his losses. He returned to the stage in 1626 with *The Staple of News* when James I died and Jonson lost his regular masque-commission. The 1628, the same year he suffered a stroke, he was appointed as the City Chronicler to the City of London but he was either unable or unwilling to do what the appointment asked of him. Eventually the appointment was revoked. His play *The New Inn*, 1629, was ridiculed while being stage prompting him to write "Ode to Himself" cajoling himself to 'leave the loathed stage'. 1631 saw his feud with Inigo Jones flare open again and it ended up with Jonson not receiving any royal commission after that date. He died on 6th August, 1637 and could not live to see his later works carefully compiled and published in a Second Folio. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. An inscription carved in stone: 'O rare Ben Jonson' marks his grave.

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SAQ |
| What does the life of Ben Jonson tell about the importance of patronages that was available for the poets during that period? |
| |
| |
| How did Ben Jonson's rivalry with his contemporaries become apparent in his works? |
| |
| |

4.4 The Work of Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson became involved with the theatre after having served in the army and by the year 1597 he was employed as an actor-writer by the entrepreneur Philip Henslowe. In the same year he was imprisoned for his part-writing his satirical play, *The Isle of Dogs*. He, however, continued to write masques and plays for private and public audience. He is one of the English dramatists who popularised **comedy of humours** in the late sixteenth century. He also worked for Shakespeare's acting company. In 1598, his 'comicall satyre', *Every Man in his Humour* was performed by Lord Chamberlain's Men in The Globe on the insistence of Shakespeare himself. 1605 saw the rise of Jonson's dramatic career. In collaboration with architect and stage designer Inigo Jones he brought out *The Masque of Blackness*. The following year, in 1606, his first masterpiece *Volpone* was staged. In the prologue to this satirical play, we find Ben Jonson, like in many of his prologues and inductions, putting forward a manifesto, a statement of artistic purpose. Assuming a neoclassical stance and echoing Horace's famous dictum that art should be pleasing and as well as useful, able to delight and instruct, Jonson writes:

In all his poems still hath been this measure:

To mix profit with your pleasure (7-8)

It is obvious in the choice of the word "poems" to describe his writings, including his plays that he thinks of them as capable of being included in the body of an author's works.

Most of English Renaissance plays being verse dramas, Ben Jonson's poetical skills served him when he was composing his plays and masques. Apart from using poetry professionally for the stage, Jonson relied on poetry to please his patrons, display his wit in the court, shower love on his friends and spew hatred on his rivals. We find among his poetical works various epigrams of praise and blame, scatological satire, elegies, odes, pastoral. Jonson wrote in the same contexts as Donne, his contemporary and still his writings are

discernibly different from Donne's. Both worked in the relatively enclosed social networks of the court and the Inns of Court, the coterie in which poetry was written and circulated among people bound together by the ties of friendship and patronage.

Apart from circulating his verses among his coterie of friends and circle of patrons like the other poets of his times, he also published them in the printed form. Two of his anthologies of poems- the *Epigrams* and *The Forest* were published in 1616 in his first folio *Works* alongside his plays and masques. The other collection *The Underwood* was published posthumously in 1640-1 in his second folio.

Stop To Consider

This section introduces you to the works of Ben Jonson. It will further elaborate on the circumstances under which these poems were written. Many of Jonson's poems were written for his patrons and close acquaintances.

Epigrams

In his 1616 folio, Jonson estimated his non dramatic verse better than the ones he wrote for the stage. The first poem in Jonson's *Epigrams* is an interesting two line poem addressed "To the Reader" which rather poses a challenge:

Pray thee take care, that tak'st my book in hand,
To read it well; that is, to understand.

Jonson's *Epigrams* is an arbitrary mixture of praise and censure, elegy and commentary- tributes and short lyrics of praises for the influential people and some personal pieces and elegies like "On My First Son" written after the death of his first son Benjamin at the age of seven. He seems to want to build a pantheon of the most influential people during his days like King James, William Camden, Sir John Roe, Don Surly, Robert (Earl of Salisbury), William (Lord Mounteagle), Thomas (Lord Chancellor), Lucy (Countess of Bedford), Elizabeth (Countess of Rutland), Susan (Countess of Montgomery), Mrs Philip Sidney, Edward Alleyn, John Donne, Sir Edward Herbert, sir Thomas

Overbury, Sir Henry Nevil, Benjamin Rudyerd and others in his *Epigrams*. There are in total 133 epigrams that Jonson wrote and that we know of. Through the discipline of form Jonson in his *Epigrams*, has been able to organize, schematize, and control experience. In his epigrams all his characteristic plain style- brevity, concision, lucidity, clarity, and thematic point converge.

Stop to Consider

Ben Jonson drew inspiration from classical sources for many of his works. Martial's epigrams were a source form which he imitated the form of his epigrams. Also consider the arrangement of the poems in his first folio. As this was the only folio he published under his own supervision, we can understand his thoughts by considering the same.

The Forest

The Forest consists of 15 poems and among them are the famous Country-house poem "To Penhurst" and the "Song: To Celia" from the play *Volpone*. His affinity towards the Sidney family is obvious if we consider the number of poems he wrote for the members of this family. He was also known to have acted as tutor to the eldest son of Robert Sidney, Lord Lisle, the owner of Penshurst. Jonson's "Ode To Sir William Sidney, on His Birthday" (Forest 14) was written for his twenty-first birthday celebration:

Now that the hearth is crowned with smiling fire,
And some do drink, and some do dance,
Some ring,
Some sing,
And all do strive to advance
The gladness higher;
Wherefore should I
Stand silent by,
Who not the least
Both love the cause and authors of the feast? (1-10)

This poem echoes the same fervour of the Penshurst Estate that Jonson displays in myriad colours in the poem “To Penshurst”. The welcoming hearth of the estate features here just as in “To Penshurst”. While many would like to stress on the lack of amorous poems among Jonson’s body of work, love is one of the predominant themes of *The Forest*. This escapes notice because Jonson does not use common poetic forms of expression for love, neither does he choose the bewildering lustful kind of love. He dwells on the ‘true and chaste love’ exemplified by the marriages of the various couples whom Jonson praises. In “Epode” (Forest 11) he elaborates on this kind of love:

That is an essence far more gentle, fine,
Pure, perfect, nay divine;
It is a golden chain let down from heaven,
Whose links are bright and even,
That falls like sleep on lovers, and combines
The soft and sweetest minds
In equal knots. This bears no brands nor darts
To murder different hearts,
But in a calm and god-like unity
Preserves community. (43-54)

The idea of ‘preserving community’ is a theme that is found in “To Penshurst” as well and the ideal couple and chaste love is an integral part of it.

Stop To Consider

The long running metaphor of trees in the titles of Ben Jonson’s poetry anthologies is interesting to note.

The Underwood

Jonson’s *The Underwood* published after his death in 1640, included his later works. Jonson had himself intended for the works to be published and had written a note “To the Reader” prefixed to *The Underwood* describing them as "works of diverse nature and matter

congested, as the multitude call timber-trees, promiscuously growing, a wood or forest." In the titles of his poetry anthologies there is a sustained metaphorical suggestiveness drawn from the earlier *The Forest* referring to trees, foliage and woods. We find "Poems of Devotion" , a series of pastoral and amorous verses, verse epistles, some odes, a few epigrams and the longer poems: "An Execration upon Vulcan"; "A Speech According to Horace"; and "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben" and ten "Eupheme" poems in this collection

SAQ

How do you think Jonson's affinity towards Renaissance Humanism and Classicism influence his poetic works?

To what extent can Jonson be considered as a representative poet of his age?

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Ben Jonson's dramatic works have always warranted more attention from the critics than his poetical works. His plays attest to the fact that he is consciously adheres a classical tradition, observing the rules of classical decorum in his own way which he affirms in the Prologue to *Volpone*. He maintains the unities of "place, time, person" trying to limit the events of the play to a twenty four hours as called for in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Satire strongly appealed Ben Jonson and though he was imprisoned once for his plays (*The Isle of Dogs*), he did not stop writing satires. Even though he was not any more imprisoned for them, he did however ruffle important feathers like no other dramatists of his time. Among his plays *Volpone*, his first masterpiece found success immediately. According to Robert C. Evans, during his contemporary period, Jonson was commended for his skill, genius, toil, wit, craft, grace, subtlety, innovation, and sense of structure, and was hailed for

emulating the ancients, attacking vice, and observing the unities of time and place. In the 17th century, Jonson's *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair* found favours among the audiences and critics like Samuel Pepys, John Dryden, Thomas Carew, William Davenant and Jeremy Collier and others.

Ben Jonson's literary reputations are usually confined to his plays but some of his non-dramatic poems are beyond doubt the finest short poems written in the early seventeenth century England. Ben Jonson had once said gloomily in a conversation to William Drummond that the works of John Donne would not stand the test of time and "for not being understood, would perish" (Conv. Dr. 158). It is also interesting to note that Jonson valued his work highly and thought they would be studied, understood and embraced by the posterity. Ben Jonson was of the belief that poetry was difficult to understand and that true poetry only appealed to a few discriminating readers. He, therefore, expected the reader to understand and appreciate his poems as evident in his first three epigrams: "To the Reader", "To My Book" and "To My Bookseller".

In his day, Jonson's art was revered and he had many admirers evident from the fact that he enjoyed an eminence in literary circle and was a mentor for the self styled 'Tribe of Ben'- Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, Sir John Suckling and others- a younger generation of poets who acknowledged him as their leader and the last bastion of the generation of the Elizabethan greats- Shakespeare, Bacon, Donne, Raleigh- all of whom he had known personally. While his greatness declined with time, ironically Donne's increased.

Ben Jonson was a classicist and a moralist and his non dramatic works with his traditional approach to poetry and lack of conceits like that of Donne resulted in a body of works which was rather of a familiar kind. The same plain familiarity that made him relatable to the readers of his time, failed to impress the critics of a later period. Jonson was, therefore, dismissed as a poet of middling stature. He came to be known as a classicist, a satirist, a dramatist but an occasional poet. However it is also not true that Jonson entirely lacked discerning

admirers. James Joyce is known to have held Ben Jonson in high regard. He once said that he had read every line of only three writers: Flaubert, Ben Jonson and Ibsen. Ben Jonson also found an admirer in the critic, Yvor Winters (1900- 1968) who placed his “plain style” above the ornate styles of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser.

In the essay “The Sacred Wood” T. S. Eliot wrote a scathing critique on Ben Jonson’s art and poetry perhaps which contributed to Jonson being entombed in his own age. T.S. Eliot described Jonson’s poetry as “of the surface” and felt that it lacked “a network of tentacular roots reaching down to man’s deepest terrors and desires.” He stresses on the issue of Jonson’s work being distanced from us by time and hence inscrutable: “in order to enjoy him at all, we must get to the centre of his work and his temperament, and that we must see him unbiased by time, as a contemporary. And to see him as a contemporary does not so much require the power of putting ourselves into seventeenth-century London as it requires the power of setting Jonson in our London: a more difficult triumph of divination”. He thus argues that Jonson’s poems appeal to the mind, and not to emotions.

Jonson had thought that reverence of readers would be easily found and that his poetry would survive the test of time but his poems have only become more and more obscure with time.

SAQ

How has the critical reception of Ben Jonson as a poet changed with time? Why do you think the change occurred? Can it be compared to that of John Donne?

4.6

4.6.1 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst”, one of his well known poems was published in the First Folio of his *Works* in *The Forest* (1616). It has

been often described as one of the finest example of the genre of ‘Country House Poem’ and is also frequently considered the first of eleven poems which are collectively known as the ‘Penshurst Group of Poems’. The overarching entity that defines the both the groups of poems is a country house. In the context of the poem we are studying, the entity is the estate of Penshurst. It is the ancestral home of the aristocratic Sidney family whose members were courtiers, soldiers, politicians, statesmen and poets among others. From the early seventeenth century poets have been fascinated and inspired by the architecture, inhabitants and history of Penshurst place.

COUNTRY HOUSE POEM

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics notes that the Country House poem must have emerged from the classical ‘Ekphrasis’ which meant ‘description’. Ekphrasis can be defined “an expository speech which vividly brings the subject before our eyes”. While ekphrasis was used to describe works of art, paintings, buildings and statues, the Country House Poem is a form of topographical poem which exclusively chooses a country estate as its subject. It can be seen in one of its earliest forms in the Latin poet Statius' *Silvae*. In such poems the country estate is praised by the poet in an ornamental language. Ben Jonson is attributed of having adapted it in “To Penshurst”, the prototype of English Country House Poems, and incorporated it into the English Poetic tradition paving the way for the later poets like Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Thomas Carew (1594-1639), Andrew Marvell (1621-78), John Dryden (1631-1700), and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) to continue developing this genre. Hugh Jenkins in his book suggests, since ‘the country-house poem occupies the uneasy, shifting ground between a popular, residual, and communal ideology and a more egalitarian, emerging bourgeois ideology, so too does it place itself between two dominant literary forms: Renaissance drama and the bourgeois form of the novel’

There is also a direct influence of the pastoral tradition on the genre of Country House Poem as the natural setting, trees and pristine setting of the country estates are hailed. This is borrowed from Virgil's *Georgics* which praises country life in contrast to the city. Though the English Country House poems do not compare village life to city life, one cannot deny the influence of the classical examples.

Oftentimes we find mythological resonances of the Golden Age and Greek Arcadia, the estate becomes a mythical place dwelling in which would naturally mean living in relationship with others, without denial or deprivation of one's own being and thereby becomes a model for human relationships on a larger social scale. An archetypal myth that features dominantly in Country House Poems is the myth of The Garden of Eden. Estates are more often bestowed with characteristics like that of the Garden of Eden in such poems. Emphasis is given in the benign relationship of the estate's lord and his tenants or his guests. It is also seen that at times the estate is conceived of as a heaven of sorts and the lord akin to God.

Sir Philip Sidney belonged to this family and was born in the estate itself. The Sidney family was a great patron of poetic arts and hence there always were poets maintaining good relations with the family, who warranted patron from them. Ben Jonson was associated with this society for most of his lifetime as it is evident from the fact that he dedicated eleven poems and two plays to the Sidney family.

"To Penshurst" was written sometime in between 1603 and 1612 and is a poem that critics have described as a country house poem *par excellence*. The formal perfection of the poem is remarkable. It celebrates and praises the estate's lord Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester, and his family concentrating more on the charming hospitality than on the proper architecture of Penshurst estate.

4.6.2 READING THE POEM

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" is a 102-lined epigram addressing the estate itself drawing the readers' attention to its difference and uniqueness when compared to the more fashionable and expensive looking estates that existed during that period. We clearly can fathom that the intention of the poet is to please the owners of Penshurst estate and even then the poem is largely topographical. Nicole Pohl is of the opinion that though Jonson's "To Penshurst" is not the first country house poem in the English language but it most certainly played a role in establishing the genre. Jonson adapted the form of the 'country house poem' from the works of poets like the Greco-Roman Statius, Martial, Virgil and Horace moulding it to better fit his own era. While he sought to earn favours from the owners of Penshurst, he did not fail to emphasize on intricate entwinement with the community.

The state rooms and the long gallery were added to the original structure of Penshurst in 1594 and Robert Sidney, planned to turn Penshurst into a 'prodigy house'. J. C. A. Rathmell is of the opinion that Jonson in his poem stresses on the superiority of Penshurst estate and urges the need to keep the estate away from the influence of Elizabethan grand country houses which according to Jonson had lost their utility, lacked timelessness and had turned away from the community.

PENSHURST PLACE/ ESTATE

In *The Stately Homes of England* (1878), Llewellyn Jewitt describes Penshurst as: "Penshurst—the 'Home' of the Sidneys—the stately Sidneys: stately in their character, in their careers, in their patriotism, in their heroism, in their rectitude, and in their verse—is surely one of the best of the Stately Homes of England". Inadvertently, Jewitt expresses the interdependence between Penshurst and the Sidney family: Jewitt demonstrates that the allure and stateliness of the estate is embedded within the allure and stateliness of the family, and vice versa.

In today's day, Penshurst Place is considered to be a historical building which is located in Tonbridge Kent. Built in 1341 and was bestowed to the Sidneys in the year 1552 by King Edward VI. After being inherited by Henry Sidney from his father Sir William Sidney, he left it in turn for his son Sir Philip Sidney. His brother Robert Sidney inherited the Estate after Philip's death and it was during his ownership that Jonson wrote his famous "To Penshurst"

Ian Donaldson writes in "Jonson's poetry":

"In "To Penshurst" the play between tenor and vehicle, between the observed scene and its figurative meaning, between the operation of a seemingly "plain" style realistically charting a known place and a style that works by indirection, association, and negative suggestion is altogether more complex, creating the sense of a landscape that is magically animated, and a family so profoundly at one with that landscape that they are implicit in and represented by the forest itself." (*The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, 130)

Jonson begins the poem (lines 1-7) primarily describing the estate and its richness in its close connection to nature and a pastoral English setting. Jonson positions this quality of Penshurst estate higher than any stature that modern architecture can create. We find him surveying the rich wooded landscape (lines 7-28). He elevates the nobility of the estate to the point where he describes the grove of trees around the estate as the dwelling of dryads, and the site where Pan, the god of music and Bacchus, the god of wine hold feasts. Jonson makes it known that man-made splendour is less desirable and is surpassed by the nature's beauty.

Jonson writes about the oak planted in Penshurst on the day of birth of Sir Philip Sidney calling it "That taller tree". Jonson as a student of classics must have known that by planting this tree the family was following a classical tradition. He writes:

Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade;

That taller tree, which of a nut was set

At his great birth, where all the muses met. (13-14)

And in hailing that “taller tree” he not only hails the tree for being a symbol of the Sidney family’s firm standing but also approving the family’s deep classical ties. Jonson attributes the oak of a twin identity that of Sir Philip Sidney. Sir Philip Sidney and the oak were both raised in the same estate and both have matured in the similar manner. The man having become the revered poet who wrote *Astrophel and Stella* and the oak holding generations of names of lovers, inflamed with love, carved on its bark. It is interesting to note that the “flames” Jonson alludes to are akin to those that Sidney himself wrote about in various poems in his poetic sequence *Astrophel and Stella*.

William Gifford who edited 1816 edition of Jonson's works writes in his notes that the other trees that Ben Jonson wrote about- ("thy lady's oak") and copse ("named of Gamage") can be identified with Lady Lisle, who according to tradition "was taken in travail under an oak in Penshurst Park, which was afterwards called *My Lady's Oak*," and also fed deer in the copse which bore her name.

Stop To Consider

Ben Jonson posits both the Penshurst Estate and the members of the Sidney Family in the same plane and throughout the poem constantly attributes qualities and virtues of one to the other. Also, he seems to approve of the observation of classical traditions like planting of tree on one’s son’s birth.

Jonson carries forward the description of the estate in a highly ornamental language occasionally alluding to classical and Greek mythical beliefs and notions. He paints a picture of an Eden-like utopic realm where there exists an allure of an almost mystical providence. He attributes the Penshurst of being a benevolent bestower of all things needed by the Lord, his family and the guests of the estate. Jonson mentions how “seasoned deers”, “purpled pheasant with the speckled side”, “painted partridge”, “fat aged carps” and “Bright eels” were regularly hunted or fished and fed on at Penshurst place and all of them came from its own grounds and ponds. He describes where on

the grounds the sheep, bullocks, kine and calf feed and where the horses and mare breed (lines 17-38). He also mentions the produce of the estate. He describes it rich in terms of “orchard fruits”- cherry, plum, fig, grape, quince, apricot and peach. He applauds the estate of its ability to bear these delicious fruits in abundance (lines 39-44). When Jonson suggests that all the animals, fowls, fishes and all the produce offer themselves up for the consumption of the Lord and the other people at the estate, he is celebrating the abundance and fertility of the estate discounting the labour required to hunt, gather and make them fit to be eaten. This can also be seen as the incorporation of the *sponte sua* motif of the myth of the Golden Age.

The descriptions in “To Penshurst” may be topographically precise but highly imaginative; the landscape is English and yet has classical undertones because of the inclusion of mythical allusions. This account, though highly stylised with lofty metaphors, provides the posterity of a firsthand account of the Penshurst place and its lifestyle and an oblique reference to other estates thriving during the early 17th century England.

Jonson then goes on to describe the estate and its Lord’s relationship with the tenants, which he says is not exploitative and just like the forest around Penshurst, they too are eager to serve and provide to their Lord’s upkeep:

And though thy walls be of the country stone,
They’re reared with no man’s ruin, no man’s groan;
There’s none that dwell about them wish them down;
But all come in, the farmer and the clown,
And no one empty-handed, to salute
Thy lord and lady, though they have no suit.
Some bring a capon, some a rural cake,
Some nuts, some apples; some that think they make
The better cheeses bring them... (45-53)

The community life that Penshurst facilitates and that the Lords of the estate encourage is celebrated by Jonson as an ideal life lived in closeness with the bounty of nature. The house itself was made of the

easily available “country stone” and not of the more expensive alternative whose procurement would have exploited the tenants. These tenants shower their love on the lords and ladies of the estate with gifts of their own which are usually home-grown or handmade.

Stop To Consider

Ben Jonson writes hunting and fishing in the poem but then tells the readers that the animals, fowls and fishes gave themselves up willingly. Why is it so?

In the line 59- 88, Jonson exalts the hospitality of Penshurst and the benevolence of its Lord. The gifts bestowed by the tenants were all used to feed the lords and his family and all the guests, visitors and the servants of the estate.

Here no man tells my cups; nor, standing by,

A waiter doth my gluttony envy,

But gives me what I call, and lets me eat;

He knows below he shall find plenty of meat.

The tables hoard not up for the next day (67-71)

King James himself was very pleased with the arrangements made by the Lady of the estate when he had stopped on being delayed by one of his hunts. The praises he heaped on the lady is what Jonson considers the “just reward” of “her high housewifery”. The table overflowing with food and drink is mostly exaggeration and flattery but the descriptions by Jonson concur with the multitude of documents preserved in the De L’Isle and Sidney Manuscripts and with the topographical features of the existing estate. However, the prosperity of the lordship as depicted in the poem is far from honest as it was a time of grave financial difficulty for much of the landed aristocracy.

Jonson skims over the less serene parts of domestic managements and the financial troubles and with extraordinary skill reminds his patron of the better features and his good fortune in the ‘true’ sense. In the concluding lines (89-102), Jonson once again praises the virtue that Penshurst emanates through its Lord and his family. He makes a final

comparison of the estate with numerous “other edifices” of the time and reaffirms that Penshurst is superior to them because of its closeness to nature, rustic village life and the community. Ben Jonson attributes all of this superiority of the estate to the able management, presence and involvement:

Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion thee
With other edifices, when they see
Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else,
May say their lords have built, but thy lord dwells. (99-102)

Throughout the poem, Jonson fuses the description of the house with the praise of its owners, thereby, while keeping the poem topographical; he manages to extol the Lord of the estate. The harmony between nature and man and that between man and man is upheld by the estate and the lord that dwelled in it. Each inhabitant is replete with kindness and morality -be it the Lord, his children, his lady, his tenants or the animals around the grounds according to Jonson. “To Penshurst” elaborates on the ideal community life helmed by the leaders with appropriate morality and spirituality, reverberating the myth of the Garden of Eden.

SAQ

What does Ben Jonson have to say about the hospitality at Penshurst?

How does Ben Jonson measure the virtue of the Lord, The Lady and their children?

In what ways is the Penshurst Estate superior to other estates according to the poet?

4.7 Summing up

Ben Jonson lived at a time when patronages for poets and dramatists were very important and so was their involvement in court-entertainment and public staging of plays at theatres. Ben Jonson, with his deep knowledge of the classics, drew inspiration from their poetic styles, literary conventions and subject matter but not without first adapting them to his own period's context with original insights. He valued his work enough to get them printed and his meticulous compilation of his poems he left for posterity, have attained the status of almost a relic. Even if the literary merits are discounted they stand as artefacts of history. Along with his satires and comedies, his poetic finesse is well displayed in his epigrams and other lyric poems. Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" celebrates a model of ideal feudal commonwealth where he hails rural life as the optimal combination of Nature and Civilisation.

4.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

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Unit 5

Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst"

SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 How to Approach the Poet

5.4 Important Poems apart from the prescribed ones

5.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

5.6 Summing Up

5.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

5.1 Objectives

In this unit you will be able to

- Learn how to approach the poet
- Know about other poems by Ben Jonson
- Answer probable questions from the text

5.2 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the Renaissance poet-dramatist Ben Jonson who rose to fame in the early seventeenth century. This unit will attempt to familiarize you with the poet prescribed by orienting you towards an approach to the text. It will also resolve issues of appearing in the examinations, especially by enabling you to tackle important questions relating to the text. We have already discussed the period the poet lived in and the various literary and larger social and cultural concerns that informed his life. As we said, Ben Jonson's

reputation as a poet rests solely on the poems and the epigrams he wrote for his patrons and friends and his dejection, disappointments, envy, ecstasy and passion find the profoundest expression in these poetic works.

5.3 How to approach the poet?

As we proceed to read Ben Jonson's poetic works and their close connection to his life, we are required to be careful. There are few autobiographical poems, notes or essays that would provide us his own account of the events of his life. We rely on the second hand accounts of his peers like William Drummond to form an image of the person he was. If we are to look upto Ben Jonson himself, he has quite particular about how and who should read his poems. His classical leanings made him echo Horace's view that his own poetry would appeal only a few discriminating readers. And he considers such ideal readers to be few. He did believe that he would be looks at more kindly by the posterity than his contemporary

From his poems we can fathom how deeply he was influenced by Classical Knowledge. Perhaps he owed this interest to William Camden and his acquaintances that Jonson was introduced to early in his life. Also, European Renaissance had spread throughout the continent after having emerged in Italy and for most poets looking up to the classical greats became a norm.

Jonson's poetic works can be better understood when considered alongside the context of the text.

5.4 Important poems apart from the prescribed ones

Ben Jonson's poems circulated in a limited circle in the form of manuscripts like other court poets of his time but his decision to

publish them in the form of a Folio in 1616 and naming it “Works” increased their circulation beyond the court crowd.

Jonson’s *Epigrams* is an arbitrary mixture of praise and censure, elegy and commentary- tributes and short lyrics of praises for the influential people and some personal pieces and elegies. There is a convergence of brevity, concision, lucidity, clarity, and thematic point in these poems.

The first poem in Jonson's *Epigrams* is an interesting two line poem addressed "To the Reader" which rather poses a challenge:

Pray thee take care, that tak'st my book in hand,
To read it well; that is, to understand.

Even though Jonson was one of the few poets of his circle to commit his coterie poems to the press, he was wary of the consequences. The second and third poems in *Epigrams* addressed "To My Book" and "To My Bookseller" are interesting because they present to us the intentions of Jonson who despite of having distrusted publishers had got his book printed for the masses. In “To My Book” he writes,

Become a petulant thing, hurl ink, and wit,
As madmen stones; not caring whom they hit.
Deceive their malice who could wish it so;
And by thy wiser temper, let men know
Thou art not so covetous of least self-fame,
Made from hazard of another’s shame

In “To my Bookseller” he beseeches his bookseller to let the book sell on its own merit to the ones who buy on it on their own and if it fails to sell, to ‘send it to Buckler’s-bury’ where it would have been taken apart and used as wrapping papers. Both the poems allude to his classicist views mirroring those of Horace who viewed his works to be recited only for his close friends. He acknowledges that his poetry may not be palatable to all of the reading public but only to the few knowledgeable ones who would perhaps not only understand but also appreciate his works and thereby buy his book. Another epigram which is important is “On My First Son” which might even be considered to be an elegy

Another interesting epigram is Epigram 17, addressed "To the Learned Critic," we see Jonson express his opinion on criticism, declaring that it was the opinion of the single judicious person that he esteemed, not that of a wider public:

And but a sprig of bays, given by thee,
Shall outlive garlands stolen from the chaste tree.

The Forest consists of 15 poems and the first poem is "Why I Write Not of Love" is about the illusive nature of Love personified by Cupid, the winged god of Love. He writes that love is impossible to be bound by the poet's verse which has successfully done so with Mars, the god of War and Venus, the goddess of Beauty.

While many would like to stress on the lack of amorous poems among Jonson's body of work, love is one of the predominant themes of *The Forest*. This escapes notice because Jonson does not use common poetic forms of expression for love, neither does he choose the bewildering lustful kind of love. He dwells on the 'true and chaste love' exemplified by the marriages of the various couples whom Jonson praises. In "Epode" (Forest 11) he elaborates on this kind of love:

That is an essence far more gentle, fine,
Pure, perfect, nay divine;
It is a golden chain let down from heaven,
Whose links are bright and even,
That falls like sleep on lovers, and combines
The soft and sweetest minds
In equal knots. This bears no brands nor darts
To murder different hearts,
But in a calm and god-like unity
Preserves community. (43-54)

Jonson's longer poem from *The Underwood* titled "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben" is an example of a poem which provides remarks to the new disciple willing

to be inducted into the 'Tribe of Ben' circle appears unpremeditated and can be studied for a better understanding of the poet himself.

5.5 Probable questions and suggested answers

Q. What does the life of Ben Jonson tell about the importance of patronages that were available for the poets during that period?

Ans: Throughout Renaissance and Early Modern England, the literary patronage system played an important role in the production of literature, in providing socioeconomic benefits and security to most writers, and in the praise and promotion of royal and aristocratic patrons and their families. Not only literature but also painting, architecture, music all the arts and were affected by a patronage culture so pervasive that no individual or sphere of life could entirely escape its effects. The connection between poetry and patronage involved more than how writers were paid, the ways they made their livings. It involved more fundamentally, how they lived their lives. Money came to the poets in the form of a onetime payment or sometimes an annual payment and at times a letter of credit. They were provided hospitality not just in terms of food and lodging but also in that they were allowed to mingle with other aristocrats which would have further benefitted the writers.

The writers would be encouraged and provided with protection and in return the patrons would receive gifts from the poets in the form of a manuscript, play or literary dedication. The writer/poet would also at times provide literary entertainment in the form of witty remarks and compositions to the patron and his guests.

The society of Early Modern England was imbued with notions of family honor and reputation and the ideas of promoting culture. Aristocrats were willing to support writer in order to receive praise and recognition in the writers works alongside facilitating the promotion of culture.

Q. How did Ben Jonson's rivalry with his contemporaries become apparent in his works?

Ans:

Ben Jonson wrote his plays in such a time when poets and writers competed against each other for recognition and patronage. Ben Jonson had many acquaintances and friends in the literary circle-many of the finest writers of his day: privileged men and women who circulated their works in manuscript, professionals who depended on public sales and private patronage, and scholars who published books in order to disseminate humanist learning. There were always instances where they would be required to collaborate with each other to stage dramatic works like masques for the court. One such person was Inigo Jones who was a stage architect and with whom Jonson collaborated to produce various masques. When Jones superseded the poet, Jonson was angered and he works through his feeling in the poem "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben". Jonson's quarrel with Jones seems not just personal but also about their different aesthetic values. He accuses of Jones of his false friendship and compares it to the spectacle that Jones produced on stage. He also wrote two poems "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones" and "To Inigo, Marquis Would-Be A Corollary" further attacking him.

The most famous quarrel is however is the so-called **War of the Theatres** (christened Poetomachia by Thomas Dekker) which was a conflict emerging from his personal and professional quarrels with two playwrights- John Marston and Thomas Dekker. This resulted in a number of plays to be put up on stage by each of the playwrights trying to demean and ridicule their literary rival. Dekker resented the murder of Gabriel Spencer and attacked Jonson in *Satiromastix*. In *What You Will*, Marston ridiculed Jonson. Jonson ridiculed Marson in *Every Man in his Humour* and again in *Cynthia's Revels*. Ben Jonson's rivalry with other poets and dramatists not only affected his works but also prompted him to write more pieces of ridicule and satire.

Q. How do you think Jonson's affinity towards Renaissance Humanism and Classicism influence his poetic works?

Ans: Ben Jonson's classicism spanned from the literary to the philosophical. He believed in the maintenance of and attention to form, decorum, fidelity, imitation, consistency etc. Also, he acknowledged that the best of classicism is exemplified in the works of ancient Greece and Rome and that any author wishing to replicate them should look toward these classics. Jonson was Influenced by Renaissance Humanism which was spreading through Europe starting in Italy, characterised by devotion to Greek and Roman classics and to restructure every literary genre on the models of the classical ones- epic, satire, lyric, drama, elegy etc. Jonson by his adaptations of Martial's epigrams and translation of Criticism of Horace is attributed of bringing them closer to the English reading Public. Apart from his own contributions to classicism, Jonson inspired the "Tribe of Ben" - Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, Sir John Suckling and others - to continue experiments in adapting Catullus, Horace, Tibullus, Ovid and Propertius to the English language. Thus the whole tradition of carpe diem poems in the seventeenth century stems from Jonson. This is the same process that Jonson himself followed. Even when he was incorporating the classical forms he made changes of his own to make his works more relatable to his contemporary times.

Jonson has been found to subscribe to Aristotle's ideas of poetry and imitation and they lie in the heart of his classicism and as a result, he is somewhat perceived as unoriginal. John Dryden, in his "An Essay of Dramatic Poesie," criticises the poet with veiled praise, when he refers to Jonson as a "learned Plagiary" of Horace and "all the other" ancient authors.

Jonson's works are replete with his huge knowledge of the classics in the form of classical allusions, imagery and mythology.

Q. To what extent can Jonson be considered as a representative poet of his age?

Ans:

Ben Jonson lived and wrote during the Renaissance which was marked with a renewed interest in the Classics and the humanism it endorsed. The classical ideas were derived from literature, rhetoric, poetics and other descriptions found in the works of Aristotle, Horace, Virgil and others. Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* is a text which incorporated and is influenced by the critical ideas that of Horace and Aristotle. The classical humanistic influence can be clearly seen in the works of Ben Jonson.

Ben Jonson's claim to fame as the representative poet of his times is evident from the immense success he attained with satirical plays and comedy of humours: *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Devil is an Ass*. His satires ruffled many important feathers and also got him arrested. Even then he has a huge following among the new and emerging poets. Known as the "Tribe of Ben", this group included Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, Sir John Suckling and others- a younger generation of poets who acknowledged him as their leader and the last bastion of the generation of the Elizabethan greats- Shakespeare, Bacon, Donne, Raleigh- all of whom he had known personally.

The King also gave recognition to Jonson as a man of letters in 1616 by granting him royal pension, making him in effect, if not in name, the first Poet Laureate. In 1618 he was awarded an honorary masters' degree from Oxford University which was a rare honor during that time.

Q How has the critical reception of Ben Jonson as a poet changed with time? Why do you think the change occurred? Can it be compared to that of John Donne?

Ans: Ben Jonson's fame as a dramatist and poet declined with time. From being hailed a leader by an entire generation of poets, he came to be known as a dramatist of fair repute but a poet of middling stature.

The change of sensibilities and the different aesthetics of the modern times is what changed the perception of Ben Jonson as a poet. Ben Jonson was a classicist and a moralist and his non dramatic works with his traditional approach to poetry and lack of conceits like that of Donne resulted in a body of works which was rather of a familiar kind. The same plain familiarity that made him relatable to the readers of his time, failed to impress the critics of a later period. T.S. Eliot, the critic responsible for John Donne's re-emergence as a poet, described Jonson's poetry as "of the surface" and felt that it lacked "a network of tentacular roots reaching down to man's deepest terrors and desires." He stresses on the issue of Jonson's work being distanced from us by time and hence inscrutable: "in order to enjoy him at all, we must get to the centre of his work and his temperament, and that we must see him unbiased by time, as a contemporary. And to see him as a contemporary does not so much require the power of putting ourselves into seventeenth-century London as it requires the power of setting Jonson in our London: a more difficult triumph of divination". He opines that Jonson's poems appeal to the mind, and not to emotions. It is interesting to note that Ben Jonson thought John Donne's poetry would perish "for not being understood" and imagined his own poems being studied with attention by "posterity". John Dryden wrote of Donne's poetry as "affecting the metaphysics" contributing to Donne's obscuring until Eliot. While Jonson's works were admired by the likes of James Joyce and Yvor Winters for his plain style, they failed to make their mark amongst the majority of modernists.

Q. What does Ben Jonson have to say about the hospitality at Penshurst?

Ans: Ben Jonson writes about the hospitality of Penshurst in the lines 59 -88. Ben Jonson tells us that every person regardless of their social stature was welcome at Penshurst. he then describes the abundance of food and drink that is offered to the visitors and guests. About his lodging arrangements he says that everything needed for a comfortable stay be it fire for warmth or light was available without even being

asked for. The legendary hospitality was such that even King James and his son were impressed by the hospitality and had praised the lady of the estate immensely.

Q. How does Ben Jonson measure the virtue of the Lord, The Lady and their children?

Ans:

Ben Jonson's parameters of measuring a person's worth are borrowed from classical knowledge. The Lord of Penshurst is attributed of being generous, benevolent and does not discriminate between high born and low born. The Lady's worth is measured in terms of her skills in housewifery. Her well maintained house was highly praised by King James himself. She is also described as chaste which according to Jonson was a rare quality. The Lord's children are as adept as their parents in mysteries of manner, art and arms and were taught to pray from an early age which Jonson claims are the best virtues that can be taught to one's children.

Q. In what ways is the Penshurst Estate superior to other estates according to the poet?

Ans:

Ben Jonson in his poem "To Penshurst" describes at length the many qualities of the Penshurst Estate. Despite of not being a richly built estate, Penshurst, according to Jonson, is rich in heritage, flora, fauna and virtues. He describes the groves of trees and the game animals found there. He refers to the bountiful nature of Penshurst place repeatedly. The kind of fruits it has on its grounds decorate the table of the lord along with the animals and fishes hunted from the grounds and ponds of the estate. The tenants too willingly provide their humble produce for the upkeep of their lord's palace. Penshurst may not be beautiful like the expensively built country houses of England, but Jonson stresses on the fact that the house never exploited them in the name of fashion. as a result of which Penshurst in a very classical manner exists cordially with the community on one hand and the

Nature on the other. This very quality makes Penshurst much superior to other estates.

5.6 Summing Up

Ben Jonson is as much a product of his times and society as he is of his classical learning. Though we see Jonson imitating Horace, Virgil, Martial and others in terms of the poetic forms, diction and metaphors, he does adapt them to suit his place, context and time. Jonson enjoyed patronages and pensions from the aristocrats and royals and his epigrams were mostly written for their pleasure. His rivalry with the other poets during his time also impacted his art. His angry satires were mostly directed towards the ones who betrayed him.

5.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

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