

***Directorate of Distance and Online Education***

**UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU  
JAMMU**



**Ist Semester**

**SESSION 2023 onwards**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**Course Code : ENG-122**

**Title of the Course : Poetry I**

**Unit – I, II, III, IV, V, VI**

**Lesson Nos. 1-39**

**Course Coordinator  
Prof. Anupama Vohra**

**Teacher Incharge  
Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

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## M. A. ENGLISH

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**Course Coordinator**  
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**Editing & Proof Reading**  
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## **WELCOME**

Directorate of Distance and Online Education extends a hearty welcome, to you all. PG English is a prestigious course; you are required to put in hard work : read the texts in detail, along with the study material and also consult books in the library.

Good percentage of marks would open a variety of job opportunities for you.

This course on poetry introduces you to the literary background of poetry upto the metaphysical poets, along with the works of famous poets - Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne and Pope. Study the poets in depth from the examination perspective. Besides, their reading might also sharpen and bring out your hidden talent of writing poetry. Work hard and success will be yours.

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

Teacher Incharge

PG English

DD&OE, University of Jammu

**DETAILED SYLLABUS OF M.A. ENGLISH**  
**SEMESTER-FIRST**

**Course Code: ENG-122**

**Duration of Examination: 3 hrs.**

**Title of the Course: Poetry I**

**Total Marks: 100**

**Credits : 6**

**(a) Semester Examination - 80**

**(b) Sessional Assessment - 20**

Detailed Syllabus for the examination to be held in Dec. 2023, 2024 & 2025.

**Objective :** The students will study the ripening of the Middle Ages and the gradual manifestations of the Renaissance and Reformation. Chaucer, the late Elizabethan, seventeenth and eighteenth century poetry and the Puritan Revolution will be studied. The students will be required to identify the common and the distinctive features of the poets as well as of the period.

**Unit-I**

Literary and Intellectual background of poetry up to the Age of Pope.

**Unit II**

Geoffrey Chaucer : Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

**Unit-III**

Edmund Spenser: "Amoretti"  
"Sonnets 65" and "Sonnets 86"  
"Epithalamion"

William Shakespeare : The following Sonnets :-  
"When I consider everything that grows"  
"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry"  
"Let me not to the marriage of true minds"  
"No more be grieved at that which thou has done"  
"Thou blind fool, what dost thou to mine eyes"

**Unit-IV**

John Milton : *Paradise Lost Book I* : Exposition  
Speeches of Satan

**Unit-V**

John Donne :

“Valedication : Forbidden Mourning”

“Lovers’ Infiniteness”

“The Canonization”

“Batter my Heart Three person’d God”

“Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness”

**Unit-VI**

Alexander Pope:

*The Rape of the Lock*

## MODE OF EXAMINATION

The paper will be divided into sections A, B and C.

M.M=80

### Section A Multiple Choice Questions

Q.No.1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set, and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark.

(10×1=10)

### Section B Short Answer Questions

Section B comprises short answer type question covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks.

(5×2 = 10)

### Section C Long Answer Questions

Section C comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Six questions, on from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt and five questions in about 300-350 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks. (5×12 = 60)

### Suggested Reading:

1. Bernard, John, editor, *Alexander Pope : The Critical Heritage*, Routledge, 2009.
2. Bennett, John, *Five Metaphysical Poets : Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell*. Cambridge UP, 1989.
3. Brower, Reuben A, *Alexander Pope : The Poetry of Allusion* : OUP, 1986.
4. Collette, Carolyn P. : *Species, Phantasms and Images : Vision on Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales*, Michigan UP, 2001.
5. Edmund Spenser : [www : poetryfoundation.org/poets/edmund-spenser](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edmund-spenser)
6. Ford, Boris, editor, *The Age of Chaucer, A 290* : Penguin Books, 1965, *The Pelican guide to English Literature*.

....., editor, *The Age of Shakespere, A 291*, Penguin Books, 1965, *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*.

....., editor, *From Donne to Marwell, A 325*, Penguin Books, 1965, *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*.

7. Grierson, Herbert J.C. And J.C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry*, Bloombury Academic, 213.
8. Greer, Germaine, *Shakespere's Wife*, Bloomsbury, 2007.
9. John Donne, *Poetry Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/John-donne](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/John-donne)
10. John Milton Poems, *My Poetic Side*, [mypoeticside.com/poets/john-milton-poems](http://mypoeticside.com/poets/john-milton-poems)
11. Keastm William R. *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry : Modern Essays in Criticism*, OUP, 1981.
12. Lever, Julius W, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*, Barnes and Noble Books, 1974.
13. Mark Joshua J. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Ancient History Encycloprdia*, 29 April 2019.
14. Smith Hallett D, *Elizabethan Poetry : A Study in Conventions, Meaning and Expression*, Harvard UP, 1952.
15. Speirs, John, *Chaucer, the Maker*, Faber and Faber, 1972.
16. *The Rape of the Lock*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 08 February 2017. [www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rape-of-the-Lock](http://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rape-of-the-Lock)
17. Thompson, NS, Chaucer, *Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love : A Comarative Study of the Decameron and the Canterbury Tales*, OUP, 2011.
18. Tuve, Rosemond, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery : Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics*, Chicago UP, 1079.
19. William Shakespeare, *Poety Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-Shakespeare](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-Shakespeare)

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	<b>John Donne : Lover's Infiniteness</b>	
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	<b>John Donne: The Canonisation</b>	
	<b>John Donne : Batter My Heart</b>	
	<b>John Dave : Hymn to God</b>	
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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122 POETRY-I**

**LESSON No. 1**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - I**

**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND  
OF POETRY UPTO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

**BACKGROUND**

**Unit Structure**

- 1.1 Objectives**
- 1.2 Introduction**
- 1.3 Pagan v/s Christian**
- 1.4 Old English Poetry**
- 1.5 Conclusion**
- 1.6 Glossary**
- 1.7 Short Answer Questions**
- 1.8 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 1.9 Multiple Choice Questions**
- 1.10 Suggested Readings**
- 1.11 References**

**1.1 OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson we shall study the literary and intellectual background to poetry during the Anglo-Saxon period of English literature.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Little is known of the origin of English literature although it is often described as beginning with Chaucer. Actually there had been more than six centuries of literature before Chaucer was born. We may understand Chaucer without much difficulty but the earlier literature reads like a foreign tongue, though much of it is available in translation.

The two most important events in the history of England took place during the fifth and the sixth centuries. The departure of the Romans in 410 left the British population open to the invaders from the north. The Angles and Saxons and Jutes came to England in marauding bands and settled there. The Anglo-Saxons included people from Germanic tribes who migrated to the island from continental Europe, and their descendants; as well as indigenous British groups, who adopted some aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture and language. The Anglo-Saxon period denotes the period of British history between about 450 and 1066, after their initial settlement, and up until the Norman Conquest in 1066. The second great event at that time is the conversion of the English to Christianity. In 597 Augustine came from Rome and began to convert the Jutes in Kent and the monks from Ireland set up monasteries in Northumbria. Most English poetry in the early Anglo-Saxon period is associated with these two events. The invading tribes either brought over stories from their Continental Germanic homes or showed a keen interest in Bible stories, in Christianity and in Christian values. The term Anglo-Saxon is also popularly used for the language, usually called English that was spoken and written by the Anglo-Saxons in England and eastern Scotland between the mid-5th century and the mid-12th century.

## 1.3 PAGAN V/S CHRISTIAN

In pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England, legends and other stories were transmitted orally instead of being written down - it is for this reason that very few survive to us today. After Christianization however, certain poems were indeed written down, with surviving examples including the *Nine Herbs Charm*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *Waldere* and most

notably Beowulf. While these contain many Christianized elements, there were certain mentions of earlier pagan deities and practices contained within them.

The only surviving Anglo-Saxon epic poem is the story of Beowulf, known only from a surviving manuscript that was written down by the Christian monk Sepa sometime between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD. The story is set not in England but in Scandinavia. It revolves around a Geatish warrior named Beowulf who travels to Denmark to defeat a monster known as Grendel, who is terrorising the kingdom of Hrothgar, and later, Grendel's Mother as well. He later becomes the king of Geatland before finally dying in battle with a dragon. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was commonly believed that Beowulf was not an Anglo-Saxon pagan tale, but a Scandinavian Christian one; it was not until the influential critical essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* by J. R. R. Tolkien, delivered in 1936, that Beowulf was established as a quintessentially English poem that, while Christian, looked back on a living memory of paganism. Nonetheless, some academics still hold reservations about accepting it as containing information pertaining to Anglo-Saxon paganism, with Patrick Wormald noting that "The poet may have known that his heroes were pagans, but he did not know much about paganism."

#### **1.4 OLD ENGLISH POETRY**

The English trace their literary origins to the seventh century. They believe that Caedmon and the unknown author of *Beowulf* were their first poets. The works prior to the Norman Conquest lay forgotten in cloisters. They could be deciphered only by a few monks who had traditional knowledge of the former language. They believed that a real national literature had flourished before the Norman invasion. Thus English literature began with the first verse sung, the first line written in a Germanic tongue in the country now called England.

The Anglo- Saxon literature is the work of clerks who lived from the seventh to the eleventh century. They may not have created all of it but they preserved it all. It is therefore an essentially Christian literature. The editors allowed nothing to survive which conflicted formally with their religion.

The Germanic tribes-the Angels, the Jutes and the Saxons- were pagans at their arrival. However these peoples had undergone mass conversion at the end of the sixth century, and the first dated writings appeared at the end of the seventh. During this period, most of the primitive poetry was uprooted, together with the mythology on which it rested. There were only traces of savage customs. Although the general character of literature was Christian, yet it was pagan in feeling. The authors of the Anglo Saxon poems had kept the old passion for adventure, together with the memory of the wild life of their ancestors and the ancestral legends and verses.

The earliest known English poem is a hymn on the creation; Bede attributes this to Cædmon (fl. 658–680), who was, according to legend, an illiterate herdsman who produced extemporaneous poetry at a monastery at Whitby. This is generally taken as marking the beginning of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Much of the poetry of the period is difficult to date, or even to arrange chronologically; for example, estimates for the date of the great epic *Beowulf* range from AD 608 right through to AD 1000, and there has never been anything even approaching a consensus. It is possible to identify certain key moments, however. *The Dream of the Rood* was written before circa AD 700, when excerpts were carved in runes on the Ruthwell Cross. Some poems on historical events, such as *The Battle of Brunanburh* (937) and *The Battle of Maldon* (991), appear to have been composed shortly after the events in question, and can be dated reasonably precisely in consequence.

By and large, however, Anglo-Saxon poetry is categorised by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices of the late 10th and early 11th centuries, known as the Cædmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the Beowulf manuscript.

While the poetry that has survived is limited in volume, it is wide in breadth. Beowulf is the only heroic epic to have survived in its entirety, but fragments of others such as Waldere and the Finnesburg Fragment show that it was not unique in its time. Other genres include much religious verse, from

devotional works to biblical paraphrase; elegies such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin* (often taken to be a description of the ruins of Bath); and numerous proverbs, riddles, and charms.

With one notable exception (*Rhyming Poem*), Anglo-Saxon poetry depends on alliterative verse for its structure and any rhyme included is merely ornamental.

#### **1.4.1 Beowulf**

*Beowulf* is the conventional title of an Old English epic poem consisting of 3182 alliterative long lines, set in Scandinavia. It is possibly the oldest surviving long poem in Old English and thus commonly cited as one of the most important works of Anglo-Saxon literature, and also arguably the earliest vernacular English literature.

The full poem survives in the manuscript known as the *Nowell Codex*, located in the British Library. Written in England, its composition by an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet is dated between the 8th and the early 11th century.

In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of the Geats in Scandinavia, comes to the aid of Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, whose mead hall (in Heorot) has been under attack by a monster known as Grendel. After Beowulf slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and is then also defeated. Victorious, Beowulf goes home to Geatland in Sweden and later becomes king of the Geats. After a period of fifty years has passed, Beowulf defeats a dragon, but is fatally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants bury him in a tumulus, a burial mound, in Geatland.

**(i) Historical Background :** The events described in the poem take place in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, after the Angles and Saxons had begun their migration to England, and before the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a time when the Anglo-Saxon people were either newly arrived or still in close contact with their Germanic kinsmen in Northern Germany and Scandinavia and possibly England. The poem may have been brought to England by people of Geatish origins.

The poem deals with legends. It was composed for entertainment and does not separate between fictional elements and real historic events, such as the raid by King Hygelac into Frisia. Scholars generally agree that many of the personalities of *Beowulf* also appear in Scandinavian sources.

The majority view appears to be that people such as King Hroðgar and the Scyldings in *Beowulf* are based on real historical people from 6th-century Scandinavia. Like the *Finnesburg Fragment* and several shorter surviving poems, *Beowulf* has consequently been used as a source of information about Scandinavian personalities such as Eadgils and Hygelac, and about continental Germanic personalities such as Offa, king of the continental Angles.

*Beowulf* is considered as an epic poem in that the main character is a hero who travels great distances to prove his strength at impossible odds against supernatural demons and beasts. The poem also begins in the middle, which is a characteristic of the epics. Although the poem begins with Beowulf's arrival, Grendel's attacks have been an ongoing event. An elaborate history of characters and their lineages is spoken of, as well as their interactions with each other, debts owed and repaid, and deeds of valor. The warriors form a kind of brotherhood called a "comitatus", which seems to have formed an ethical basis for all words, deeds, and actions.

**(ii) Form and Meter :** An Old English poem, *Beowulf* is very different from modern poetry. Anglo-Saxon poets typically used alliterative verse, a form of verse in which the first half of the line (the a-verse) is linked to the second half (the b-verse) through similarity in initial sound. In addition, the two halves are divided by a caesura: "Oft Scyld Scefing \\\ sceapena þreatum" (l. 4). This verse form maps stressed and unstressed syllables onto abstract entities known as metrical positions. There is no fixed number of beats per line: the first one cited has three (Oft SCYLD SCEFING, with ictus on the suffix -ING) whereas the second has two (SCEAþena þREATum).

The poet has a choice of epithets or formulae to use in order to fulfill the alliteration. When speaking or reading Old English poetry, it is important to remember for alliterative purposes that many of the letters are not pronounced the same way as they are in modern English. The letter "h", for

example, is always pronounced (Hroðgar: HROTH-gar), and the digraph "cg" is pronounced like "dj", as in the word "edge". Both *f* and *s* vary in pronunciation depending on their phonetic environment. Between vowels or voiced consonants, they are voiced, sounding like modern *v* and *z*, respectively. Otherwise they are unvoiced, like modern *f* in "fat" and *s* in "sat". Some letters which are no longer found in modern English, such as thorn, *þ*, and eth, *ð* – representing both pronunciations of modern English "th", as in "thing" and "this" – are used extensively both in the original manuscript and in modern English editions. The voicing of these characters echoes that of *f* and *s*. Both are voiced (as in "this") between other voiced sounds: oðer, laþleas, suþern. Otherwise they are unvoiced (as in "thing"): þunor, suð, soþfæst.

Kennings are also a significant technique in *Beowulf*. They are evocative poetic descriptions of everyday things, often created to fill the alliterative requirements of the meter. For example, a poet might call the sea the "swan-road" or the "whale-road"; a king might be called a "ring-giver." There are many kennings in *Beowulf*, and the device is typical of much of classic poetry in Old English, which is heavily formulaic. The poem also makes extensive use of elided metaphors.

#### 1.4.2 Other Poetry

**(i) The Pagan Poems:** There are other heroic poems besides *Beowulf*. Two have survived in fragments: *The Fight at Finnsburh*, which retells of one of the battle scenes in *Beowulf*, and *Waldere*, a version of the events of the life of Walter of Aquitaine. Two other poems mention heroic figures: *Widsith* is believed to be very old in parts, dating back to events in the 4th century concerning Eormanric and the Goths, and contains a catalogue of names and places associated with valiant deeds. The poem gives an idea of the wandering minstrels who went from court to court, singing praises of the princes from whom they received or expected gifts. *Deor* is a lyric, in the style of *Consolation of Philosophy*, applying examples of famous heroes, including Weland and Eormanric, to the narrator's own case.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains various heroic poems inserted



throughout. The earliest from 937 is called *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which celebrates the victory of King Athelstan over the Scots and Norse. There are five shorter poems: capture of the Five Boroughs(942); coronation of King Edgar (973); death of King Edgar (975); death of Alfred the son of King Æthelred (1036); and death of King Edward the Confessor (1065).

The 325 line poem *The Battle of Maldon* celebrates Earl Byrhtnoth and his men who fell in battle against the Vikings in 991. It is considered one of the finest, but both the beginning and end are missing and the only manuscript was destroyed in a fire in 1731.

Old English heroic poetry was handed down orally from generation to generation. As Christianity began to appear, re-tellers often recast the tales of Christianity into the older heroic stories.

**(ii) Elegiac poetry:** Related to the heroic tales are a number of short poems from the Exeter Book which have come to be described as "elegies" or "wisdom poetry". They are lyrical and Boethian in their description of the up and down fortunes of life. Gloomy in mood is *The Ruin*, which tells of the decay of a once glorious city of Roman Britain (cities in Britain fell into decline after the Romans departed in the early 5th century, as the early English continued to live their rural life), and *The Wanderer*, in which an older man talks about an attack that happened in his youth, where his close friends and kin were all killed; memories of the slaughter have remained with him all his life. He questions the wisdom of the impetuous decision to engage a possibly superior fighting force: the wise man engages in warfare to preserve civil society, and must not rush into battle but seek out allies when the odds may be against him. This poet finds little glory in bravery for bravery's sake. *The Seafarer* is the story of a somber exile from home on the sea in which suffering from cold mingles with the pains of water and wind. The only hope of redemption is the joy of heaven. Other wisdom poems include Wulf and Eadwacer, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*. Alfred the Great wrote a wisdom poem over the course of his reign based loosely on the neoplatonic philosophy of Boethius called the *Lays of Boethius*.

### **(iii) Caedmon and Cynewulf Schools of Poetry:**

Cædmon is the earliest English (Northumbrian) poet whose name is known. An Anglo-Saxon, he was originally ignorant of "the art of song" but learned to compose one night in the course of a dream, according to the 8th-century historian Bede. He later became a zealous monk and an accomplished and inspirational Christian poet.

Cædmon is one of twelve Anglo-Saxon poets identified in medieval sources, and one of only three of these for whom both roughly contemporary biographical information and examples of literary output have survived. Cædmon's only known surviving work is Cædmon's Hymn, the nine-line alliterative vernacular praise poem in honour of God which he supposedly learned to sing in his initial dream. The poem is one of the earliest attested examples of Old English language and is, with the runic Ruthwell Cross and Franks Casket inscriptions, one of three candidates for the earliest attested example of Old English poetry. It is also one of the earliest recorded examples of sustained poetry in a Germanic language.

Cynewulf is one of twelve Anglo-Saxon poets known by name, and one of four whose work survives today. He presumably flourished in the 9th century, with possible dates extending into the late 8th and early 10th centuries.

He is famous for his religious compositions, and is regarded as one of the pre-eminent figures of Christian Old English poetry. Posterity knows of his name by means of runic signatures that are interwoven into the four poems which comprise his scholastically recognized corpus. These poems are: *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Christ II* (also referred to as *The Ascension*).

The four signed poems of Cynewulf are vast in that they collectively comprise several thousand lines of verse. He is often compared to William Cowper or even Dante. Its seventeen hundred lines show a composition in three parts—the advent of Christ or his birth, his going away or Ascension and his second coming at the Last Judgement.

Both schools of thought are Christian; both writers are sons of their age and inheritors of a philosophy of life pagan in many respects.

Caedmon is, at times, subjective and personal in tone to a degree not found in pure folk-epic. In Cynewulf the personal note is emphasised and becomes lyrical. Caedmon's hymn in praise of the Creator is a sublime statement of facts calling for universal acknowledgment in suitably exalted terms; Cynewulf's confessions in the concluding portion of *Elene* or in *The Dream of the Rood*, or his vision of the day of judgment in *Crist*, are lyrical outbursts, spontaneous utterances of a soul which has become one with its subject and to which self-revelation is a necessity.

The greatest distinction between the one school and the other is due, however, to the degree in which Cynewulf and his group show their power of assimilating foreign literary influences. England was ceasing to be insular as the influence of a literary tongue began to hold sway over her writers. They are scholars deliberately aiming at learning from others—they borrow freely, adapt, and reproduce. Form has become of importance; at times, of supreme importance; the attempt, architecturally imperfect as it may be, to construct the trilogy we know as *Crist* is valuable as a proof of consciousness in art, and the transformation that the riddles show in the passage from their Latin sources furnishes additional evidence of the desire to adorn.

Yet, it is hard not to regret much that was lost in the acquisition of the new. The reflection of the spirit of paganism, the development of epic and lyric as we see them in the fragments that remain, begin to fade and change; at first Christianity is seen to be but thin veneer over the old heathen virtues, and the gradual assimilation of the Christian spirit was not accomplished without harm to the national poetry, or without resentment on the part of the people. It was many a year before the hostility to the new faith was overcome and the foreign elements blended with the native Teutonic spirit. The process of blending can be seen perfectly at work in such lines as *The Charm for Barren Land*, where pagan feeling and nominal Christianity are inextricably mixed. There, earth spells are mingled with addresses to the Mother of Heaven. That so much of what remains of Old English literature is of a religious nature does not seem strange,

when it is remembered through whose hands it has come down to us. Only what appealed to the new creed or could be modified by it would be retained or adapted, when the Teutonic spirit became linked with, and tamed by, that of Rome.

### 1.4.3 Specific features of Anglo-Saxon poetry

#### *Simile and metaphor*

Anglo-Saxon poetry is marked by the comparative rarity of similes. This is a particular feature of Anglo-Saxon verse style, and is a consequence of both its structure and the rapidity with which images are deployed, to be unable to effectively support the expanded simile. As an example of this, the epic *Beowulf* contains at best five similes, and these are of the short variety. This can be contrasted sharply with the strong and extensive dependence that Anglo-Saxon poetry has upon metaphor, particularly that afforded by the use of kennings. The most prominent example of this in *The Wanderer* is the reference to battle as a “storm of spears”. This reference to battle gives us an opportunity to see how Anglo-Saxons viewed battle: as unpredictable, chaotic, violent, and perhaps even a function of nature. It is with these stylistic and thematic elements in mind, that one should first approach Anglo-Saxon poetry.

#### *Alliteration*

Old English poetry traditionally alliterates, meaning that a sound (usually the initial consonant sound) is repeated throughout a line. For instance, in the first line of *Beowulf*, "Hwaet! We Gar-Dena | in gear-dagum", (meaning "Lo! We ... of the Spear Danes in days of yore"), the stressed words *Gar-Dena* and *gear-dagum* alliterate on the consonant "g".

#### *Variation*

The Old English poet was particularly fond of describing the same person or object with varied phrases (often appositives) that indicated different qualities of that person or object. For instance, the *Beowulf* poet refers in three and a half lines to a Danish king as "lord of the Danes" (referring to the people in general),

"king of the Scyldings" (the name of the specific Danish tribe), "giver of rings" (one of the king's functions is to distribute treasure), and "famous chief". Such variation, which the modern reader (who likes verbal precision) is not used to, is frequently a difficulty in producing a readable translation.

### ***Caesura***

Old English poetry, like other Old Germanic alliterative verse, is also commonly marked by the caesura or pause. In addition to setting pace for the line, the caesura also grouped each line into two couplets.

## **1.5 CONCLUSION**

Thus we see that during the Anglo-Saxon period, poetry undergoes a noticeable development. As it is the result of hundreds of years of slow growth, it is not possible to divide the types of verse into definite watertight compartments. The epic exists in one of its forms in *Beowulf*, which lacks the finer qualities of the classical epic, the strict unity, the high dignity, and the broad motive, though it has vigor and a majesty which have obvious appeal. The lyric has no real example in Old English, though there are certain poems which have some of the expressive melancholy and personal emotion associated with the lyric e.g. *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. A comparison between the Caedmon and Cynewulf schools of poetry shows clearly a development in technique. There is a greater sureness of handling material, greater individuality of approach, less reliance on stock phrases, more subtle use of alliteration and a greater desire for stylistic effect. This is a natural development of literature.

## **1.6 GLOSSARY**

- lineages : the members of a person's family who are directly related to that person and who lived a long time before him or her
- marauding : groups of people going from one place to another killing or using violence, stealing and destroying
- paganism : a religion which worships many gods, specially which existed before the main world religions.

## 1.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

- (i) Name two poems of the Old English that have the touch of lyrical quality in them.

Ans. : 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer'.

- (ii) What do you understand by 'kenning'?

Ans : A kenning is a type of circumlocution, in the form of a compound that employs figurative language in place of a more concrete single-word noun. Kennings are strongly associated with Anglo-Saxon poetry. They usually consist of two words, and are often hyphenated. For example, the word "sword", may be replaced with a more abstract compound such as "wound-hoe", or a genitive phrase such "ice of shields".

## 1.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What are the two events in the history of England that influenced the English poetry in the early Anglo-Saxon period?
2. Give your acquaintance with the story of *Beowulf*.
3. Write a short note on the pagan poems of the Anglo-Saxon Period.
4. Give a catalogue of the elegiac poems written in the Anglo-Saxon period.
5. Bring out the difference between Caedmon and Cynewulf schools of poetry.
6. Write an essay on the specific features of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
7. During Anglo-Saxon period, poetry undergoes a noticeable development. Discuss.

## 1.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Q.1 In “Beowulf,” what is the name of the monster that Beowulf defeats in his first heroic deed?
- A) Grendel
  - B) Dragon
  - C) Wyrn
  - D) Troll
- Q.2 “The Wanderer” laments the loss of what?
- A) His sword
  - B) His homeland and lord
  - C) His wealth
  - D) His family
- Q.3 In “The Seafarer,” what does the speaker view as the only true source of security and salvation?
- A) Wealth and riches
  - B) Exploration and adventure
  - C) Earthly pleasures
  - D) God’s divine grace
- Q.4 What is the primary characteristic of Beowulf’s leadership style?
- A) Dictatorial
  - B) Humble and submissive
  - C) Delegative and democratic
  - D) Authoritarian and controlling
- Q.5 Which of the following literary works is an example of an Anglo-Saxon elegy?

- A) “Macbeth”
- B) “The Canterbury Tales”
- C) “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”
- D) “The Seafarer”

Answers : 1A, 2B, 3D, 4C, 5D

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-I**

**LESSON No. 2**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - I**

**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND  
OF POETRY UPTO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

**THE NORMAN CONQUEST TO CHAUCER (1066-1350)**

**Unit Structure**

- 2.1 Objectives**
- 2.2 Introduction**
- 2.3 French Influence**
- 2.4 Characteristic Features**
  - 2.4.1 Changes in the Language**
  - 2.4.2 Epic and romance**
  - 2.4.3 The Lyric Poetry**
  - 2.4.4 Religious Poetry**
  - 2.4.5 Secular Poetry from 1200 to 1350**
- 2.5 Alliterative Verse (14th century)**
- 2.6 King's English**
- 2.7 Conclusion**
- 2.8 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 2.9 Suggested Readings**

**2.1 OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson the learner shall survey the features of Anglo- Norman poetry in the history of English literature with reference to its literary and intellectual

background.

## **2.2 INTRODUCTION**

Anglo-Norman literature is literature composed in the Anglo-Norman language developed during the period 1066–1204 when the Duchy of Normandy and England were united in the Anglo-Norman realm.

The Norman language came to England with William the Conqueror. Following the Norman conquest, the Norman language became the language of England's nobility. During the whole of the 12th century Anglo-Norman (the variety of Norman used in England) shared with Latin the distinction of being the literary language of England, and it was in use at the court until the 14th century. During the reign of Henry VII English became the native tongue of the kings of England. The language had undergone certain changes which distinguished it from the Old Norman spoken in Normandy. An Anglo-Norman variety of French continued to exist into the early 15th century, though it was in decline at least from the 1360s, when it was deemed insufficiently well-known to be used for pleading in court. The French language continued to enjoy great prestige in the late 14th century.

The most flourishing period of Anglo-Norman literature was from the beginning of the 12th century to the end of the first quarter of the 13th. The end of this period is generally said to coincide with the loss of the French provinces to Philip Augustus, but literary and political history do not correspond quite so precisely.

## **2.3 FRENCH INFLUENCE**

The literary ideal changed at the Norman conquest of 1066. The conquerors had forgotten their paganism and the language and traditions of the country of their origin. They imported the French literary ideal into Great Britain. Anglo-Saxon literature seemed to disappear entirely. The literature of France became the first of European literatures in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and spread its glory and influence far beyond the confines of France. The English took both matter and manner from French works. Hence we need to

be acquainted with French medieval poetry if we wish to understand Chaucer's literary origins.

It is generally recognized that the old French authors wrote with ample clarity. Needless to say their clarity was not purely abstract. For example, the English poets adopted the word *clere* (clear) anew and used it as their French predecessors. Chaucer begins his most lyrical song with the line:

Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere.

Besides, the authors had taste for well lit pictures, which was an outcome of their joy in life, their pleasure in blue sky and sunlight. They grabbed every opportunity to shed light upon a picture. Roland, a song of disaster, is a series of brilliant touches. The portrait of Roland is quite luminous. The French love of fighting had no gloomy shades. It was rather a love of movement, noise, colour and glory. Unlike Anglo- Saxon heroes, they leave their mourning and make another beginning. At Hastings, movement, gaiety and light enter English literature. Half the gifts and aptitudes of English poetry have then their beginning. Every verse form, every arrangement of rhymes and every stanza afterwards used in English poetry can be found in French poetry in seed or in flowers. Hence forth English poetry, like French, had a variety of forms in proportion to its subjects.

The whole of French medieval literature was known and loved by the Normans and much of it was translated or imitated by the English. Its aesthetic character reappeared in Chaucer's English works three centuries after the conquest. The Normans had already severed every tie with the language and poetry of Scandia from where they had emanated. Their conversion to Christianity brought them closer to French swiftly and fundamentally. For more than a century the language of the Normans showed no essential difference from French.

## **2.4 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES**

The Anglo-Norman verse was found to be prosaic in character. It lacked sensibility and search for beauty. It is made up of versified chronicles and didactic treatises. The Anglo- Normans were dominated by intellectual curiosity or utilitarianism. The poems attempt to bring together the legends scattered

throughout the land of Great Britain, and thus to facilitate the fusion of its conflicting races. Their authors united Britons, Angles and Normans in the praises of the country. The great island had never received such homage as was tendered to it in the *Brut*. The brighter aspect of the country was discovered, which Anglo Saxon poetry had painted in a vague manner. Thus Anglo- Norman literature had weakened aesthetic character because its primary purpose was to instruct and unify the enemy races.

The native purity of the French language was adulterated by contact with speech which differed from it profoundly. So the more intelligent of Anglo—Norman writers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries turned to Latin. The Latin poets provided the vernacular poets with modes of versification. The Latin verses exercised a considerable influence on English poetry from the time the Anglo Saxon line was finally abandoned and new paths were explored. From this time Latin rhymed verse was allied with French verse to undermine and overthrow the Anglo Saxon form.

#### **2.4.1 Changes in the Language**

English writers made repeated efforts to translate the works of French poets. The English vocabulary lost a number of words and in exchange received French words. English came to borrow the words which denoted the customs ideas imported from Normandy – the terms of warfare, hunting, chivalry, courtly speech, art, luxury etc. The modern English language had more numerous words of French origin or words based on Latin and Greek than Germanic words. Besides there was a modification of the form and the pronunciation of Anglo Saxon words. There was an increase of the monosyllables which are so numerous in modern English. Anglo Saxon was gradually simplified to modern English. The poetic language lost closeness, freedom and some element of the picturesque but the language as a whole gained lucidity and precision. The final result of the transformations was not felt until the sixteenth century. The language of this long period of transition was called Middle English.

Let us have a glimpse of this slow and deep rooted evolution. At first, French and English naturally kept separate. The conquerors spoke French while the ruled spoke Anglo Saxon, which lost the dignity of an official and of a literary language. After the loss of Normandy by John Lackland in 1204, the conquerors began to pay attention to the native language. The simplification of English was a sort of compromise between the two languages. Now it was possible for the two races to understand each other better. The words which the Normans found most difficult were gradually dropped and replaced by their own words. The whole of the thirteenth century was filled with these changes, which became customary by the fourteenth century. By this time the Normans had abandoned French to a large extent and the native people brought their language closer to theirs. Henceforth English reigned alone: in 1350 it took the place of French as the language of the schools; in 1362 it became that of the law courts; and in 1399 it was used in Parliament for the first time by Henry IV. During this period prosody attained to perfect balance with Chaucer, who was the first great metrical writer of his country.

#### **2.4.2 Epic and romance**

The French epic came over to England at an early date. It is believed that the *Chanson de Roland* was sung at the battle of Hastings, and some Anglo-Norman manuscripts of *Chansons de geste* have survived to this day. *The Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* was, for instance, only preserved in an Anglo-Norman manuscript of the British Museum (now lost), although the author was certainly a Parisian. The oldest manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland* that we possess is also a manuscript written in England, and amongst the others of less importance we may mention *La Chançon de Willame*, the MS. of which has (June 1903) been published in facsimile at Chiswick.

Although the diffusion of epic poetry in England did not actually inspire any new *chansons de geste*, it developed the taste for this class of literature, and the epic style in which the tales of the *Romance of Horn*, of *Bovon de Hampton*, of *Guy of Warwick* (still unpublished), of *Waldef* (still unpublished),

and of *Fulk Fitz Warine* are treated, is certainly partly due to this circumstance. Although the last of these works has come down to us only in a prose version, it contains unmistakable signs of a previous poetic form, and what we possess is really only a rendering into prose similar to the transformations undergone by many of the *chansons de geste*.

The inter influence of French and English literature can be studied in the Breton romances and the romans d'aventure even better than in the epic poetry of the period. The *Lay of Orpheus* is known to us only through an English imitation, *Sir Orfeo*; the *Lai du cor* was composed by Robert Biket (fr), an Anglo-Norman poet of the 12th century (Wulff, Lund, 1888). *The Lais of Marie de France* were written in England, and the greater number of the romances composing the *matière de Bretagne* seems to have passed from England to France through the medium of Anglo-Norman.

The legends of Merlin and Arthur, collected in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (died c. 1154), passed into French literature, bearing the character which the bishop of St Asaph had stamped upon them. Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* (c. 1175) is doubtless based on an Anglo-Norman poem. Robert de Boron (c. 1215) took the subject of his *Merlin* from Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Finally, the most celebrated love-legend of the Middle Ages, and one of the most beautiful inventions of world-literature, the story of Tristan and Iseult, tempted two authors, Béroul and Thomas, the first of whom is probably, and the second certainly, Anglo-Norman. One *Folie Tristan* was composed in England in the last years of the 12th century.

Less fascinating than the story of Tristan and Iseult, but nevertheless of considerable interest, are the two *romans d'aventure* of Hugh of Rutland, *Ipomedon* (published by Eugen Kölbing and Koschwitz, Breslau, 1889) and *Protesilaus* (still unpublished) written about 1185. The first relates the adventures of a knight who married the young duchess of Calabria, niece of King Meleager of Sicily, but was loved by Medea, the king's wife.

The second poem is the sequel to *Ipomedon*, and deals with the wars and subsequent reconciliation between *Ipomedon's* sons, *Daunus*, the elder, lord of *Apulia*, and *Protesilaus*, the younger, lord of *Calabria*. *Protesilaus* defeats *Daunus*, who had expelled him from *Calabria*. He saves his brother's life, is reinvested with the dukedom of *Calabria*, and, after the death of *Daunus*, succeeds to *Apulia*. He subsequently marries *Medea*, King *Meleager's* widow, who had helped him to seize *Apulia*, having transferred her affection for *Ipomedon* to his younger son.

To these two romances by an Anglo-Norman author, *Amadas et Idoine*, of which we only possess a continental version, is to be added. *Gaston Paris* has proved indeed that the original was composed in England in the 12th century.

The Anglo-Norman poem on the *Life of Richard Coeur de Lion* is lost, and an English version only has been preserved. About 1250 *Eustace of Kent* introduced into England the *roman d'Alexandre* in his *Roman de toute chevalerie*, many passages of which have been imitated in one of the oldest English poems on Alexander, namely, *King Alisaunder*.

#### 2.4.3 The Lyric Poetry

The only extant songs of any importance are the seventy-one *Ballads of Gower*. The remaining songs are mostly of a religious character. Most of them have been discovered and published by *Paul Meyer*. Although so few have come down to us such songs must have been numerous at one time, owing to the constant intercourse between English, French and Provençals of all classes. An interesting passage in *Piers Plowman* furnishes us with a proof of the extent to which these songs penetrated into England. We read of:

"... dykers and deluers that doth here dedes ille,  
And dryuen forth the longe day with 'Deu, vous saue,  
Dame Emme!'" (Prologue, 223 f.)

One of the finest productions of Anglo-Norman lyric poetry written



in the end of the 13th century is the *Plainte d'amour*; and we may mention, merely as literary curiosities, various works of a lyrical character written in two languages, Latin and French, or English and French, or even in three languages, Latin, English and French. In *Early English Lyrics* (Oxford, 1907) we have a poem in which a lover sends to his mistress a love-greeting composed in three languages, and his learned friend replies in the same style.

#### 2.4.4 Religious Poetry

Works of piety reappeared towards the end of the twelfth century. Their only local element is language. Their matter is mainly transcriptions, often literal, from Latin or French. The problem was to gain the ear of an oppressed poor and ignorant people. It was therefore necessary to use a very simple language and to multiply explanations and concrete details. Again and again, an author excuses himself for using a language so much despised as English. He knows that his style is bad, that his rhymes are weak but he believes himself justified by his aim. The earliest in date of this religious poem is *Poema Morale*. The novelty of this poem is not doctrinal but formal. In style and versification, these four hundred lines of seven accents, in sections of four and three, are an innovation, and the form had a high density, for it was adopted by most of the popular ballads. Since the rhythm is iambic, the line is roughly syllabic. Almost every one of these lines, which are rhymed in couplets, contains a maxim. The sententious style contrasts with the epical manner of the Anglo-Saxons. The old phraseology is gone, and has been replaced by a simple language, without images and bare and precise, but animated by some homely comparisons. It is like a first essay in blank verse.

There is more poetry in some of the contemporary prayers. *The Prayer to Our Lady* contains the first truly artistic and poetic stanzas in the new language. *The Life of Saint Brandan* is a translation from the French. It introduced the English to the enchantments and marvels and the optimism of the beautiful Celtic legend. *The Life of Saint Dunstan* by Robert Gloucester is full of homely touches and cordial light heartedness. *Cursor Mundi* (1320) is a collection of twenty four

thousand lines of verse. Its aim is to interest the people in the Bible stories. *The Pricke of Conscience* by anonymous author is wordy and mediocre but its wide popularity makes it worthy of study. His aim is to give an impulse to devoutness, by first showing for the miseries and vicissitudes of this world and then depicting the afterlife, of which his presentment is as concrete and grossly material as was usual among the preachers of the day. The ten thousand octosyllabic lines versify his visions and display the childishness of his matter. He lacks the rough good sense of Langland and Chaucer's art. *The Pricke of Conscience* marks the decline of religious poetry in the first half of the fourteenth century.

#### **2.4.5 Secular Poetry from 1200 to 1350**

A secular literature that developed during this period was founded exclusively on French works. It was predominantly chivalrous and was inspired by French romantic poems. Large portions of these poems of chivalry were turned into English so that minstrels might tell them to the people. The British stories were most valued and gave the native poets matter for their most popular and their most original songs.

In the last quarters of the twelfth century Layamon put Wace's *Brut* into English verse. Wace had glorified Britons at the expense of their Saxon adversaries. Layamon, as a faithful translator, repeated this story although he was a pure German by race and tongue. He deserves honour for first revealing some of the most poetic touches in the story. Yet he was not mere translator. He is the first writer to weave about King Arthur a fairy lore of which there is hardly a word in Geoffrey of Monmouth or in Wace. Although he was awkward and blunt yet he was not displeasing.

The works which came after his were principally rhymed chronicles. They are interesting because they have a national character. There is originality of plot, manner and spirit in the romances of *Havelok* and *Horn*, which were inspired by Scandinavian legends. These works by unknown English poets are independent, attractive and superior to their French versions. *Havelok* is a narrative of octosyllabic couplets. *Horn*,

with its very short lines, has the form of a lay intended to be sung. Love, which is hardly mentioned in *Havelok*, is dominant in *Horn*. Thus *Horn* is particularly interesting as being transitional between the romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the romantic ballads of the later period. *Havelok* and *Horn* show how much borrowing from French chivalrous poetry went on at this time and how English poetry was beginning to be even when it borrowed. The poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* is older than *Havelok* and *Horn* by half a century. It is the first work in English which is written correctly and under French influence. In the poem the native words are fitted pleasantly and exactly to the foreign form. With the fourteenth century the satirical spirit entered English in adaptations of the fabliaux. Some of them are so lively that they herald Chaucer. Such is the fable of *Dame Siriz, or the Weeping Bitch*.

Some songs of the period are highly lyrical, and their inspiration and form are entirely French. They have the French way of evoking pictures of spring and flowering gardens. ‘*Alison*’ and ‘*Springtime*’ are examples of graceful songs. There is a more marked feeling for nature than is seen in most of the French contemporary songs. In the *Springtime*, the misery of passion is portrayed. Here is a glimpse of a spontaneous note:

<i>Sumer is icumen in.</i>	Summer is come in.
<i>Lhude sing cuccu.</i>	Loudly sing cuckoo.
<i>Groweth sed and bloweth med,</i>	Groweth seed and bloweth mead,
<i>And springth the wde nu.</i>	And springeth the wood new.
<i>Sing cuccu.</i>	Sing cuckoo.

Folk songs of this type reappear only at the end of the sixteenth century. However the numerous and exact descriptive touches show a more marked

feeling for nature than was seen in most of the contemporary French songs.

The political songs were inspired by events within the country. They express aspirations, anger, love, hatred. The minstrels composed them in English for the people. The tones of the social satire are harsh and coarse. They denounced the vices of the nobles, the state and the clergy. The *Song of the Husbandman complains* of the burden of the taxes and the oppression of the bailiff. Songs were written even against the king when he was tyrannous. The poetry anticipated Langland in its denunciation of all the vices of society. The entire national poetry became patriotic. However the songs lack the narrative element. They simply chant the praises of the victors and cover the vanquished with insults. Yet they are interesting as they reflect the national unity and the high self esteem which the English nation had acquired. They are a prelude to the rich literature of the next generation. The great victories of Edward III were being sung in London and Minot's poems were popular in the countryside when Chaucer was born. The number, the originality and the worth of the works in the latter half of the fourteenth century make it a flowering season in English literature. This English was acquiring the qualities of courtliness and art. It was ready to become the language of the court and that of the countryman.

## **2.5 ALLITERATIVE VERSE (14TH CENTURY)**

Although the various classes of society were drawing closer during this age yet there was a diversity of the dialects of England. Alliterative verse reappeared, abundant and flourishing in the west of England about the middle of the fourteenth century. The old verse form came back to life at the moment when the spirit of the nation was reborn. The poetry of the west regained an epic swing, resumed the use of the epithets and synonyms necessary to alliteration. There were as many French and Latin words in the alliterative poems as in Chaucer. However these words were more Anglicized because the Alliterative poets, being less literate, used English spellings and used words not as they read them but as they hear them. The four alliterative poems contained in a single manuscript and entitled *Pearl*, *Purity*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawayn and the*

*Grene Knyght* were written around 1360-70. They have different subject and form but the similarity in the language and feeling lead us to believe that they were written by the same poet. The author is unknown but he proves himself an experienced artist. *Sir Gawayn and the Grene Knyght*, a well written poem, is remarkable for the liveliness and variety of its scenes. The story has many similarities with the tale of the second book of the *Faerie Queene*, but both in human and in dramatic interest, it is superior to Spencer. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* was the most popular poem of the fourteenth century. Although the language is more difficult than Chaucer's, it is less outlandish than that of Gawain. It was indeed a national poem and quite different in spirit from the French poems. William Langland was born in 1330, ten years before Chaucer. He knew the law courts and the legal language. His work is that of a man of profoundly religious mind, who is indignant at the vices of the society. He gives first a satirical picture of the actual world and then a vision of the world as it would be if the teaching of the Gospel were truly practiced. He was convinced of the need for a reform of the secular and regular clergy. The boldness and novelty of his thought are, in this century, really astonishing. However he lacks the art of construction or arrangement. He loses himself in the confused allegories and pictures. His picture of the crowd is a contrast to Chaucer's peaceful picture of the pilgrims. This work can be praised for its ideas only. The lively satire is accompanied and directed by an intense religious fervor, which is hardly found in Chaucer. He was a rebel against the aristocratic system and social inequalities. However owing to lack of art and music, his work is not worthy of literary merit. This is the reason why in spite of the immediate popularity of his poem, he had almost no descendants. He is the last noteworthy writer of the alliterative verse. English verse acquired fixed forms within his life time but from Chaucer.

## **2.6 KING'S ENGLISH**

London was becoming the social and political centre; the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge were the intellectual centers of the nation and the king had his residence here. So the speech of the east Midlands and the district of

London has been called King's English. Its preeminence was established in the end of the fourteenth century. However since Anglo-Saxon times, almost all English poetry had been produced apart from it. It was due to the fact that English was always subordinate either to Latin or to French or rather Anglo-Norman. The common language of English was used only for practical purposes. It was considered too mean for literary purposes.

John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, wrote in Latin and French but quite later he started writing in English under the influence of Chaucer's success. He is remembered primarily for three major works, the *Mirour de l'Omme*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*, three long poems written in French, Latin, and English respectively, which are united by common moral and political themes. The stories in *Confessio Amantis* are chiefly adapted from classical and medieval sources and are told with a tenderness and the restrained narrative art that constitute Gower's main appeal today. Gower is the last in date of the Anglo-Norman poets. He was a typical average poet of his century.

With the Norman conquest of England, beginning in 1111 the Anglo-Saxon language rapidly diminished as a written literary language. The new aristocracy spoke predominantly Norman, and this became the standard language of courts, parliament, and polite society. As the invaders integrated, their language and literature mingled with that of the natives: the Oïl dialect of the upper classes became Anglo-Norman, and Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English.

While Anglo-Norman or Latin was preferred for high culture, English literature by no means died out, and a number of important works illustrate the development of the language. Around the turn of the 13th century, Layamon wrote his *Brut*, based on Wace's 12th century Anglo-Norman epic of the same name; Layamon's language is recognizably Middle English, though his prosody shows a strong Anglo-Saxon influence remaining. Other transitional works were preserved as popular entertainment, including a variety of romances and lyrics. With time, the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts

of law.

It was with the 14th century that major works of English literature began once again to appear; these include the so - called Pearl Poet's *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Cleanness*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Langland's political and religious allegory *Piers Plowman*; Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; and the works of Chaucer, the most highly regarded English poet of the Middle Ages, who was seen by his contemporaries as a successor to the great tradition of Virgil and Dante.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

Thus the poetry in this period developed greatly from the stylistic point of view. It is clear from the comparison between Lazamon's *Brut* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. From artless the poet becomes the conscious artist. When faced with more difficult material, the poets tend to become obscure. Their arduous and obscure task was gradually to merge the so disparate elements of the new language into a harmonious whole. Whoever listens to the poetry attentively at once perceives discords and then becomes aware of the progress realized. Some poets have been able to tell their tales fluently or to sing with some grace or warmth of feeling in short lined verse. This English was still deficient in courtliness and art but it was ready to become the language of the court as well as that of the countryman.

## **2.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Who is credited with bringing the Norman language to England?  
Ans. William the Conquerer.
2. What was the most flourishing period of Anglo-Norman literature?  
Ans. From the beginning of the twelfth century to the end of the first quarter of the thirteenth century.
3. What was the consequence of the Normans' conversion to Christianity?  
Ans. It brought them closer to French swiftly and fundamentally.

4. What was the cause of the weakened aesthetic character of Anglo-Norman literature?
- Ans. Its primary purpose was to instruct and unify the enemy races of Britons, Angels and Normans.
5. What was the contribution of the Latin poets to the Anglo-Norman writers?
- Ans. They provided them with modes of versification.
6. When did English replace French:
- (i) as the language of the schools?
  - (ii) as the language of the courts?
  - (iii) as the language of the Parliament?
- Ans. (i) 1350
- (ii) 1362
- (iii) 1399
7. What was the most celebrated love legend of the Middle Ages?
- Ans. The story of Tristram and Isolde.
8. Which author, German by race and tongue, put Wace's Brut into English verse?
- Ans. Layamon.
9. Name the two rhymed English chronicles (romances) by unknown authors inspired by Scandinavian legends.
- Ans. Havelok and Horn.
10. Name Langland's most popular poem of the fourteenth century.
- Ans. Piers Plowman.
11. Name the first work in English written correctly and under French



influence.

Ans. The Owl and the Nightingale.

12. Who was the last in date of the Anglo-Norman poets?

Ans. John Gower.

13. What does Anglo Norman literature refer to?

14. What do you understand by the term Middle English?

15. What was the significance of the romances of Havelok and Horn?

16. Despite immediate popularity of Langland, he had almost no descendants. Give reasons.

17. What do you understand by King's English?

## **2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122 POETRY-I**

**LESSON No. 3**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - I**

**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND  
OF POETRY UPTO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

**CHAUCE TO RENAISSANCE**

**STRUCTURE**

- 3.1 Objectives**
- 3.2 Introduction**
- 3.3 Chaucer's Influence**
  - 3.3.1 Linguistic**
  - 3.3.2 Literary**
  - 3.3.3 English**
- 3.4 From Death of Chaucer to Renaissance (1400 to 1516)**
  - 3.4.1 Poetry in England**
  - 3.4.2 Scottish Poetry of the Period**
- 3.5 Conclusion**
- 3.6 Short Answer Questions**
- 3.7 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 3.8 Suggested Readings**

**3.1 OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson learner shall study the literary and intellectual background of poetry during the times of Chaucer to the Renaissance.

## **3.2 INTRODUCTION**

The late fourteenth century English poetry has been demarcated as the ‘first age’ and Chaucer is described as “Father of English poetry”. There remain indisputable grounds for regarding the contribution of Chaucer and certain of his contemporaries as foundational in the history of English poetry. Hence the late fourteenth century is a distinctive and crucial literary period. Late fourteenth century England produced the first English poetry that has continued to be read and responded to throughout subsequent periods.

Geoffrey Chaucer, known as the Father of English literature, is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages and was the first poet to be buried in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. Chaucer was a crucial figure in developing the legitimacy of the vernacular, Middle English, at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin.

He was born in London about 1340. He had an active life with diverse engagements. He was page, squire, diplomat and official in turns. His great patron was John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and son of Edward III. From the age of about thirty he was charged with diplomatic missions to France, Flanders and Italy in succession.

## **3.3 CHAUCER’S INFLUENCE**

### **3.3.1 Linguistic**

Chaucer wrote in continental accentual-syllabic meter, a style which had developed since around the 12th century as an alternative to the alliterative Anglo-Saxon meter. Chaucer is known for metrical innovation, inventing the rhyme royal, and he was one of the first English poets to use the five-stress line, a decasyllabic cousin to the iambic pentameter, in his work, with only a few anonymous short works using before him. He imported the decasyllabic line from France and under Italian influence made it pliable. The arrangement of these five-stress lines into rhyming couplets, first seen in his *The Legend of Good Women*, was used in much of his later work and

became one of the standard poetic forms in English. His early influence as a satirist is also important, with the common humorous device, the funny accent of a regional dialect, apparently making its first appearance in *The Reeve's Tale*.

The poetry of Chaucer, along with other writers of the era, is credited with helping to standardize the London dialect of the Middle English language from a combination of the Kentish and Midland dialects. Modern English is somewhat distanced from the language of Chaucer's poems owing to the effect of the Great Vowel Shift some time after his death. This change in the pronunciation of English, still not fully understood, makes the reading of Chaucer difficult for the modern audience. The status of the final *-e* in Chaucer's verse is uncertain: it seems likely that during the period of Chaucer's writing the final *-e* was dropping out of colloquial English and that its use was somewhat irregular. Chaucer's versification suggests that the final *-e* sometimes to be vocalized, and sometimes to be silent; however, this remains a point on which there is disagreement. When it is vocalized, most scholars pronounce it as a schwa (the vowel sound in the 'a' of the word 'about'). Apart from the irregular spelling, much of the vocabulary is recognizable to the modern reader. Chaucer is also recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the first author to use many common English words in his writings. These words were probably frequently used in the language at the time but Chaucer, with his ear for common speech, is the earliest manuscript source. Acceptable, alkali, altercation, amble, angrily, annex, annoyance, approaching, arbitration, armless, army, arrogant, arsenic, arc, artillery and aspect are some of the many English words attested in Chaucer.

### **3.3.2 Literary**

Widespread knowledge of Chaucer's works is attested by the many poets who imitated or responded to his writing. John Lydgate was one of the earliest poets to write continuations of Chaucer's unfinished *Tales* while Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* completes the story of Cressida left unfinished in his *Troilus and Criseyde*. Many of the manuscripts of

Chaucer's works contain material from these poets and later appreciations by the romantic era poets were shaped by their failure to distinguish the later 'additions' from original Chaucer. Writers of the 17th and 18th centuries, such as John Dryden, admired Chaucer for his stories, but not for his rhythm or rhyme, as few critics could then read Middle English. It was not until the late 19th century that the official Chaucerian canon, accepted today, was decided upon, largely as a result of Walter William Skeats's work. Roughly seventy five years after Chaucer's death, *The Canterbury Tales* was selected by William Caxton to be one of the first books to be printed in England. The idea of *The Canterbury Tales* was a novel idea. It was a turning point in European thought. It was more than a literary innovation. It was a change of mental attitude. Poetry turned to the study of man and manners. By his grouping of representatives of the different callings, he has painted with minute exactness the body and soul of the society of his times. The persons he has painted are discovered by their own actions and words.

### **3.3.3 English**

Unlike Gower, Chaucer was not tempted either by Latin or by French. His immediate choice was London English, King's English. Although the language was in a poor state, Chaucer had great faith in this living language. He disregarded and debased artificial and prosaic Anglo-Norman and expressed in English all the graces and refinements he found in the poetry of France. His later poems, written after his journey to Italy in 1372, show traces of the influence of the Italian poetry. From Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, he learnt to enrich his line with glowing images and impassioned themes. In his *Troilus*, he was half Italian and half English. In his masterpiece he was to be all English.

Chaucer is sometimes considered the source of the English vernacular tradition. His achievement for the language can be seen as part of a general historical trend towards the creation of a vernacular literature, after the example of Dante, in many parts of Europe. Although Chaucer's language is much closer to Modern English than the text of *Beowulf*, such that (unlike that of *Beowulf*) a modern

English speaker with a large vocabulary of archaic words may understand it, it differs enough that most publications modernize his idiom. Following is a sample from the prologue of 'The Summoner's Tale' that compares Chaucer's text to a modern translation:

***Original Text***

*This frere bosteth that he  
knoweth helle,*

*And God it woot, that it is  
litel wonder;*

*Freres and feendes been but.  
lyte asonder*

*For, pardee, ye han ofte tyme  
herd telle*

*How that a frere ravyshed was  
to helle*

*In spirit ones by a visioun;*

*And as an angel ladde hym up ,  
and down*

*To shewen hym the peynes that  
the were,*

*In al the place saugh he nat a frere;*

*Of oother folk he saugh ynowe in wo.*

*Unto this angel spak the frere tho:*

*Now, sire, quod he, han freres  
swich a grace*

***Modern Translation***

*This friar boasts that he  
knows hell,*

*And God knows that it is  
little wonder;*

*Friars and fiends are seldom  
far apart.*

*For, by God, you have  
ofttimes heard tell*

*How a friar was taken to hell*

*In spirit, once by a vision;*

*And as an angel led him up  
and down,*

*To show him the pains that  
were there,*

*In all the place he saw not  
a friar;*

*Of other folk he saw enough  
in woe.*

*Unto this angel spoke the  
friar thus:*

*"Now sir", said he, "Have  
friars such a grace*

*That noon of hem shal come to  
this place?*

*Yis, quod this aungel, many a  
millioun!*

*And unto sathanas he ladde hym  
down.*

*--And now hath sathanas,--seith  
he,--a tayl*

*Brodder than of a carryk is the  
sayl.*

*Hold up thy tayl, thou sathanas!  
--quod he;*

*--shewe forth thyn ers, and lat  
the frere se*

*Where is the nest of freres in  
this place!--*

*And er that half a furlong wey  
of space,*

*Right so as bees out swarmen  
from an hyve,*

*Out of the develes ers ther gonne  
dryve*

*Twenty thousand freres on a route,*

*And thurghout helle swarmed al  
about,*

*And comen agayn as faste as  
they may gon,*

*That none of them come to  
this place?"*

*"Yes", said the angel, "many  
a million!"*

*And unto Satan the angel led  
him down.*

*"And now Satan has", he said,  
"a tail,*

*Broader than a galleon's sail.*

*Hold up your tail, Satan!"  
said he.*

*"Show forth your arse, and  
let the friar see*

*Where the nest of friars is in  
this place!"*

*And before half a furlong of  
space,*

*Just as bees swarm out from  
a hive,*

*Out of the devil's arse there  
were driven*

*Twenty thousand friars on  
a rout,*

*And throughout hell swarmed  
all about,*

*And came again as fast as  
they could go,*

*And in his ers they crepten  
everychon.*

*And every one crept into his  
arse.*

*He clapte his tayl agayn and lay  
lay very ful stille*

*He shut his tail again and  
still*

Thus, Chaucer comes before us as a painter of life. He writes in a dialect still new, uses words which he was the first to put to real literary use. Chaucer begins English poetry and ends Middle Ages. He inherited all the literature of France and breathed new language into it. In The Canterbury Tales, the element of the poet's personality has been subdued, superseded by pleasure in observing and understanding. Chaucer sees what is and paints it as he sees it. He is a pioneer of the group of spectators who efface themselves in order to look at the society better.

### **3.4 FROM DEATH OF CHAUCER TO RENAISSANCE (1400 TO 1516)**

#### **3.4.1 Poetry in England**

Gower, after Chaucer's success, made up his mind to write in English. But his work in English Confessio Amantis is a tiresome poem of some 40,000 verses which is in the allegory-dream framework tradition. Unfortunately the Chaucer whose followers noticed and liked more was the Chaucer of the Roman de la Rose tradition and not that of the Canterbury Tales tradition. Chaucer's best followers were Lydgate and Occleve but they lack genius.

England was going through the end of the Middle Ages and the corruption of the Medieval system is somewhat illustrated in the work of these minor poets through the decadence of the courts and of the nobility. With the Norman Conquest, French lords substituted for Anglo-Saxon lords. Later Henry II and the Hundred Years War refreshed the great French influence on England. The French courtly love tradition which influenced Dante and Petrarch brought about in England a Roman de la Rose tradition with works about knight and King Arthur and Sir Gawain and Lancelot. All this tradition found in England is best represented in Geoffrey Chaucer who is the great achievement of the English Middle Ages. But the Hundred Years War and the War of the



Roses left a disastrous situation in England. The last of the French territories diminished the French influence and the destruction of many noble families created a situation which the Tudors would exploit very well. The great wars of the Middle Ages, which are on one side the golden years of nobility's influence, chivalric myth and courtly love, mark, on the other side, the end, in England, of nobility's power and culture of the Middle Ages themselves. And with the rise of a new social and political order, a new philosophy and art came into being.

The English literary scene after Chaucer is not much inspiring. England took two centuries to produce a poet worthy to rank with Chaucer. No writer of genius was born during these long years. The English verse form was thrown off its balance and recovered a sure rhythm only with Spenser. John Lydgate (1373-1450) was the most voluminous poet of the fourteenth century and even of the Middle Ages of England. About 1,40,00 lines of his verse are extant. He was principally an indefatigable translator and compiler. His longest poems are *The Storie of Thebes* and *Troye-Book*, which retell the famous romances, *The Fall of Princes*, adapted from the Latin of Boccaccio. However he delved himself so deep in books that it is certainly from books that he seems to have taken most of his verses which speak of nature.

Alexander Barclay (1474-1552) was the first to introduce the eclogue to his fellow countrymen. An eclogue is a poem in a classical style on a pastoral subject. Poems in this genre are sometimes also called bucolic. In his youth he had written five eclogues, which he published in 1514. They have nothing of the idyll but are moral satires, discussions between a townsman and a countryman, between a poor poet and a rich miser, an exposition of a courtier's life. Barclay has the merits of sincerity of speech and realism but his language is rude and his verse suffers from the general lack of rhythm.

The fashionable school of courtly allegory, first introduced into England by the translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, reached its extremity in Stephen Hawes's *Passetyme of Pleasure*, printed by Caxton's successor, Wynkyn de Worde in 1517. This was a dreary and pedantic poem, in which it is told how

Graunde Amoure, after a long series of adventures and instructions finally won the love of La Belle Pucel. Hawes was a mediocre poet. His style, entangled by awkward constructions, is among the worst known to English poetry. Barclay and Skelton, the last two writers of verse who are in the medieval tradition, at least show some novelty of subject or manner.

John Skelton (1460-1529), who was the tutor of the future Henry VIII, won praise from Erasmus as a learned humanist. He was very well acquainted with ancient poets and was mindful of the mythology of antiquity. His poetry represents the last stirrings of the dying Middle Ages. He mingled the old fashions with the new classical learning. In his *Bowge of Courte* and in other of his earlier pieces, he used, like Hawes, Chaucer's seven-line stanza but his later poems were mostly written in a verse of his own invention, called after him *Skeltonical*. This was a sort of glorified doggerel, in short, swift, ragged lines, with occasional intermixture of French and Latin..

*Her beautye to augment,  
Dame Nature hath her lent  
A warte upon her cheke,  
Who so lyst to seke  
In her visage a skar  
That semyth from afar  
Lyke to the radiant star,  
All with favour fret,  
So properly it is set.  
She is the violet,  
The daysy delectable,  
The columbine commendable,  
The jelofer amiable;  
For this most godly floure,  
This blossom of fresh colour,  
So Jupiter me succor,  
She flourysheth new and new  
In beaute and vertew;*

*Hac claritate gemina,  
O gloriosa femina, etc.*

Skelton was a rude railing rhymers, a singular mixture of a true and original poet with a buffoon; whimsical, obscure but always vivacious. In this age of repetitions, Skelton pleases because he is brutal and coarse. He was the rector of Diss in Norfolk but his profane and scurrilous wit seems rather out of keeping with his clerical character. In *Spake, Parrot* and *Why Come ye not to Courte?* he assailed the powerful Cardinal Wolsey with the most ferocious satire and was, in consequence, obliged to take sanctuary at Westminster, where he died in 1529.

### 3.4.2 Scottish Poetry of the Period

It is the most glorious period of all old Scottish poetry. King James I (1394-1436) was the first of the poets of Scotland who were influenced by Chaucer. In his *The Kingis Quair*, he expresses in verse a romantic incident of his life. At eleven years of age he was taken captive by the English and was kept prisoner for nineteen years in France. During this captivity he fell in love with Lady Jane Beaufort, niece to Henry IV, whom he married in 1424. James's poem is inspired by Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, his translation of the *Roman de la Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. However there is freshness in his imitations which is quite personal.

Gavin Douglas (1474-1522) was a Scottish bishop, poet and translator. His principal pioneering achievement was the *Eneados*, a full and faithful vernacular translation of the *Aeneid* of Virgil and the first successful example of its kind in any Anglic language.

William Dunbar (1460-1520) was a poet of striking undisciplined power and one of the great names in Scottish literature. He is the Burns of the fifteenth century, with something of the poet's passion for beauty, native humor and force of expression. He excels in every verse form. He uses Langland's alliterative line with as much success as the Chaucerian meter. Some scholars regard Dunbar as the greatest British poet between Chaucer and Spenser. He wrote allegorical poems and satirical

ballads. Dunbar's poems praise and sometimes imitate his great English predecessors – Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate- and it is accurate to say that his poetry represents the culmination of medieval poetic practice. At the same time, it is also appropriate to point out that some of his poems seem to anticipate the poetry of such sixteenth and seventeenth century poets as Wyatt and Donne, Herbert and Milton and in Scottish literary tradition, the poetry of Robert Burns.

### **THE OLD BALLADS**

A ballad is a form of verse, often a narrative set to music. Ballads derive from the medieval French ballads, which were originally 'dancing songs'. The Scottish ballads had become increasingly popular after Chaucer's death. They were a refreshing contrast with the artificial court poetry of the 15th and first three quarters of the 16th century. The English and Scot ballads were narrative songs, written in a variety of meters but chiefly in what is known as the ballad stanza. It is not possible to assign a definite date to these ballads. They lived on the lips of the people, and were seldom reduced to writing till many years after they were first composed and sung. Meanwhile they underwent repeated changes, so that we have numerous versions of the same story. They belonged to no particular author but, like all folk lore, were handled freely by the unknown poets, minstrels and ballad reciters, who modernized their language, added to them or corrupted them and passed them along. Coming out of an uncertain past, based on some dark legend of heart break or bloodshed, they bear no poet's name. in the form in which they are preserved, few of them are older than the 17th or the latter part of the 16th century, though many, in their original shape are doubtless much older. A very few of the Robin Hood ballads go back to the 15th century, and to the same period is assigned the charming ballad of the *Nut Brown Maid* and the famous border ballad of *Chevy Chase*, which describes a battle between the retainers of the two great houses of Douglas and Percy. It was this song of which Sir Philip Sidney wrote, "I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas but I found myself more moved than by a trumpet." The style of the ballads was not always rude. In their compressed energy of expression, in the impassioned way in which

they tell their tale of grief and horror, there reside often a tragic power and art superior to anything in English poetry between Chaucer and Spenser. The true home of the ballad literature was especially the Scotch border where constant military activities supplied many traditions of heroism, like those celebrated in the old poem of the *Battle of Otterbourne* and in the *Hunting of the Cheviot or Chevy Chase*. Some of these are Scotch and others English; the dialect of Lowland Scotland did not differ much from that of Northumberland and Yorkshire, both descended alike from the old Northumbrian of Anglo-Saxon times. Other ballads were shortened, popular versions of the chivalry romances, which were passing out of fashion among educated readers in the 16th century and now fell into the hands of the ballad makers. Others preserved the memory of local countryside tales, family feuds and tragic incidents, partly historical and partly legendary, associated often with particular spots. Such are, for example, *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow*, *Fair Helen of Kirkconnell*, *The Forsaken Bride* and *The Twa Corbies*. Others have a coloring of popular superstition, like the beautiful ballad concerning Thomas of Ersyldoune, who goes in at Eildon Hill with an elf queen and spends seven years in a fairy land.

However the most popular of all the ballads were those which cluster about the name of that good outlaw, Robin Hood, with his merry men, hunted the forest of Sherwood, where he killed the king's deer and waylaid rich travelers but was kind to poor knights and honest workmen. Robin Hood is the true ballad hero, the darling of the common people as Arthur was of the nobles. The names of his confessor, Friar Tuck; his mistress Maid Marian; his companions, Little John, Scathelock and Much, the miller's son were as familiar as household words. Langland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century mentions 'rimes of Robin Hood' and efforts have been made to identify him with some actual personage but there seems to be nothing historical about Robin Hood. He was a creation of the popular fancy. The game laws under the Norman kings were very oppressive and there were dim memories among the Saxon masses of Herward and Edric the Wild, who had defied the power of the Conqueror, as well as of later freebooters, who had taken to the woods and lived by plunder. Robin

Hood was a thoroughly national character. He had the English love of fair play, the English readiness to shake hands and make up and keep no malice when defeated in a square fight. He beat and plundered the fat bishops and abbots, who had more than their share of wealth but he was generous and hospitable to the distressed and lived a free and careless life in the good green wood. He was a mighty archer with those national weapons, the long bow and the cloth yard shaft. He tricked and baffled legal authority in the person of the proud sheriff of Nottingham, thereby appealing to the secret sympathy of the yeomanry of England.

Addison too praised ballad in his *Spectator*. He realized the ballad's Homeric qualities and used it as a text to preach that the beautiful is the simple. *Chevy Chase* was one of the medieval poems which induced Romanticism. The very irregularity of its verses was found to have a special charm and this rudeness inspired Coleridge to give a new harmony to his *Ancient Mariner* and to his *Christabel*. *The Nut-brown Maid* has thirty *six-lined* stanzas with their alternating refrains. It is an artistic composition with simplicity of style and sincerity of tone.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

With the Norman Conquest of England, beginning in 1111, the Anglo-Saxon language rapidly diminished as a written literary language. The new aristocracy spoke predominantly Norman and this became the standard language of courts, parliament and polite society. As the invaders integrated, their language and literature mingled with that of the natives: the dialect of the upper classes became Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English.

While Anglo-Norman or Latin was preferred for high culture, English literature not by any means died out, and a number of important works illustrate the development of the language. Around the turn of the 13th century, Layamon wrote his *Brut* based on Wace's 12th century Anglo-Norman epic of the same name. Layamon's language is recognizably English, though his prosody shows a strong Anglo-Saxon influence remaining. Other transitional works were preserved as popular entertainment, including a variety of romances

and lyrics. With time the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts of law.

It was with the 14th century that major works of English literature began once again to appear. These include the so called *Pearl Poet's Pearl*, *Patience*, *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Langland's political and religious allegory *Piers Plowman*; Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the works of Chaucer, the most highly regarded English poet of the Middle Ages, who was seen by his contemporaries as a successor to the great tradition of Virgil and Dante.

The reputation of Chaucer's successors in the 15<sup>th</sup> century has suffered in comparison with him, though Lydgate and Skelton are widely studied. A group of Scottish writers were influenced by Chaucer. The rise of Scottish poetry began with the writing of *The Kingis Quair* by James I of Scotland. The main poets of this Scottish group were Robert Henryson, William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. Henryson and Douglas introduced a note of almost savage satire, which may have owed something to the Gaelic bards, while Douglas' *Eneados*, a translation into Middle Scots of Virgil's *Aeneid*, was the first complete translation of any major work of classical antiquity into English or the Anglic language.

### 3.6 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What invention in poetic meter is Chaucer credited with?

Ans. Geoffrey Chaucer introduced Rhyme royal, a rhyming stanza form into English poetry. It consists of seven lines, usually in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is ababbcc. In practice, the stanza can be constructed either as a tercet and two couplets (aba, bb, cc) or a quatrain and a tercet (abab, bcc). Along with the couplet, it was the standard narrative meter in late Middle Ages. Chaucer may have adopted the form from a French ballad stanza or from the Italian Ottava rima, with the omission of the fifth line.

2. What is Great Vowel Shift?

Ans. The Great Vowel Shift was a major change in the pronunciation of

the English language that took place in England between 1350 and 1700. Because English spelling was becoming standardized in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Great Vowel Shift is responsible for many of the peculiarities of English spelling. For example, the vowel in the English word *same* was in Middle English pronounced similar to modern *psalm*; the vowel in *feet* was similar to modern *fate*; the vowel in *wipe* was similar to modern *weep*, the vowel in *boot* was similar to modern *boat* and the vowel in *mouse* was similar to modern *moose*.

3. What is a Schwa?

Ans. A schwa refers to the mid central vowel sound (rounded or unrounded) in the middle of the vowel chart, denoted by the IPA symbol / / or another vowel sound closer to that position. An example in English is the vowel sound in the 'a' of the word 'about'.

4. What is an eclogue?

Ans. An eclogue is a poem in a classical style on pastoral subject. Poems in the genre are sometimes also called bucolic.

5. What is Skeltonical verse?

Ans. This was a sort of glorified doggerel, in short, swift, ragged lines with occasional intermixture of French and Latin.

6. What is King James I's poem *Kingis Quair* inspired by?

Ans. James's poem is inspired by Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, his translation of the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Troilus and Criseyde*.

### 3.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Chaucer's influence through his works.
2. The Canterbury Tales is a turning point in European thought. Discuss.



3. Chaucer is sometimes considered the source of the English vernacular tradition. Elaborate.
4. Write a note on English literary scene after Chaucer.
5. What do you know about the ballad tradition?

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-I**

**LESSON No. 4**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**UNIT - I**

**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND  
OF POETRY UPTO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

**RENAISSANCE TO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

**STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 Objectives**
- 4.2 Introduction**
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- 4.4 Early Renaissance Poetry**
- 4.5 Elizabethan Poetry from 1590 to the Metaphysical Poets**
- 4.6 Conclusion**
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**4.1 OBJECTIVES**

In this unit learner shall study the literary and intellectual background of poetry during the Renaissance period up to the Metaphysical poets.

**4.2 INTRODUCTION**

The Renaissance is a period from the 14th to the 17th century, considered the bridge between the Middle Ages and Modern history. It started as a cultural movement in Italy in the late Medieval period and later spread to the rest of Europe. It began in Florence, Italy, in the 14th century.

The word Renaissance, literally meaning "Rebirth" in French, first appears in English in the 1830s. The Renaissance was a cultural movement that profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period. Beginning in Italy, and spreading to the rest of Europe by the 16th century, its influence was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, religion, and other aspects of intellectual inquiry. Renaissance scholars employed the humanist method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art.

### **4.3 THE RENAISSANCE IN ENGLAND**

The Renaissance was slow in coming to England, with the generally accepted start date being around 1509. It is also generally accepted that the English Renaissance extended until the Restoration in 1660. However, a number of factors had prepared the way for the introduction of the new learning long before this start date. A number of medieval poets had shown an interest in the ideas of Aristotle and the writings of European Renaissance precursors such as Dante.

The introduction of movable-block printing by Caxton in 1474 provided the means for the more rapid dissemination of new or recently rediscovered writers and thinkers. Caxton also printed the works of Chaucer and Gower and these books helped establish the idea of a native poetic tradition that was linked to its European counterparts. In addition, the writings of English humanists like Thomas More and Thomas Elyot helped bring the ideas and attitudes associated with the new learning to an English audience.

Three other factors in the establishment of the English Renaissance were the Reformation, Counter Reformation, and the opening of the era of English naval power and overseas exploration and expansion. The establishment of the Church of England in 1535 accelerated the process of questioning the Catholic world-view that had previously dominated intellectual and artistic life. At the same time, long-distance sea voyages helped provide the stimulus and information that underpinned a new understanding of the nature of the universe which resulted in the theories of Nicolaus Copernicus and Johannes

Kepler.

On the other hand, although the spread of Protestantism all over England caused her to break with the Middle ages more decidedly than France and Italy, her literature remained more nearly medieval than that of either of the two countries. Literature in the preceding centuries had been almost all imported from France and had mainly consisted of translations and adaptations. It had not assumed a truly national shape. The greatest poet Chaucer had been essentially French. While in France the Renaissance was eminently aristocratic, in England it was always regardful of the masses. It preserved and increased the vogue of the ballads.

#### **4.4 EARLY RENAISSANCE POETRY**

With a small number of exceptions, the early years of the 16th century are not particularly notable. The Douglas Aeneid was completed in 1513 and John Skelton wrote poems that were transitional between the late Medieval and Renaissance styles. The new king, Henry VIII, was something of a poet himself. Two poets of the court, Wyatt and Surrey, brought about renewal of poetry and it was in Italy that they found both models and stimulus.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42), admired lyrical poetry which he found in France and Italy. He had a desire to fashion English verse on the model of the Italians. Wyatt's first professed object was to experiment with the English tongue, to civilise it, to raise its powers to those of its neighbours. He borrowed from the Italians poetic forms which were unknown to his fellow countrymen, like Dante's terza rima and Petrarchian sonnet. The sonnet was then the principal vehicle for the direct expression of personal feeling, without recourse to fiction of allegory. It was by the sonnet that lyricism again entered English poetry. The brevity of the form necessitated the use of the rare word, the metaphor, subtlety and condensation. A significant amount of his literary output consists of translations and imitations of sonnets by the Italian poet Petrarch; he also wrote sonnets of his own. He took subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure. Petrarch's sonnets consist of an "octave", rhyming *abba*

*abba, followed*, after a turn (volta) in the sense, by a "sestet" with various rhyme schemes. Wyatt employs the Petrarchian octave, but his most common sestet scheme is cdde ee. This marks the beginnings of an exclusively "English" contribution to sonnet structure that is three quatrains and a closing couplet.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, (1516 –1547), was an English aristocrat, and one of the founders of English Renaissance poetry. He and his friend Sir Thomas Wyatt were the first English poets to write in the sonnet form. Surrey was less directly influenced by the Italians than Wyatt and had a perfectly just sense of what befitted the poetry of the nation. He substituted the less elaborate and easier English form which Shakespeare later adopted, three quatrains with different rhymes followed by a couplet. However, chiefly he was the first English poet to publish blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) in his translation of the second and fourth books of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Owing to him, English poetry acquired a magnificent instrument, which once perfected, became the meter of the drama and of the epic. Thus together, Wyatt and Surrey, due to their excellent translations of Petrarch's sonnets, are known as "Fathers of the English Sonnet". While Wyatt introduced the sonnet into English, it was Surrey who gave them the rhyming meter and the division into quatrains that now characterizes the sonnets variously named English, Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnets.

Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) was the only poet after Wyatt and Surrey and before Spenser who left memorable verses behind him. He reverted to the medieval tradition. His only contribution to poetry, other than drama, was the *Induction*, which was followed by *The Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham*, written in 1563 for the *Mirror of Magistrates*. This *Mirror* was a series of stories concerning the misfortunes of the great figures in English history and was written by several poets. Sackville conceived the idea of the collection, and its verses constitute its only merit. His *Induction*, written in the seven line stanza (*ababbcc*) beloved of Chaucer, takes us back to the vision and allegories of the *Roman de la Rose*. He used an English which had contracted its grammar and dropped its terminations,

and he reconstituted alternating accents more regularly than even Wyatt and Surrey.

The men of the Renaissance who reestablished rhythm were preoccupied by ancient meters. It was they who first used the words iambus, trochee and spondee to denote the combinations of accentuated and unaccentuated syllables in their lines. Versification wavered for sometime between anarchy and excessive regularity before it reached equilibrium. Sackville had undeniable artistic sense and Spenser was inspired by him when he painted the gloomiest pictures in *The Faerie Queene*. Thus Sackville deserves to be called the connecting link between Chaucer and Spenser. He deserves the glory of having helped to renew English poetry.

### **THE PIONEERS: LYLY, SIDNEY AND SPENSER**

Lyly, Sidney and Spenser were the three men who, about 1578, simultaneously, were initiators of the literature dedicated to beauty. Hence the three are being presented here side by side.

John Lyly (1554-1606), is the first of the writers who consciously and persistently used an artistic style and whose chief aspiration was to say a thing well. He was the father of euphuism and was born of a family of grammarians. He has been justifiably called the first English novelist or the first story teller who painted society romantically. His prose is almost as regulated and measured as verse. Although it suffers from excesses yet the innovation it represented served to cast the formless in a mould, to impart art to the inartistic.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) revealed in his *Apologie for Poetrie* his ideal of noble and classical beauty in writing. His *Arcadia*, published in 1590, inculcated in a whole generation a taste for literary jewellery, both genuine and false. Sidney lends life, feeling and will to the inanimate and the abstract. Working at language often by bold and new combinations of words, Sidney reaches close and vigorous expression. He is the first Englishman who was conscious of all the resources his language held for the impassioned

style. His metaphors are sudden and elliptical. All the energy as well as the preciousness of the Shakespearian style exists in germ in the *Arcadia*. But Sidney's real innovation was due to senses sharpened by the contemplation of plastic works of art. He shows a sense of line and colour and of effects of light and shade hitherto unknown to English. It was especially the poets whom he influenced. A whole century of writers, including Shakespeare and the so called metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, were full of the refinements and the strange subtleties of which Sidney had brought the dangerous and dazzling model from Italy and to which he had given the strength of his youthful ardour.

To express feelings which had some analogy with Petrarch's, Sidney took recourse to the sonnet, which had been neglected in England since Surrey's day. In his *Astrophel and Stella*, he enshrined each movement of his heart, each incident of his love within the narrow bounds of the fourteen lines. She is Stella, his star; he Astrophel, enamored of the star. In Sidney's verses there are many figures and metaphors. There are even antitheses and ingenious verbal elaboration. A whole allegory is sometimes condensed into a single line or even a single word. Nothing else in the lyricism of the English Renaissance is at once so ardent, so true, so direct and so noble. Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) Since Sidney's works did not appear until after his death, it was Spenser who first revealed poetic beauty to his generation. Spenser was the master of the language and seemed able to tune English verse to the natural tones of his voice. He modeled himself on Chaucer. His intention was not to break with the past but to sink his roots deep into it.

In his *The Shepherd's Calendar*, he nationalizes his eclogues by pungent words borrowed from the old poets of his country and from provincial vocabulary. The merits of the poem are properly those of style and are astonishing, in view of their date. Never yet had English poetry held a poem in which the combinations of lines and rhymes were both as variously rich and as novel. In the *Calendar*, there are as many as five different

forms of stanzas in heroic or ten syllabled line. For the first time an English poet seemed to triumph over his European rivals, and in the very genre which was generally attractive in the sixteenth century, in pastoral poetry. From the moment of its publication Spenser was the acknowledged national poet.

Spenser addressed to Elizabeth Boyle the Amoretti sonnets and the superb Epithalamion which concludes them. These poems have a place to themselves among the works of Spenser. He voices his feelings in them without recourse to allegory. The innovation illustrates the importance of the part played by the sonnet in this period. It was almost the sole medium of direct effusion and personal expression. Spenser's sonnets come between those of Sidney and Shakespeare, from which they are distinct in form as in sentiment. His three quatrains, linked by an artistic arrangement of rhymes and followed by a couplet, make a harmonious whole. *His Epithalamion* has no equal. The fine classical structure of the whole poem- simple, luminous and inevitable- make this ode Spenser's perfect production and the lyrical triumph of the English Renaissance.

*The Faerie Queene* was his masterpiece. It was his supreme ambition and the supreme pride of England, which confidently pitted this poem against the most famous epics of ancient and modern times. His poem was one of the world's most magnificent picture books. He borrows the idea or subject of his pictures from everywhere, from books as from paintings and pageants and the scenes on the stage of his time. He rejects no poetic source. We find in him reminiscences of Homer, Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Chaucer, Langland, Lydgate, Malory, Sackville et al. Spenser occupies a transitional place in the history of the masque, a theatrical entertainment including poetry singing and dancing which was performed in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially at the royal court. His poem was inspired by the masques he had seen, but itself supplied one of the richest models and one of the strongest imaginative stimulants to the magnificent masques which came after him. *The Faerie Queene* may be said to have fixed the masques of the



English Renaissance. His stanza, nine iambic lines – the first eight of them five footed and the ninth a hexameter, was the mould natural to his syntax and to his thought. Although it was used by many poets after him like Thomson, Byron, Shelley, Keats, it never seems to adapt itself as well to their tones as to his. No single stanza read separately can give an idea of the immense part which the stanza plays in the poem, in which each one inherits the cumulative force of all its predecessors.

#### **4.5 ELIZABETHAN POETRY FROM 1590 TO THE METAPHYSICAL POETS**

Almost all the poetry down to the Metaphysical poets derived from Sidney and Spenser. Pastorals imitated from Spenser or Sidney abounded. *Astrophel and Stella* provoked a whole flowering season of sonnets. The successive appearance of Sidney's sonnets and *Arcadia* and of the first books of *The Faerie Queene* was the signal for an intense literary activity. The majority of the writers wrote verses in the fashionable poetic genres.

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) and Michael Drayton (1563-1631) are the two poets who express, more directly than Spenser, their patriotic feeling, which is less troubled than his by the dream of a golden age or by hostility to the present. They survive only in a few pages of verse and a few short poems but their figures are distinct. Daniel had a vision of an English literature which should be read over the whole world. He told in narrative the story which was at this moment being dramatized, which Shakespeare was taking for the subject of plays. The eight cantos of Daniel's *Civil Wars*, published from 1595 to 1609, treat of misfortunes of England from the reign of Richard II until the break between Warwick and Edward IV. It corresponds to the Shakespearian histories, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and the first two parts of *Henry VI*. Daniel's exposition is more accurate, cool and dignified than the plays. Unfortunately he poetizes too little. He keeps pace with the facts, adding fictions only very rarely. Yet the purity of his poetic style was admired and was called 'well languaged'. This purity, then so rare, won him favor in the nineteenth century. Writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were working for the simplification of the

language, praised Daniel for having banished eccentricities and arbitrary inventions from his style.

Christopher Marlowe wrote *Hero and Leander* a poem that retells the Greek myth of Hero and Leander. After Marlowe's untimely death it was completed by George Chapman. The minor poet Henry Petowe published an alternative completion to the poem. The poem was first published posthumously, five years after Marlowe's demise.

The poem may be called an epyllion, that is, a "little epic": it is longer than a lyric or elegy, but concerned with love rather than with traditional epic subjects, and it has a lengthy digression — in this case, Marlowe's invented story of how scholars became poor. Marlowe certainly knew the story as told by both Ovid and by the Byzantine poet Musæus Grammaticus; Musaeus appears to have been his chief source.

Yet if Musaeus and Ovid gave it impetus, the poem is marked by Marlowe's unique style of extravagant fancy and violent emotion. Perhaps the most famous instance of these qualities in the poem is the opening description of Hero's costume, which includes a blue skirt stained with the blood of "wretched lovers slain" and a veil woven with flowers so realistic that she is continually forced to swat away bees. The final encounter of the two lovers is even more frenzied, with the two at times appearing closer to blows than to embraces.

**Shakespeare** published two narrative poems on erotic themes, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. *Venus and Adonis* is a poem written in 1592–1593, with a plot based on passages from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is a complex, kaleidoscopic work, using constantly shifting tone and perspective to present contrasting views of the nature of love.

Ovid told of how Venus took the beautiful Adonis as her first mortal lover. They were long-time companions, with the goddess hunting alongside her lover. She warns him of the tale of Atalanta and Hippomenes to dissuade him from hunting dangerous animals; he disregards the warning, and is killed by a boar.

Shakespeare developed this basic narrative into a poem of 1,194 lines. His chief innovation was to make Adonis refuse Venus's offer of herself.

*The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) is a narrative poem by William Shakespeare about the legendary Lucretia. In his previous narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis* (1593), Shakespeare had included a dedicatory letter to his patron, the Earl of Southampton, in which he promised to write a "graver work". Accordingly, *The Rape of Lucrece* lacks the humorous tone of the earlier poem.

Shakespeare retains the essence of the classic story, incorporating Livy's account that Tarquin's lust for Lucrece sprang from her husband's own praise of her.

**Ben Jonson's** poetry, like his drama, is informed by his classical learning. Some of his better-known poems are close translations of Greek or Roman models; all display the careful attention to form and style that often came naturally to those trained in classics in the humanist manner. Accepting both rhyme and stress, Jonson used them to mimic the classical qualities of simplicity, restraint, and precision.

"Epigrams" (published in the 1616 folio) is an entry in a genre that was popular among late-Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences, although Jonson was perhaps the only poet of his time to work in its full classical range. The epigrams explore various attitudes, most from the satiric stock of the day: complaints against women, courtiers, and spies abound. Jonson's epigrams of praise, including a famous poem to Camden and lines to Lucy Harington, are longer and are mostly addressed to specific individuals. Although it is included among the epigrams, "On My First Sonne" is neither satirical nor very short; the poem, intensely personal and deeply felt, typifies a genre that would come to be called "lyric poetry." It is possible that the spelling of 'son' as 'Sonne' is meant to allude to the sonnet form, with which it shares some features. A few other so-called epigrams share this quality. Jonson's poems of "The Forest" also appeared in the first folio. Most of the fifteen poems are addressed to Jonson's aristocratic supporters, but the most famous are his country-

house poem "To Penshurst" and the poem "To Celia" ("Come, my Celia, let us prove") that appears also in *Volpone*.

*Underwood*, published in the expanded folio of 1640, is a larger and more heterogeneous group of poems. It contains *A Celebration of Charis*, Jonson's most extended effort at love poetry; various religious pieces; encomiastic poems including the poem to Shakespeare and a sonnet on Mary Wroth; the Execration against Vulcan and others. The 1640 volume also contains three elegies which have often been ascribed to Donne (one of them appeared in Donne's posthumous collected poems).

Jonson has been called 'the first poet laureate'. In his time Jonson was at least as influential as Donne. In 1623, historian Edmund Bolton named him the best and most polished English poet. That this judgment was widely shared is indicated by the admitted influence he had on younger poets. The grounds for describing Jonson as the "father" of cavalier poets are clear: many of the cavalier poets described themselves as his "sons" or his "tribe". All of them, including those like Herrick whose accomplishments in verse are generally regarded as superior to Jonson's, took inspiration from Jonson's revival of classical forms and themes, his subtle melodies, and his disciplined use of wit. In these respects Jonson may be regarded as among the most important figures in the prehistory of English neoclassicism.

**The metaphysical poets** is a term coined by the poet and critic Samuel Johnson to describe a loose group of English lyric poets of the 17th century, whose work was characterized by the inventive use of conceits, and by speculation about topics such as love or religion. These poets were not formally affiliated; most of them did not even know each other or read each other's work.

John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Crashaw are described as the 'central figures' of metaphysical poetry.

John Donne's poetry had considerable influence on subsequent poets, who emulated his style. And there are several instances in which seventeenth-century poets used the word 'metaphysical' in their work, meaning that Samuel Johnson's description has some foundation in the poetry of the previous century.

Their style was characterized by wit and metaphysical conceits—far-fetched or unusual similes or metaphors, such as in Andrew Marvell's comparison of the soul with a drop of dew; in an expanded epigram format, with the use of simple verse forms, octosyllabic couplets, quatrains or stanzas in which length of line and rhyme scheme enforce the sense. Their poetry diverged from the style of their times, containing neither images of nature nor allusions to classical mythology, as were common. Several metaphysical poets, especially John Donne, were influenced by Neo-Platonism. One of the primary Platonic concepts found in metaphysical poetry is the idea that the perfection of beauty in the beloved acted as a remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm. Their work relies on images and references to the contemporary scientific or geographical discoveries. These were used to examine religious and moral questions, often employing an element of casuistry.

Metaphysical Poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which, like that of the *Divina Commedia*, the *De Natura Rerum*, perhaps Goethe's *Faust*, has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the rôle assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence.

Cowley's bright and alert, if not profound mind, is attracted by the achievements of science and the systematic materialism of Hobbes. Donne, moreover, 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. The divine poets who follow Donne have each the inherited metaphysic of

the Church to which he is attached, Catholic or Anglican. But none of the poets has for his main theme a metaphysic like that of Epicurus or St. Thomas passionately apprehended and imaginatively expounded. Donne, the most thoughtful and imaginative of them all, is more aware of disintegration than of comprehensive harmony, of the clash between the older physics and metaphysics on the one hand and the new science of Copernicus and Galileo and Vesalius and Bacon on the other.

### **AGE OF POPE**

The Augustan Age in English literature refers to a period of literary achievement and cultural flourishing that occurred during the early to mid-eighteenth century. The term “Augustan” is derived from the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, who is often considered the epitome of a wise and just ruler. The writers of the Augustan Age sought to emulate the values and achievements of Augustus and his era, and their literature reflected a number of distinctive features.

Generally, the period between 1680 and 1750 is called the Augustan age in English literature, for frequent comparisons were made between the literary activity of the England of this period and that of the Rome of Emperor Augustus which produced such poetic geniuses as Virgil, Horace, Ovid and many others. Dr. Johnson in his characteristic way said that Dryden did for English poetry what Augustus had done for the city of Rome— “he found it brick and left it marble.” Dryden and Pope were the greatest poets of the Augustan age. They conscientiously looked to the writers of Greek and Roman antiquity for guidance and inspiration. However, most of all, they were influenced by the Roman poets of the age of Augustus. They discredited the tradition of the decadent metaphysical poets and established a new school of poetry which has since come to be known as the Neo-classical school of English poetry. Though something had already been done before Dryden by Denham and Waller yet much was left to be done by Dryden himself and, still later, by Pope.

The neo-classicism of Dryden and Pope was representative of the spirit of the age. The Restoration age marked the close of the genuine “romanticism” of the Elizabethan period and also the decadent romanticism of the Jacobean and Caroline periods. The creative imagination, exuberant fancy, and extravagance of the past had no appeal for an age which saw the establishment of the Royal Society and the inauguration of a new era of experimental science. A critical spirit was abroad, and men stopped taking things for granted. The spirit of the age was analytic and inquisitive, not synthetic and naively credulous. It put a greater stress on reason and intellect than on passion and imagination. The neo-classical poetry of Dryden, Pope and their compatriots was a manifestation of this new spirit.

### **Respect for the Ancients:**

The neo-classicists were champions of common sense and reason and were in favour of normal generalities against the whims and eccentricities of individual genius. These normal generalities went under the term “Nature”. Pope’s advice to budding writers was to “follow nature”. Curiously enough the slogan of Rousseau and the English romantic poets who reacted against the school of Pope, was also the same. But “nature” for the romantics meant something entirely different- primitive simplicity and the world of forest, flowers, birds, streams, etc. Dryden and Pope laid special stress on the imitation of the ancients and the observance of the rules formulated or adhered to by them. For the rules of the ancients were, in the words of Pope “nature still, but nature methodised”. Neo-classical poets abundantly translated and adapted classical words. Thus, Dryden gave a verse translation of Virgil and Pope of Homer. This translation did not literally adhere to their originals. Thus, Bentley observed that Pope’s translation of Homer was a good poem but it was “not Homer”. What is more important than literal fidelity, however, is the attempt at capturing the spirit of the original. And this Dryden and Pope did pretty well. Even the original works of the English neo-classicists have echoes of classical writers.

### **Neoclassicism and its influence:**

The Augustan Age was marked by a revival of classical values and a renewed interest in the ancient Greek and Roman literary traditions. The writers of this period

were influenced by the ideas of the French Renaissance, which emphasized the importance of reason, order, and clarity in literature. They sought to emulate the style and subject matter of classical literature, and their works were characterized by an emphasis on clarity, simplicity, and restraint.

The neo-classical school of Dryden and Pope was much influenced by the Neo-classical French school of the age of Louis XIV which goes down in history as the “golden” or “Augustan” age of French literature. One of the important tenets of the French neo-classical criticism was a theory of kinds or genres. Traditional criticism in the age of Dryden and Pope also worked through a reverent attention to these genres which the French critics had derived from the classics. Aristotle, the godhead of all criticism for the Neo-classicists had dealt with only two genres- Epic and Tragedy. But by the middle of the seventeenth century many more genres came to be recognised and fit styles for them came to be fixed. The appropriateness of the style of genre- the principle of decorum- came to be exalted to a veritable shibboleth. A hierarchy of genres found its establishment. The English poets adopted this important genre from the French neo-classicists.

### **Satire and Moral Instruction:**

The writers of the Augustan Age were preoccupied with social and moral issues, and their literature often served as a vehicle for satirical commentary and moral instruction. Satire was a popular form of writing during this period, and writers used it to criticize the social and political structures of their time. They also sought to promote ethical behaviour and moral values through their literature, and their works often contained explicit moral messages.

Much of romantic poetry is marked by an egregious lack of realism amounting at times to sheer escapism. Classicism, on the other hand, puts special emphasis on concrete reality and aims pre-eminently at edification and improvement of the reader. That is why much of the classical poetry is realistic, didactic and satiric. Almost all classical poets were men of action, very much in the thick of life and its pressing affairs. They wrote with a very clear and concrete purpose, not just for the fun of it or for fulfilling a pressing necessity of self-revelation. Political, religious, and even personal satire became in the Augustan era the vogue of the day. If the neo-classical



poet was not satiric, he was, at least sure to be didactic. It is very rarely that we come across in this age such a poem as Pope's "Eloisa to Aberlard", which is a poem without a purpose. Aiming neither at instruction not at ridicule not chastisement through satire.

### **Rationalism and Enlightenment:**

The Augustan Age was also marked by a growing interest in rationalism and Enlightenment ideas. The writers of this period were interested in the scientific and philosophical advances of their time, and they sought to apply rationalist principles to their literary works. They believed that reason and rationality could help to solve social and moral problems, and their works reflected this belief.

### **Urbanization and the Emergence of the Middle Class:**

The Augustan Age coincided with a period of urbanization and the emergence of the middle class. The writers of this period were often members of the urban middle class, and their literature reflected the concerns and values of this social group. They were interested in issues such as commerce, trade, and urban life, and their works often reflected a fascination with the city and its culture.

### **Prose Fiction:**

The Augustan Age saw the emergence of the novel as a popular literary form. The writers of this period were interested in exploring human behavior and psychology, and the novel provided them with a new medium for doing so. Novels were often written in a realistic style, and they explored issues such as love, marriage, and social mobility. The novel became an important form of literature during the Augustan Age, and it has continued to be a popular literary form ever since.

The Augustan Age in English literature was marked by a number of distinctive features, including a revival of classical values, a preoccupation with social and moral issues, a growing interest in rationalism and Enlightenment ideas, the emergence of the middle class, and the popularity of the novel as a literary form. The writers of this period sought to create literature that reflected the values and concerns of their time, and their works continue to be studied and appreciated today.

The Augustan Age in English literature saw the emergence of several prominent writers, who produced a range of influential works.

### **The Age of Pope (1700-1744):**

It was poet Oliver Goldsmith who first designated the early 18th century, as the Augustan Age. The age has also been called the Age of Pope. The Augustan age includes the age of Dryden and Pope. The restoration of Stuart monarchy in 1660 marked the beginning of the Augustan age.

Eighteenth century in England was an age equal to the age of Augustus Caesar, when the Roman society had reached the peak of its glory. The name Augustan Age was chosen by writers who saw in Pope, Addison, Swift, Johnson and Burke the modern parallels to Horace, Virgil and Cicero, and all that brilliant company who made Roman literature famous in the day of Augustus. Past ages of England were looked upon as barbarous, and the classics of Greece and Rome were regarded as models which men of taste were to follow.

This period, in the first place, is called the classical age, because reason dominated emotion; social conventions became more important than individual convictions; form became more important than content. The term “classic” is applied to designate writing of the finest quality. According to Goethe, “Everything that is good in literature is classical.” Every national literature has at least one period in which an unusual number of exceptional writers produce books of outstanding quality, and this is called the classical period of a nation’s literature. The age of Queen Anne is often called the classical age of England. Addison, Swift, Richardson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Dr Johnson, Burke, Gibbon and Pope are the great luminaries of the age.

The writers of this age were governed by set rules and principles. And, in this crazy adherence to rules the writers were deeply influenced by Boileau and Rapin, who insisted on precise methods of writing poetry and who professed to have discovered their rules in the works of Aristotle and Horace.

The period is also called the age of reason and good sense, because it was based on the good – sense ideal of the French critic Boileau. It was an age of enlightenment when a literature which had become pellucid and clear began to diffuse knowledge

among a growing public. The supremacy of reason was scarcely challenged. There reigned a common belief in the advancement of human mind.

The Augustans believed in respectability and designed conformity. They had no regard for boundless imagination and overflowing enthusiasm of the Elizabethan age. Their outlook was rational. The poets of this age strove to repress all emotion and enthusiasm. Good sense became the ideal of the time, and good sense meant a love of the reasonable and the hatred of the extravagant and mystical. Wit took precedence over imagination; inspiration was lost in technical skill. The whole literature of the age was marked by coldness and want of feeling.

The 18th century literature was indebted to the growing influence of French literature. One notable feature of French influence may be seen in the tragedies in rhyme that were for a time in vogue, of which plots were borrowed from French romances. Boileau held supreme sway over the minds of the literary artists. He was almost a literary dictator.

An important characteristic of the age was the belief that literature must follow nature. Pope exhorted his contemporaries to follow nature. However, the nature of the Augustan period was not the nature of Wordsworth. The Augustans were drawn towards human nature rather than the nature we have in forests. Their sole aim was to copy man and manners of society. Alexander Pope said: "*The proper study of mankind is man*".

The literature of the age was concerned with the follies and foibles of the times. Literature became an interpretation of life, the kind of life that was led in the social and political circles of the times. Poetry became the poetry of the town, the coffee – house and artificial society; Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is a classic example. The literature of the age lost all touch with the country life and became the literature of the town.

Satire is the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, scorn, or indignation. Satire is usually justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly.

Satire became the prominent form of literature during the Augustan age. The satires of Dryden are well known to us. In the age of Pope, the love for satire came to the upper surface and the cold worldliness of Augustan life found its expression in polished wit and satire.

The language of poetry became gaudy and inane and the ordinary language was kept out from poetic literature. The result was that the literature of the age became artificial, stilted, rational and intellectual, losing all inspiration, enthusiasm and romantic fervour which were the hall-marks of the literature of the Elizabethan age. The Augustans were superior in other ways, notable in satire and journalism, in the technical language of philosophy and science and in the great branch of modern literature, the novel, of which they were among the English pioneers.

In heroic couplet lines of iambic pentameter rhyme in pairs : *aa, bb, cc* and so on. The adjective “heroic” is applied because of the frequent use of such couplets in heroic poems (epic) and plays. This verse form was introduced into English poetry by Geoffrey Chaucer.

During the Augustan age the heroic couplet was recognised as the only medium of poetic expression. It was no longer possible to write one’s thoughts as the pen could move. The fastidiousness of the public ear did not appreciate “the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease.” In the heroic couplet the poets put all their skill and wrote with an unimaginable correctness and precision.

#### **Jonathan Swift:**

Jonathan Swift was an Irish-born writer who is best known for his satirical works, including *A Modest Proposal* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. *A Modest Proposal* is a satirical essay that proposes a solution to the problem of poverty in Ireland by suggesting that the Irish sell their children as food to the wealthy. *Gulliver’s Travels* is a novel that satirizes human nature and the political and social institutions of Swift’s time.

#### **Samuel Johnson:**

Samuel Johnson was a writer, lexicographer, and critic who is best known for his dictionary of the English language, *A Dictionary of the English Language*. Johnson

was also a prominent literary critic, and his critical essays and biographical sketches are still highly regarded today. He wrote a number of other works as well, including *Rasselas* and *The Lives of the Poets*.

**Daniel Defoe:** Daniel Defoe was a writer and journalist who is best known for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The novel tells the story of a man who is shipwrecked on a desert island, and it explores themes of survival, isolation, and individualism. Defoe also wrote a number of other works, including *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *Moll Flanders*.

**John Dryden:** John Dryden was a poet, playwright, and critic who is often considered one of the most important writers of the Restoration period, which preceded the Augustan Age. He wrote a number of influential works, including *The Conquest of Granada*, *All for Love*, and *Absalom and Achitophel*. Dryden was also a literary critic, and his critical essays helped to establish the norms and conventions of English literary criticism.

**Joseph Addison and Richard Steele:**

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were the co-founders of *The Spectator*, a periodical that played a significant role in shaping the literary and cultural values of the Augustan Age. *The Spectator* was a collection of essays, poems, and short fiction that addressed a wide range of social and cultural issues. It was immensely popular during its time, and it helped to establish the norms and values of English literature in the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, the Augustan Age in English literature was marked by the emergence of several prominent writers, who produced a range of influential works. These writers included Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Daniel Defoe, John Dryden, and Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Their works helped to define the literary and cultural values of the Augustan Age, and they continue to be studied and appreciated today.

## **4.6 CONCLUSION**

The Italian influence which Wyatt and Surrey brought into English

poetry at the Renaissance gave it a more serious, a more thoughtful color. They caught, especially Wyatt in some of the finest of his sonnets and songs, that spirit of 'high seriousness' which Chaucer with all his admiration of Italian poetry had failed to apprehend. English medieval poetry is often gravely pious, haunted by the fear of death and the judgement; it is never serious and thoughtful in the introspective, reflective, dignified manner which it became in Wyatt and Sackville, and our 'sage and serious' Spenser, and in the songs of the first group of Elizabethan courtly poets, Sidney and Raleigh and Dyer. One has but to recall 'My lute, awake! perform the last', 'Forget not yet the tried intent', 'My mind to me a kingdom is', and to contrast them in mind with the songs which Henry VIII and Cornish were still composing and singing when Wyatt began to write, in order to realize what Italy and the Renaissance did to deepen the strain of English lyric poetry as that had flowed under French influence from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. But French influence, the influence of Ronsard and his fellows, renewed itself in the seventies, and the great body of Elizabethan song is as gay and careless and impersonal as the earlier lyric had been, though richer in colour and more varied in rhythm. Then came Donne and Jonson and new qualities of spirit and form were given to lyrical poetry, and not to lyrical poetry alone.

#### **4.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

1. By whom and when was movable block printing introduced into England?

**Ans.** By Caxton in 1474.

2. Name the two English humanists that helped bring ideas and attitudes associated with the new learning to an English audience?

**Ans.** Thomas More and Thomas Elyot.

3. Name the first English poets to write in the sonnet form.

**Ans.** Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt.

4. What do you understand by trochee?

**Ans.** A trochee is a metrical foot used in formal poetry consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one.

5. What is euphuism?

**Ans.** It consists of a preciously ornate and sophisticated style, employing in deliberate excess a wide range of literary devices such as antitheses, alliterations, repetitions and rhetorical questions.

6. How did *Arcadia* influence the writers of the times?

**Ans.** Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, published in 1590, inculcated in a whole generation a taste for literary jewellery, both genuine and false.

7. How did Sidney influence Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets?

**Ans.** A whole century of writers, including Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets, were full of the refinements and the strange subtleties of which Sidney had brought the dangerous and dazzling model from Italy and to which he had given the strength of his youthful ardour.

8. What is masque?

**Ans.** The masque is a theatrical entertainment including poetry singing and dancing which was performed in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially at the royal court.

9. For which of his attribute did Daniel win favor in the nineteenth century?

**Ans.** The purity of his poetic style, then so rare, won him favor in the nineteenth century. Writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were working for the simplification of the language, praised Daniel for having banished eccentricities and arbitrary inventions from his style.

10. What is epyllion?

**Ans.** An epyllion is a "little epic". It is longer than a lyric or elegy, but concerned with love rather than with traditional epic subjects, and it has a lengthy digression.

11. What do you understand by metaphysical conceits?

**Ans.** A conceit is an extended metaphor with a complex logic that governs a poetic passage or entire poem. By juxtaposing, usurping and manipulating images and ideas in surprising ways, a conceit invites the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison. The term metaphysical conceit is generally associated with the 17th century metaphysical poets. The metaphysical conceit differs from an extended analogy in the sense that it does not have a clear-cut relationship between the things being compared.

#### **4.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Enumerate the factors that helped introduce Renaissance in England.
2. Comment on the influence of the Italian literature on Wyatt and Surrey.
3. Establish Sackville as a connecting link between Chaucer and Spenser.
4. Comment on Lyly, Sidney and Spenser as initiators of the literature dedicated to beauty.
5. Discuss Daniel and Drayton as patriotic poets.



6. Write a note on the classical influence on the poetry of Chaucer and Shakespeare.
7. Is it justified to call Jonson as the father of the Cavalier poets? Discuss.
8. Several metaphysical poets were influenced by Neo-Platonism. Discuss.

#### **4.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Who is often considered the “father of English poetry” and wrote “The Canterbury Tales” during the 14th century?
- A) Edmund Spenser
  - B) John Milton
  - C) Geoffrey Chaucer
  - D) William Shakespeare
- Q.2 Which monarch’s reign is associated with the English Renaissance, characterized by flourishing arts, culture, and literature?
- A) King James I
  - B) Queen Elizabeth I
  - C) King Charles I
  - D) King Henry VIII
- Q.3 Who authored the pastoral poem “The Shepherd’s Calendar” and is known for using intricate language and allegory?
- A) Christopher Marlowe
  - B) Ben Jonson
  - C) John Donne
  - D) Edmund Spenser

- Q.4 Which play by William Shakespeare is often considered a quintessential example of Renaissance drama, focusing on the human experience and tragic flaws?
- A) “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”
  - B) “Hamlet”
  - C) “Romeo and Juliet”
  - D) “Macbeth”
- Q.5 John Donne is associated with what poetic movement that emerged in the 17th century, characterized by intellectual and philosophical exploration?
- A) Romanticism
  - B) Metaphysical poetry
  - C) Neoclassicism
  - D) Realism
- Q.6 Which of the following poets is known for his “Holy Sonnets” and exploring complex metaphysical themes in his poetry?
- A) William Wordsworth
  - B) John Milton
  - C) Christopher Marlowe
  - D) John Donne
- Q.7 In John Milton’s epic poem “Paradise Lost,” who is the main antagonist and tempts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?
- A) Beelzebub
  - B) Lucifer

C) Gabriel

D) Michael

Q.8 Which Renaissance playwright and poet wrote the tragedy “Doctor Faustus,” depicting the downfall of a scholar who makes a pact with the devil?

A) Ben Jonson

B) Thomas More

C) Christopher Marlowe

D) Francis Bacon

Q.9 Which English philosopher’s writings, such as “Leviathan,” had a significant influence on the development of political thought during the Renaissance?

A) John Locke

B) Thomas Hobbes

C) Francis Bacon

D) René Descartes

Q.10 What literary form became popular during the Renaissance, presenting functional stories through a frame narrative, as seen in “The Decameron” by Giovanni Boccaccio?

A) Sonnets

B) Satires

C) Epistles

D) Short stories

Answers : 1C, 2B, 3D, 4B, 5B, 6D, 7B, 8C, 9B, 10D

#### 4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **THE AGE OF CHAUCER**

### **Unit Structure**

#### **5.1 Objectives**

#### **5.2 The Hundred Year's War**

#### **5.3 Religious and Social Unrest**

#### **5.4 Disposition of Richard II**

#### **5.5 General Features**

#### **5.6 Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)**

#### **5.7 His Works**

#### **5.8 Chaucer's 'French' Period**

#### **5.9 Chaucer's Italian Period**

#### **5.10 Chaucer's Place in English Literature**

#### **5.11 Examination Oriented Questions**

#### **5.12 Multiple Choice Questions**

#### **5.13 Suggested Readings**

### **5.1. OBJECTIVES**

In the lesson the learner is exposed to the social background of the period, the political scenario of the times, Chaucer's works and his place in

Literature to enable the learner to make a general assessment of Chaucer.

## **5.2. THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR**

During the reign of Edward III, in England the Hundred Years' War with France broke out. It was to prove the longest war ever fought by England, and when it was over, many deep changes had been brought about in the institutions of the country and in the national consciousness.

Edward's mother, Isabella, the daughter of king Philip IV of France, was also called Philippe le Bel. When the king died, his three sons succeeded to the throne one after the other, but all soon died childless. There being no direct heir to the French Crown, a nephew of Philip IV became king with the name of Philip VI.

Edward III claimed the crown for his mother Isabella whom the French had not chosen because, according to the French Salic Law, no woman was allowed to ascend the throne. Edward's claims were ignored and he declared war on France.

The English won a naval victory near Sluys, in Flanders (1340), and a battle at Grecy (1346). About a year later, Edward took Calais after a famous siege that had lasted almost twelve months. After that, a truce was concluded, thanks to the mediation of Pope Clement VI.

In 1348, a dreadful pestilence, known in England as the 'Black Death', spread all over the world from China to the Atlantic Ocean. It was one of the direst calamities in the history of the world, and in England, the population was decimated.

In 1355, the war was resumed under the leadership of Edward III's eldest son, Prince Edward, called the 'Black Prince', one of the most romantic figures in English history. In a battle fought at Poitiers (1356), against overwhelming odds, he defeated John of Valois, King of France, and took him prisoner together with his son. By the treaty of Bretigny (1366) more than half of France went to Edward.

Then he began to extort money from his new French subjects to defray the expenses of an expedition to Spain intended to help Pedro, the Cruel, in quelling a revolt of the Spaniards who had risen against him. Being unwilling to pay the new taxes, Edward's subjects applied for help to the King of France. The war was renewed and the Black Prince avenged himself most cruelly on the town of Limoges whose population was massacred in cold blood. But this time the English were no longer successful and Prince Edward was compelled to return to England in broken health. He died there in 1376. His father, Edward III, died a year later and by this time the English had lost all their possessions in France except Calais. The war was interrupted, to be resumed later on by Henry V.

Though Edward III had four sons besides the Black Prince, Parliament acknowledged as his rightful heir, Richard of Bordeaux, the Black Prince's son. He ascended the throne as Richard II, in 1377. As he was then only a boy of ten, first John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III, and then the Duke of Gloucester, acted as regents.

### **5.3 RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL UNREST**

During the reign of Edward III, John Wycliffe (1320-1384), preached his doctrine of the poverty of the clergy and maintained that, all authority being founded on grace, wicked kings, popes and priests should have no power. A new sect arose whose members were called the Lollards or 'mumblers'. They adopted Wycliffe's views and declared themselves in favour of common ownership of goods.

In 1381, an insurrection broke out on account of a tax called the poll-tax. The occasion for it was the refusal of a tiller in Kent to pay his dues. He struck the tax-collector dead with his hammer, and became the leader of the revolt. He was known as Wat, (the) Tyler.

Under his leadership 1,00,000 men marched towards London to demand justice from the King, and Richard promised to grant their demands. His promises were never kept, but partly as a result of the shortage of labour caused by the

Black Death, the conditions of the people after the Peasants' Revolt gradually improved, the remains of serfdom soon disappeared, and labourers became free to work for wages.

In 1388, the Parliament known as the 'Merciless' met and, at the instigation of the Duke of Gloucester, banished the King's friends under a charge of mismanagement. But in 1389, Richard came of age, dismissed the Duke of Gloucester, and took over the government himself.

#### **5.4 DISPOSITION OF RICHARD II : THE BEGINNING OF THE HOUSE OF LANCASTER.**

The reign of Richard II came to a tragic end in 1399, when Henry Boling defeated Duke of Lancaster, son of John of Gaunt, and landed in Yorkshire while Richard was in Ireland. He seized the crown and compelled Richard to sign his own deposition. Richard died the next year, probably starved to death or murdered.

#### **5.5 GENERAL FEATURES OF LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF CHAUCER**

The political and social conditions of the period strongly affected literature. The sudden burst of military glory obtained at Crecy and Poitiers promoted the growth of a new English national spirit in opposition to everything that came from France. French itself ceased to be the official language, and English was introduced into Court and Parliament.

The revolt of Wat Tyler and the success of Wycliffe's teaching are clear signs that deep changes had been wrought in the mentality of the people and that a new need for social justice was beginning to be felt by the humbler classes. The towns of England were gradually winning power and privilege from their feudal lords and, little by little, craftsmen and merchants were rising in power and wealth. Craft-guilds and merchant-guilds were coming into being, while trade was increasing enormously.

The spirit of national independence and commercial prosperity, a new



consciousness of the rights of man, the socialist-type of the Lollards and the new moral earnestness of Wycliffe's preaching were forces by which the crust of feudalism was eventually broken and the beginning of a modern national literature was made possible. The greatest representative of the period and the first modern poet was Geoffrey Chaucer. His best known contemporaries were William Langland, John Gower and John Wycliff.

## **5.6 GEOFFREY CHAUCER (1340–1400)**

**His Life** - Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London in 1340, in the family of a wine merchant in Thames Street. We know very little about his early life. It is doubtful whether he studied at Oxford or Cambridge, the two leading universities of the time, but there is some reason to believe that he received his education at both.

The first well established fact about his life is that in 1357 he became page to the wife of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, one of the sons of Edward III. In 1359, Edward III renewed his attack upon France and Chaucer bore arms and fought for the King. In the course of the campaign he was taken prisoner, but was ransomed before the Treaty of Bretigny in 1365. We then know nothing of his life for the next six years. Probably he spent much of his time reading French poetry, which was very popular in those days.

From 1366 to 1372, he was again connected with the Court. Pensions, gifts and lucrative situations were given to him by John of Gaunt (another son of Edward III), who later on became Chaucer's brother-in-law, having married the sister of the poet's wife. In the following years he was sent on several diplomatic missions abroad, three of which were to Italy, in 1372, 1374, and 1378. Italian literature, which was already in full bloom at that time, opened to Chaucer a new world. He certainly read much of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. He may even have met Petrarch and Boccaccio, for they died in 1374 and 1375.

On his return to England, he was appointed as Comptroller of the Customs, a brilliant position which freed him from every financial anxiety.

All went well with him during the reign of Edward III and Richard II. In 1386, he sat in Parliament as one of the knights for the Shire of Kent. But when Gloucester took the lead against the king, the poet fell on evil days and lost his office. He was even compelled to borrow money for his immediate needs. However, when Richard triumphed over his adversaries, he obtained a grant of £ 20 a year for life. But until his death, he seems to have been in dire straits for money, and, when Henry IV succeeded to the throne, he sent him a humorous *Complayente to his Empty Purse*, and the new king doubled his pension, Chaucer died in London in 1400 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

## **5.7 HIS WORKS**

### **The Three Phases of His Literary Production**

Chaucer's literary production is generally divided by scholars into three periods or phases : the Period of French imitation (1359–72); the Period of Italian influence (1372–86); and the independent or English period of his full artistic maturity (1386–1400).

## **5.8 CHAUCER'S 'FRENCH' PERIOD**

When Chaucer first began to write, translations from the French were still popular, and he was only following the prevalent fashion when he set himself to translate the *Roman de la Rose*. This was a long allegorical love poem, consisting of about 20,000 lines of which the first 4,000 were written by Guillaume de Lorris, and was taken up and finished forty years after his death, by Jean de Meung about the end of the century.

During the first period, he wrote mainly allegorical poetry after the manner of the French and used the octo-syllabic couplet. To this period belongs *The Book of the Duchess* (1369). John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, died in November, 1369, and it is the first original poem of any length by Chaucer which has come down to us. He wrote this poem in her honour. In the prologue, he feigns that in default of sleep, of which a sickness he has 'suffered this eight yere' has bereft him, he reads Ovid's story on how King Coyx appeared after his death to his faithful wife Alcione, and then

dreams of a May Morning and a hunt, amid which he meets a knight, clothed all in black, lamenting under an oak. The knight tells him how he had loved and won the fairest of all ladies, 'the goode, faire white', as he calls her, and dwells on her beauty and goodness. Now she is dead. The poet dreams that he stammers out a word of sympathy, and then amid the sound of the returning hunt he wakes, and the graceful poem comes to an end.

The suggestion of a hopeless love which had robbed him of health and happiness, made in the Prologue to *Blaunche*, is continued in the beautiful little poem, the *Complaint of the Death of Pity*. Joined on to the *Pity* in two manuscripts, is another poem of 128 lines, notable as containing several metrical experiments among them, being the first example of Dante's *terza riva* in the English language. This *Complaint to his Lady*, as it has been called, would seem, from its experimental character, to be purely playful.

Another poem may belong to this period, the *Compleynt of Mars*, founded on the old myth told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* of the love of god Mars for the goddess Venus, and its discovery by Phoebus Apollo. This story, Chaucer here works out, according to the astronomy of his day, of a conjunction of the planet Mars with the planet Venus in the sign of Taurus, or The Bull—one of the astrological houses of Venus into which Phoebus or the Sun enters every April. Gossip said that the poem also had reference to an intrigue between the Lady Isabella of York and the Duke of Exeter, but the theory is superfluous, and the poem is humorous and ingenious enough to stand by itself.

## 5.9 CHAUCER'S 'ITALIAN' PERIOD

In the second period, he fell under the influence of the great Italian poets of the age. From Dante he first learned the full power and range of poetry; from Petrarch he got the taste for a perfect form; from Boccaccio he derived the art of telling a story delightfully. In this period, he mainly used the heroic verse of seven lines, each of five iambic feet rhyming *ababbcc*, and began to use the heroic couplet of five iambic feet rhyming in pairs, *aa bb cc*. In the seventeenth century, this verse was regarded by Dryden as the true form for tragic or heroic drama and therefore called 'heroic.'

From his visit to Italy, Chaucer brought back three books, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante and the *Teseide* and *Filostrato* of Boccaccio. With the *Filostrato*, Chaucer was more immediately successful, for between 1380 and 1383 he transmuted it into his longest and very beautiful poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Written in the seven line stanza over which he had obtained a complete mastery, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is full of human interest and pathos, vivid in colour and the sense of the beauty and fleetingness of life and if he had written nothing else, by itself it would entitle him to be ranked among the greatest English poets. He takes the story as Boccaccio told it, and humanises and enriches it at every point.

While *Troilus* was in progress, Chaucer took up two other subjects. The first of these, which leaves its trace on the *Troilus* and on many of his later works, was a prose translation of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, a Roman statesman and a man of letters, who was first imprisoned and afterwards murdered by order of Theodoric in A.D. 525.

The other subject which interrupted *Troilus* was Richard II's wedding with Anne of Bohemia. *The House of Fame* describes in octosyllabic couplets, a dream, on a certain December 10. On December 12, 1380, an English ambassador was appointed to entreat for the marriage, and Dr. Aage Brusendorft suggests that the decision had been taken on the 10th and inspired Chaucer to write a poem on the lines of *Le Temple d'Honneur*, in which Froissart had guardedly forecast an unidentified marriage.

The next separate poem preserved after *Troilus* is that known as *The Legend of Good Women*. It consists of nine stories of women noted for constancy and fidelity, and the poet wrote it to make up for the bad light he had thrown upon the female sex in his *Troilus and Criseyde*. It is considered by some a preparatory experiment for the *Canterbury Tales*.

### **Chaucer's 'Independent' Period**

The independent period of the poet's artistic maturity goes from 1386 to 1400 and includes *The Canterbury Tales*, written in 1387. They are the

best pieces in Middle English and his first truly original work of poetry. They were first printed by Caxton in 1475.

**Later Minor Poems :** *The Canterbury Tales* was Chaucer's last important work, and the composition of those specially written for the cycle certainly spread over several years. But Chaucer, though he was probably but little over sixty at the time of his death, seems to have felt old age press heavily on him and it is quite possible that he did not continue his story-telling upto the last. He wrote, however, a few short poems during his later years. *The Former Age, Fortune, Truth, Gentilesse, Lak of Steadfastness* are linked together by their obvious reminiscences of the poet's translation of the *De Consolatione*. The *Compleynt of Chaucer to his Purse*, despite its humour closes rather pitifully, the long list of his poems.

#### 5.10 CHAUCER'S PLACE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

In estimating the work of any poet, we have to consider it under two different aspects— in its relation to the time during which it was produced, and in its positive results. Looked at from either of these points of view, Chaucer's achievements were very great. When he began to write, the ideals of the thirteenth century had lost their power. While the memory of Richard Coeur de Lion was fresh in men's minds, the adventures of knights and their ladies formed a natural subject for poetry. By the reign of Richard II, they had lost any semblance of reality. Dead also was the fervour of mystical faith which gave to the Arthurian romances, their unique atmosphere. The first, and not the least, of the achievements of Chaucer was that he gave English poetry new subjects, drawn partly from Italian literature, partly from Latin, partly from the popular tales of his day, partly, and this is the most important of all, from the English life which he saw around him. That he, who was essentially a poet of the Court, brought into English Court poetry such a series of descriptions as we have in the *Prologue To Canterbury Tales*, which are the most striking instances of originality that the history of English literature can offer us.

### 5.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

1. Discuss the social and political background of the age of Chaucer.

### 5.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Which literary work is considered Geoffrey Chaucer's magnum opus, showcasing a diverse group of characters on a pilgrimage to Canterbury?
- A) "The Divine Comedy"
  - B) "The Canterbury Tales"
  - C) "Le Morte d'Arthur"
  - D) "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"
- Q.2 What important position did Chaucer hold in the 14th century, which allowed him to travel and engage with a wide range of people, influencing his writing?
- A) Court jester
  - B) Knight
  - C) Merchant
  - D) Civil servant
- Q.3 Which language did Chaucer use to write "The Canterbury Tales," making it one of the first major works of English literature in this language?
- A) Latin
  - B) French
  - C) Italian
  - D) Middle English

- Q.4 What literary form did Chaucer employ in “The Canterbury Tales,” with each pilgrim telling a story on their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket?
- A) Ballad
  - B) Epic
  - C) Frame narrative
  - D) Lyric poem
- Q.5 Which character from “The Canterbury Tales” is known for his humorous tales and is a cunning fox in one of them?
- A) The Knight
  - B) The Pardoner
  - C) The Squire
  - D) The Nun’s Priest
- Q.6 Chaucer is often referred to as the “father of English poetry” mainly because he was the first English poet to:
- A) Write in blank verse
  - B) Write heroic couplets
  - C) Publish a novel
  - D) Be widely translated
- Q.7 In “The Canterbury Tales,” the pilgrims are journeying to the shrine of which saint?
- A) Saint George
  - B) Saint Michael
  - C) Saint Thomas Becket
  - D) Saint Augustine

- Q.8 Which pilgrimage site is the ultimate destination of the characters in “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) Canterbury Cathedral
  - B) Westminster Abbey
  - C) St. Paul’s Cathedral
  - D) Durham Cathedral
- Q.9 Chaucer’s “Troilus and Criseyde” is a tragic narrative poem that is a retelling of which ancient work?
- A) “The Aeneid”
  - B) “The Iliad”
  - C) “The Odyssey”
  - D) “The Epic of Gilgamesh”
- Q. 10 Which of Chaucer’s works, known for its allegorical portrayal of the battle between Virtue and Vice, is considered an important precursor to “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) “The Book of the Duchess”
  - B) “The Parliament of Fowls”
  - C) “The Legend of Good Women”
  - D) “The House of Fame”

Answer: 1B, 2D, 3D, 4C, 5D, 6B, 7C, 8A, 9B, 10A

### 5.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Alfred W. Pollar - Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales
2. Ralph Baldwin - The Unity of the Canterbury Tales.



**THE CANTERBURY TALES****Unit Structure****6.1 Objectives****6.2 The frame work****6.3 Fiction and fact in Chaucer's Narrative****6.4 Unfinished Condition of the Tales****6.5 Characters in Tales****6.6 Examination Oriented Questions****6.7 Multiple Choice Questions****6.8 Suggested Readings****6.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the general frame work of "The Canterbury Tales." The study of fact and fiction and other traits of tales are discussed for proper analysis.

**6.2 THE FRAME WORK**

The first part of the work is called 'The Prologue' and tells us how a party of thirty people of all sorts and conditions, including Chaucer himself, bound for the shrine of Thomas a Becket in Canterbury, met at the Tabard Inn, Southwark (across the Thames from the City of London) and agreed upon the proposal of the host that each should tell two stories on the way to Canterbury

and two on the way back. The reward for the pilgrim who would tell the best story was free supper when all returned to the inn.

It is easy to notice that the idea of collecting a number of tales within a general framework was undoubtedly borrowed from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. However, Chaucer's work remained unfinished : only twenty-two of the pilgrims tell one tale. So, including the story told by Chaucer himself, we have twenty-three tales, three of which were not completed.

The Pilgrim's represent almost every class of society in the fourteenth century, and, as we read 'The Prologue', we are carried back to Chaucer's time. We are introduced to a knight, a squire, a yeoman, a prioress, a monk, a merchant, a scholar of Oxford, a wife of Bath, etc., all of them vividly portrayed with their foibles and their hobbies.

Each of these pilgrims tells a story in keeping with his own character. The tales deal with the whole range of medieval poetry — chivalrous (the knight), didactic (the Parson), satiric (the Wife of Bath).

With the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer, ignoring the literary conventions of the time, broke away from the traditional schemes, and left the abstract regions of metaphysics, theology and allegory. He took men and things just as they were and he was content to describe them with kindly humour, without judging them. Through his frank and realistic humour, through his way of looking at squires and monks, we feel that feudal society and the church, the two pillars upon which the medieval world rested, were crumbling away and that a new class was coming in power to which Chaucer himself belonged—the merchant middle-class or the bourgeoisie.

### 6.3 FICTION AND FACT IN CHAUCER'S NARRATIVE

Chaucer tells us in the 'Prologue how', one April,

*In South werk at the Tabard as I lay  
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage  
To Canterbury with ful devout corage,*

*At night were come into that hostelrye,  
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye  
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle  
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alley,  
That toward Canterbury wolden ryde.*

Now, at the dissolution of the Monastries ‘a hostelry called the Tabard’ was mentioned in the surrender of the Southwark property of the Abbot of Hyde. In the time of Speght, who edited Chaucer’s works in 1602, the inn was managed by a Master G. Preston, who had then newly refitted it for the convenience of travellers, and in the *Survey of London* by Stow (1588), it is mentioned as the most ancient of the many fair inns in Southwark. All this proves abundantly that in the 16th century and probably in the 15th, there was a Tabard Inn in existence.

#### **6.4 UNFINISHED CONDITION OF THE TALES**

*“ne breke thou not ours play,  
For every man save thou hath told his tale,”*

It clearly implies, what we should expect, that each pilgrim has to tell two tales in all, one in the beginning, the second on the homeward journey, giving fifty-eight altogether. We have two tales from each pilgrim, and there are seven of them (the Yeoman, Ploughman, and five Guildsman) from whom we have no tales at all, while those of the Squire and Cook are incomplete and the Monk’s Tragedies and Chaucer’s Tales of Sir Thopas are interrupted. On the other hand, we have a prose tale from Chaucer in addition to Sir Thopas, and an extra tale, not contemplated in the Prologue, told by a Yeoman, who with a Canon, his master, overtakes the pilgrims when they have ridden some five miles from Ospringe. Thus we have twenty finished stories, two unfinished and two interrupted ones.

According to Chaucer’s plan, between each story and its successor

there should have been a conversational link or talk on the Road. But at least, eight of these links are missing, so that it is necessary to divide the tales into nine groups, the stories within which are linked together, while between one group and another there is a gap. The order of these nine groups is not given quite accurately in any single manuscript, but is sufficiently determined by the references to time and places.

## 6.5 CHARACTERS IN TALES

The following are the characters that figure in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* :

- a) Knight, Squire, The Yeoman
- b) Franklin
- c) Prioress and her Chaplain
- d) Prioress's Priests
- e) Clerk of Oxford, The Poor Parson,
- f) Monk, Friar, Pardoner, and Summoner,
- g) Merchant, five Gildsmen and their Cook, Maunciple, Shipman
- h) Physician and Sargeant of Law.
- i) Miller, Reeve, Ploughman
- j) Wife of Bath
- h) Chaucer

*The Canterbury Tales* can best be read in the following order :

**First Day :** The pilgrims leave Southwark, pass Deptford and Greenwich and spend the night presumably at Dartford. (The plan is for four tales from each pilgrim.)

**Second Day :** The pilgrims pass Rochester and spend the night at

spring. (The plan here and for the rest of the fragments is for one tale from each pilgrim).

**Third Day :** The pilgrims arrive in Canterbury in the morning, visit the shrine of St. Thomas in the afternoon and spend the night in Canterbury.

**Fourth Day :** The pilgrims start the homeward journey, arriving at Sittingbourne and spending the night in Rochester.

**Fifth Day :** The pilgrims return to the Tabard for the prize-awarding supper.

The freedom that Chaucer gave to his pilgrims, including the Host, was parallel to the freedom he felt he had himself. They could quarrel, argue, seek to impose themselves and their visions, or hide behind a facade of respectability; they could admire, love, reflect their piety in their actions and utterances. The most remarkable quality of *The Canterbury Tales* is its immense variety, and the undercurrent of delightful humour and tender pathos that runs through them all. His pilgrims have been drawn from all possible ranks and professions, except the royalty. He has placed a tale in front of the readers that is appropriate to its teller. The Knight's tale is heroic in subject, chivalrous in sentiment, and romantic in tone. The Nun's Priest's tale is a comic story dealing with real life. There are stories which are repellent, ridiculous and shocking. Sometimes the character of the teller is revealed by the story he tells. For example, the Clerk's tale of patient Griselda reveals the sacrificing and idealistic nature of the narrator.

The pilgrims are represented as affected by a variety of destructive and restorative kinds of love. Their characters and movements can be fully described only as mixtures of the loves that drive and goad, and of the love that calls and summons. The pilgrims have, while they stay and when they move, their worldly host. They too have their worldly summoner and pardoner who, in the very worst way, move and are moved with them. Nevertheless, the Summoner and Pardoner, who conclude the roll of the

company, despite, and beyond their appalling personal deficiency, may suggest the summoning and pardoning, the judgment and grace, which in Christian thought embrace and conclude man's pilgrimage and which, therefore, with all the corrosions of satire and irony, are also the seriously appropriate conclusion to the tapestry of Chaucer's pilgrims.

The idea of pilgrimage as occasion for the telling of a sequence of stories was one of the happiest devices of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The religious motive of a pilgrimage made possible the coming together on a friendly footing of representatives of many social classes, the relative safety and cheapness of such a form of travel, especially to such a famous and long-established shrine as Canterbury, promoted a holiday spirit which encouraged music, story-telling and led to the free exchange of opinions and confidences. Thus, through his adoption of the pilgrimage device, Chaucer was able to make of his *General Prologue* an unsurpassed social document – and his framing narrative– a true human comedy.

## **6.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the main themes of the tales in the Canterbury Tales.
2. Discuss the number of main characters in the tales.

## **6.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Which literary work is considered Geoffrey Chaucer's magnum opus, showcasing a diverse group of characters on a pilgrimage to Canterbury?
- A) "The Divine Comedy"
  - B) "The Canterbury Tales"
  - C) "Le Morted' Arthur"
  - D) "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"

- Q.2 What important position did Chaucer hold in the 14th century, which allowed him to travel and engage with a wide range of people, influencing his writing?
- A) Court jester
  - B) Knight
  - C) Merchant
  - D) Civil servant
- Q.3 Which language did Chaucer use to write “The Canterbury Tales,” making it one of the first major works of English literature in this language?
- A) Latin
  - B) French
  - C) Italian
  - D) Middle English
- Q.4 What literary form did Chaucer employ in “The Canterbury Tales,” with each pilgrim telling a story on their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket?
- A) Ballad
  - B) Epic
  - C) Frame narrative
  - D) Lyric poem
- Q.5 Which character from “The Canterbury Tales” is known for his humorous tales and is a cunning fox in one of them?
- A) The Knight
  - B) The Pardoner

- C) The Squire
  - D) The Nun's Priest
- Q.6 Chaucer is often referred to as the "father of English poetry" mainly because he was the first English poet to:
- A) Write in blank verse
  - B) Write heroic couplets
  - C) Publish a novel
  - D) Be widely translated
- Q.7 In "The Canterbury Tales," the pilgrims are journeying to the shrine of which saint?
- A) Saint George
  - B) Saint Michael
  - C) Saint Thomas Becket
  - D) Saint Augustine
- Q.8 Which pilgrimage site is the ultimate destination of the characters in "The Canterbury Tales"?
- A) Canterbury Cathedral
  - B) Westminster Abbey
  - C) St. Paul's Cathedral
  - D) Durham Cathedral
- Q.9 Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" is a tragic narrative poem that is a retelling of which ancient work?
- A) "The Aeneid"
  - B) "The Iliad"



- C) “The Odyssey”
- D) “The Epic of Gilgamesh”

Q. 10 Which of Chaucer’s works, known for its allegorical portrayal of the battle between Virtue and Vice, is considered an important precursor to “The Canterbury Tales”?

- A) “The Book of the Duchess”
- B) “The Parliament of Fowls”
- C) “The Legend of Good Women”
- D) “The House of Fame”

Answer : 1B, 2D, 3D, 4C, 5D, 6B, 7C, 8A, 9B, 10A

## **6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Alfred W. Pollar - Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales
2. Ralph Baldwin - The Unity of the Canterbury Tales.

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**CHAUCER'S ART OF CHARACTERISATION****Unit Structure****7.1 Objectives****7.2 Introduction****7.3 Wife of bath****7.4 The Host****7.5 Conclusion****7.6 Examination Oriented Questions****7.7 Multiple Choice Questions****7.8 Suggested Reading****7.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to expose the learner to the characters in the tales and also to give in depth details about the character of Wife of Bath.

**7.2 INTRODUCTION**

Chaucer, the generic father of English literature, was born in 1340. He was a dynamic poet and a creative artist. In *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, he was one of the thirty pilgrims. Chaucer described the pilgrims or characters in a subtle manner.

He is a committed sociologist and he has drawn round characters.

In the “*Prologue*”, Chaucer’s art of characterisation is based upon his personal observations or experiences, which creates an impression that he knows all these characters personally. By grouping these characters he represents occupations and callings. He has presented small cohesive units (small sections). Each group is very cohesive and what binds them in a society is impartiality or allowing each character to speak, express or act according to his wish faithfully and without any intervention. Each character has its own life and stands long enough before ‘we readers’ for the proper scrutiny or examination. Chaucer is particularly bothered about their dress and occupation.

Chaucer, as a first person singular narrator, exhibits a fair amount of keenness and deep interest about the biographical information of his co-pilgrims. All the pilgrims come from diverse trades. For example :

- a) The Knight
- b) The Squire
- c) The Yeoman

They represent the warrior or fighting martial class. Chaucer gives them no importance because they belonged to respectable section of the society.

**a) The Knight**

A highly praised warrior, a gallant and chivalrous soldier, he is free from arrogance and never did anything wrong in his life. He puts on a short jacket and keeps an armour with him. He has fought as many as fifteen bloody battles and looks as if he has just returned from the voyage.

**b) The Squire**

The squire is a lusty youth and a great lover, who has great strength and wears a multicoloured dress, short gown and always rides on a horse. He goes to the battlefield only to impress his beloved.

### **c) The Yeoman**

The Yeoman is a servant of the knight, whose duty is to serve his master. He has a dagger with him. He wears a coat and a green coloured hood.

- a) The Doctor of Physic
- b) The Man of Law
- c) The Clerk of Oxford
- d) The Poet himself

They all represent a liberal profession and they are emancipated, and intelligent persons.

### **The Clerk of Oxford**

He was a man of few words and an erudite scholar. His hobby was studies.

- a) The Ploughman
- b) The Reeve
- c) The Franklin
- d) The Miller

They all represent the Agrarian class.

- a) Ploughman :** He was at the bottom in hierarchy, who tills the land.
- b) Reeve :** An agriculturally affluent man.
- c) Miller :** He was a revenue tax-collector. In young age, he was a good horse rider and carpenter also.
- d) Franklin :** He was a Lord or King of dining table and a man with epicurean taste. He was an assistant to a lawyer in legal matters. He can also be called a gourmet.

a) The Merchant

b) The Shipman

They both represent trading class and Chaucer has portrayed them as strictly business-minded persons.

a) The Wife of Bath

b) The Haberdishire

c) The Carpenter

d) The Webber

e) The Dyer

f) The Tepicer

g) The Weaver

They represent crafts, skills etc., and are called skilled artisans.

### **7.3 THE WIFE OF BATH**

She is one of the most famous character in Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. She is very keen about her dress and socks. She is very eccentric and a totally vain and stupid lady. She knows the art of love and romance and has done a fair amount of travelling.

a) The Manciple

b) The Cook

c) The Host of Tabard Inn.

They are connected with catering business.

a) The Parson,

b) The Summoner.

They represent the secular clergy. The Summoner was a con-man. He

was a decent, kind rascal and is a real human paradox. He was the most corrupt man.

- a) The Nun
- b) The Friar
- c) The Prioress
- d) The Monk
- e) The Pardoner.

All these represent Monastic orders, which means they are ascetics in their behaviour. They are steeped in satire.

These are called as subtle nuances of characterisation. This shows that no section of society is absent from Chaucer's mind or in other words, we can say that it is a whimsical melody of colours and costumes, which makes the presentation of characters in the *Prologue* so colourful. This also makes the depiction of the society very interesting. It can be, therefore, called a tolerant curiosity in the study of man and manners and relationship between individual and ideas. It is another instrument in the art of correct characterisation. Chaucer has, thus, presented his characters in such a way that the *Prologue* looks like a composite art gallery.

Chaucer's characterization of the pilgrims is carried still further in the continually moving narrative of the links between the tales. The devices by which Chaucer maintains the freshness, variety and liveliness of this background are natural and entertaining, and most important of all is the role of the Host.

#### **7.4 THE HOST**

He dominates almost every episode along the road to Canterbury. His dignity, his independence, his experiences as an innkeeper, his geniality, his tact, admirably qualify him for the leadership of a personally conducted tour; and the way in which he meets the various minor and major crises

of the journey, gives continuous dramatic interest to the links. His sense of social values prompts him to arrange that the Knight shall tell the first tale and calls on the Monk to follow; but when the Miller insists on being heard instead, the Host yields the point to avoid a disturbance because he sees that the man is drunk. Yet, ordinarily he maintains a firm rein, warns against loss of time, and stops any pilgrim who wanders from the point. He adapts his tone to the person he addresses, is respectful to the Knight and Man of Law, courtly to the Prioress, encouraging to the shy and aloof Clerk, and bluff with the Cook. In order to keep the company entertained, he jests good-humouredly with the Monk and the Priest, and he ridicules Chaucer in order to dissipate the sober mood created by the Prioress's tale. Alert to prevent quarrels, he checks the bickering of the Friar and the Summoner and reconciles the Manciple and the Cook, and when he becomes involved in an angry exchange of abuse with the Pardoner, he readily yields to the Knight's intervention as a peace-maker.

Another dramatic element of the framing narrative is the constant introduction of quarrels and disputes. These are sometimes motivated by occupational jealousy as in the case of the Miller and the Reeve, who are often brought into conflict through their duties in connection with the medieval manor, and of the Cook and the Manciple, who are rival caterers. The Friar and the Summoner are also natural rivals, in that both are expert in winning money by various unscrupulous ways. The chief item of dispute that runs through several stages of the journey is the age-old war of the sexes, which perhaps begins with the Host's allusion to his wife's love of domination, is lightly touched upon in the "Nun's Priest's Tale" and rises to the importance of a discussion or debate in the Wife of Bath's frank statement of her heretical opinions on matrimony and the different replies that these call forth from the Clerk, the Merchant and the Franklin.

Still another dramatic artifice employed in the links and prologues

is, which might be called the confession. Based perhaps on a literary convention which appears in the *Roman de la Rose* and in the Elizabethan soliloquy, the device is here made natural through the confidential mood inspired by the pilgrimage. The Franklin as well as the Host reveal their domestic troubles on one or two occasions; but the outstanding examples of this form of self-revelation are the Wife of Bath's Prologue, with the first part of his tale. In each case, a strongly individualized personality intimately reveals his or her Principles and Practice, however contrary to accepted morality; each then reinforces these statements of experience by the authority of a tale by way of example and even evokes a dramatic response from the other pilgrims. The Wife of Bath's account of how she won the mastery of five husbands, with its accompanying tale of woman's sovereignty, precipitates the different kinds of irony displayed by the Clerk and the Merchant. The Pardoner's cynical confession of avarice, lechery, and gluttony contrasted with his eloquent sermon against these sins, ends in a scene variously interpreted by the critics but accepted by all as tensely dramatic.

Another thing worth considering about his characters is their universality. They are not of an age but of all ages. They are timeless creations on a time determined stage. The Squire, the Monk, the Prioress, the Franklin, the Wife of Bath, etc., may have changed their names, but they are all human beings, having the same passions, desires and instincts as are common to all humanity. All of us feel at home in their company for we all recognize in them an element of our own selves. Chaucer's portrait gallery is representative not only of his age, but also of humanity in all ages and countries. Chaucer, moreover, knew how to strike a delicate balance between the individual and the type. His characters present their typical natures without ceasing to be individuals and more general traits would have turned the picture into a frozen symbol, an uninteresting abstraction, more individual traits would have confused it by depriving the mind of obvious means of identification. Similarly, his ecclesiastical characters represent the degeneration of the church and the corruption that had overtaken the clergy of the times. His Monk, Friar,



pardoner and Summoner have all forgotten their duties. They have grown greedy and selfish and are given to all sorts of corrupt practices. They have been individualised by noting their personal peculiarities and oddities. For example, the Monk has been individualised by his eyes :

*His eyes steps and rolling in his head,*

*That seemed as a furnace in his head.*

And by his bald head which shone like a mirror. Some of his characters, like the Prioress and the Friar, have been brought to life by giving them a name. We feel that they are men and women whom Chaucer must have met and minutely observed. Sometimes, some physical peculiarities are emphasised to add individuality to some character. For example, we have the forked beard of the Merchant, the Miller's famous wart surrounded by a tuft of hair and the red pimpled-face of the Summoner.

## **7.5 CONCLUSION**

Thus, Chaucer has assigned himself the task and role of a social chronicler and *The Prologue* can be considered as a well-knit composite tale of human character and the epicentre or the central protagonist of this tale is man himself. We may summarize Chaucer's achievement by saying that he is the earliest of the great moderns. In comparison with the poets of his own time, and with those of the succeeding century, the advance he makes is almost startling. For example, Manning, Hamlet and the romances are of another age and of another way of thinking from ours, but apart from the superficial archaisms of spelling, the modern reader finds in Chaucer something closely akin. All the Chaucerian features help to create this modern atmosphere : the shrewd and placidly humorous observation, the wide range of humanity, the quick aptness of phrase, the dexterous touch upon the metre, and above all, the fresh and formative spirit "the genius turning dross into gold". Chaucer is, indeed, a genius, he stands alone, and for nearly two hundred years none dare claim equality with him.

## **7.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Throw Light on the art of Characterization of Chaucer.
2. Discuss the Character of Wife of Bath.

## **7.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 What term describes Chaucer's technique of creating characters with distinct traits and personalities in "The Canterbury Tales"?
- A) Allegory
  - B) Symbolism
  - C) Foreshadowing
  - D) Characterization
- Q.2 Which character in "The Canterbury Tales" is known for being extremely fastidious about his appearance and cleanliness?
- A) The Miller
  - B) The Monk
  - C) The Pardoner
  - D) The Wife of Bath
- Q.3 Which character is a Prioress known for her delicate manners and her fondness for animals in "The Canterbury Tales"?
- A) The Prioress
  - B) The Nun's Priest
  - C) The Franklin
  - D) The Reeve
- Q.4 What is the profession of the character who is portrayed as a greedy and corrupt church official in "The Canterbury Tales"?

- A) The Summoner
  - B) The Parson
  - C) The Clerk
  - D) The Squire
- Q.5 Who is the character known for his storytelling skills and wisdom, and serves as the Host of the pilgrims in “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Miller
  - B) The Reeve
  - C) The Knight
  - D) The Host
- Q.6 What character is a knight who has fought in numerous battles and upholds chivalry and honor in “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Pardoner
  - B) The Knight
  - C) The Friar
  - D) The Prioress
- Q.7 Which character’s physical appearance is described as having a gap-toothed smile and wearing scarlet red stockings in “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Squire
  - B) The Wife of Bath
  - C) The Nun’s Priest
  - D) The Clerk
- Q.8 What is the occupation of the character who is a member of the clergy, but is criticized for being more interested in worldly pursuits than spiritual matters?

- A) The Monk
  - B) The Parson
  - C) The Friar
  - D) The Prioress
- Q. 9 Which character is known for being a skilled carpenter and is deceived by Nicholas in “The Miller’s Tale”?
- A) The Pardoner
  - B) The Summoner
  - C) The Reeve
  - D) The Miller
- Q.10 Who is the character known for his eloquence and learning, yet is critical of the world’s corruption and lack of spirituality in “The Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Squire
  - B) The Clerk
  - C) The Pardoner
  - D) The Monk

Answer : 1D, 2C, 3A, 4A, 5D, 6B, 7B, 8A, 9C, 10B

## 7.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. Arthur compton Rickett - *History of English Literature*

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 8**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

**UNIT - II**

**CHARACTERS IN ‘THE PROLOGUE’**

**Unit Structure**

- 8.1 Introduction**
- 8.2 Objectives**
- 8.3 The Knight**
- 8.4 The squire**
- 8.5 The yeoman**
- 8.6 The prioress**
- 8.7 The monk**
- 8.8 The friar**
- 8.9 The Merchant**
- 8.10 The Oxford Clerk**
- 8.11 The sergeant of law**
- 8.12 The franklin**
- 8.13 The cook**
- 8.14 The shipman**
- 8.15 The Doctor of Physic**
- 8.16 The wife of Bath**
- 8.17 The poor parson**

- 8.18 The ploughman**
- 8.19 The miller**
- 8.20 The manciple**
- 8.21 The reeve**
- 8.22 The summoner**
- 8.23 The pardoner**
- 8.24 Let Us Sum Up**
- 8.25 Multiple Choice Questions**

## **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* presents a social group of thirty persons, larger and more diversified than the ten gentlefolk of the *Decameron*. Chaucer's group of pilgrims is not coherently representative of English society, but covers well enough the main social elements. The nobility and the lowest class labourers are excluded as unlikely to travel in the fashion of this group; but the knights, the learned professions, the landed gentry, medieval manor (through its miller and reeve), and the free agricultural labourers are all represented. The rising middle classes are well exhibited by the London merchant, preoccupied with foreign commerce, the five tradesmen with aldermanic ambitions, Harry Bailey, innkeeper of Southwark, and by the London Cook and Manciple. From the provinces, come the expert cloth weaver, Alisan of Bath and the daring sea-captain of Dartmouth. The portraits of the clergy (nearly one-third of the company) are significant for the tolerance with which Chaucer points out the foibles of the monastic orders in describing the Monk and Prioress. He is severe in satirizing the worldliness of the Friar; and is open in attack on the corrupt Summoner and the fraudulent Pardoner. His ideal portraits of Clerk of Oxford and the Parish Priest, alongwith his equally favourable descriptions of the Knight and the

Ploughman, perhaps reflect his own admiration at a time of changing standards of the basic ideals of earlier medieval society, as they had found expression in its fundamental classes – the men of prayer, the men of war, and the men of labour.

## **8.2 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson's objective is to introduce the learner all to the characters in the prologue.

## **8.3 THE KNIGHT**

The Knight was a worthy man. He loved truth, honour, freedom and courtesy. He was chivalrous and had been to far off countries, both Christian and Heathen, in the wars of his King. He had also fought fifteen mortal battles for the sake of his religion. No man had travelled farther than he, and he had been respected at all places. Place of honour was always awarded to him for his worthiness. Though he was so brave, yet he was as modest as a maid. He had never spoken rudely to any person in all his life. In fact, “he was a very perfect gentle knight.”

As far as his dress and equipment is concerned, his horses were good, but he was not dressed modestly. He wore a jerkin or short vest of coarse woollen cloth soiled by his armour, for he had just returned from his travels and had directly come for his pilgrimage.

## **8.4 THE SQUIRE**

The young Squire, accompanied his father, the Knight, for pilgrimage. He is a young man of about twenty years, of medium height and with curly hair. He is healthy and active and has great strength. He has fought a number of battles in different lands, but he does not fight for his religion or his king. He goes to the wars only because he hopes, in this way, to win the favour of his lady- love. He is fond of the good things in life. All the day he would sing songs, dance, or play on the flute. He loved so passionately that at night he slept no more than a Nightingale. He likes to dress up

fashionably and well. His gown is short with long sleeves. It is embroidered all over :

*Embroidered was he, as it were a mead*

*All full of fresh flowers, white and red,*

He was also courteous and humble, and served his father at the time of meals.

### **8.5 THE YEOMAN**

The Knight had a Yeoman and no other servant at that time, because it pleased him to ride in that manner. This Yeoman was wearing a green coat and hood, and in his hand he carried a mighty bow and under his belt a set of arrows with peacock feather, bright and sharp, and a bow. His head was closely shaved and his face was brown. He was well-versed in wood-craft. He seemed to be a forester, on his breast he wore the figure of St. Christopher. He also bore over his shoulder a horn, hung by a green belt. A dagger hung on one side and a sword on the other.

### **8.6 THE PRIORESS**

There was also a nun called Madam Eglentyne. She was a Prioress or head of her convent. She was very simple and quiet in her smiling. She sang God's prayer fully well, with a charming nasal tone. She did not know the French of Paris, but could speak French of the school of Stratford At le Bowe very well. She was fully trained in the art of eating.

*She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle.*

*No wett hir fingers in hir sauce depe:*

*Wel coude she carie a morsel, and well kepe*

*That no drope ne fille upon hir brest.*

Her greatest pleasure lay in courtesy. In her manners she is pleasant and tries her best to imitate the behaviour of the court. She is stately and



dignified. As regards her kindness, she was so sympathetic and kind-hearted that she would weep if she saw a mouse entrapped, or if it were dead or bleeding. She has small hounds whom she feeds well, and weeps if one of them dies, or someone strikes them sharply, and with her,

*And al was conscience and tendre herte.*

Her mouth is small and soft, and her forehead nearly a span wide. She is certainly not undergrown i.e. she is rather fat. She is fashionably dressed. She wears coral beads studded with green and from it hangs a beautiful golden brooch with the inscription "Love conquers all". She has a Nun and three Priests as her attendants.

### **8.7 THE MONK**

A Monk, fat and flourishing, like a Lord, is also one of the company. He is fond of hunting and has a number of good horses in his stable. He does not care at all for the text of the Bible which says that hunters are not good men, or that a Monk should better stay within his monastery. He does not study or labour with his hands, for he considers such things useless. All his time is devoted to hunting, eating and merry-making. He dresses fashionably in the finest manner. He wears fur-lined sleeves, gold pins, and love-knots. His bald head is as shining as a glass; his face was also equally bright, as if it had been anointed. He was a fat Lord in good condition. His eyes were bright and rolled in his head. His boots were made of soft leather; his horse was in an excellent condition. He was not lean and thin like a ghost of all roasted meats, he loved most a fat swan. His horse was as brown as a berry.

### **8.8 THE FRIAR**

The Friar is a wanton and merry fellow, and in all the four orders of Friars, there is none to equal him in gossip and flattery. He is a noble pillar of his order. He is very well acquainted with rich franklins, rich women and barmaids. As to lepers and beggar women, he considers it below his dignity to have acquaintance with them. It is not profitable to have dealings with people who can give no money. Chaucer ironically remarks that he is a very

good beggar and accepts even a penny from a widow who has nothing else to give. He leads a life of pleasure to the disregard of his religious duties. He has married many a young woman at his own cost. He carries a bag full of knives and pins, which he gave as gifts to beautiful women. And surely, he sings in a sweet voice, he can play upon the fiddle excellently, in singing ballads he has no equals. His neck is white as lily, and he is familiar with taverns in every town.

He has greater power to hear confessions and grant forgiveness than a curate, and he does so for the sake of money. He is like a master or a Pope, and not at all like a poor threadbare scholar. His short cloak is of double worsted and stands round like a bell, when newly pressed. He whimsically lisps a little, so that his English may sound sweet, and when he recites a song and plays a harp :

*His eyen twinkled in his heed aryght*

*As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.*

## **8.9 THE MERCHANT**

There is also a Merchant with a forked beard. He wore a colourful dress. He sat high upon his horse with a beaver-hat of Flanders on his head. His boots were fastened very neatly. He expressed his views pompously, always keeping in view the increase of his own profit. He desired that, at any cost, the sea-route between Middleburg and Orwell must be kept open. He was clever in business transactions at the exchange. He was a shrewd man, nobody ever knew that he was in debt, so dignified was he in his dealings, in his bargains and money lending. He was a worthy man.

## **8.10 THE OXFORD CLERK**

The Clerk of Oxford is the most remarkable of all, who had long devoted himself to the study of logic. He was not fat and looked lean and serious. His cloak was threadbare, because he lacked prudence and cunningness to secure a job and so far he had got no Church job. He does not care for money

or any worldly office. He would prefer to keep near his bed twenty volumes of Aristotle and his philosophy, than rich robes or a fiddle or a gay harp. Although he was a philosopher, he had little gold in his money-box. Whatever he could get from his friends, he spent on books and ardently prayed for the souls of those who provided him with the means to pursue his studies. He was extremely careful about his studies :

*Of studie took he moost care and moost heede,*

*Noght o word spak he moore than was neede.*

Whatever little he spoke was courteous, brief and to the point and full of matter. He loved most to learn and to teach.

#### **8.11 THE SERGEANT OF LAW**

There was also a Sergeant of Law, who was prudent and wise, an excellent person, who often visited the porch of St. Paul's Church, London. He was discreet and worthy of great reverence or at least he appeared to be so, his words were very wise. He had been a judge at the session of the law courts, by patent and full authority from the King. With his learning and great fame, he had earned much money and also robes. There was never such a great purchaser of lands as he. For him all objects of purchase were virtually estates. In fees he charged and nobody could find fault in the legal documents prepared by him. Nowhere could be found a more busy man, yet he appeared busier than he was. He knew accurately every law case and judgement since the time of King William, the Conqueror, and he knew by heart every statute, word by word, and nobody could find any defect in his writing. He was dressed in a coat of mixed stuff or colour and had a girdle of silk with small ornaments.

#### **8.12 THE FRANKLIN**

The Sergeant had a Franklin with him. He had a beard as white as a daisy, a red face, and sanguine temperament. He was fond of having a sop in wine every morning. He lived a life of pleasure, for he was the very son of Epicurus. He was of the view that perfect bliss lies in pleasure only. He always kept an open house, and was thus like St. Jullian in his own part

of the country. His bread and his wine were always of the best quality, never did a man's cellars contain better wine. His house never lacked fish or fresh meat, which he had in abundance, as if it snowed meat and drink and every dainty dish that can be imagined by a person. He changed his meats and his supper according to the changes in the seasons of the year. His cage contained many fat patridges and his fish-pond was full of breams and pikes. His cook never dared to make the sauce pungent and kept his kitchen equipment ever in good order. Throughout the day, a great table ready laid, stood in his hall. He was a grand Lord, when he acted as a judge at the sessions, and had served several times in Parliament as a Knight from his shire. A knife hung from his girdle and a pouch of "silk, white like morning milk. He had served as a sheriff and an auditor and, *"Was ...wasour" such a worthy vavasour."*

#### **The Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyere and Tapicer**

There was also a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer and a Tapicer, all dressed in the dress of a great and grand guild. Their equipment was fresh and new. Their knives were tipped not with brass, but with fine wrought silver. This was also the case with their girdles and pouches. Each of them appeared to be a fair burgess worthy for sitting on a dais in a guild hall. Everyone of them was wise enough to be an Alderman, and each of them also possessed enough goods and income. Their wives must agree with this view; else they are to blame. When they went to Vigils they had their mantles carried royally before them.

#### **8.13 THE COOK**

They had a Cook with them, who could in case of need, boil chickens with the marrowbones and tart powder and delicious cyprus root during the pilgrimage. He well knew the taste of London ale. He could roast, boil, fry, make dainty soup and bake a pie. But it was a great pity that he had a sore on his chin. He could prepare "copon in cream" comparable with that prepared by the best of cooks.

#### 8.14 THE SHIPMAN

There was also a Shipman who lived at Dartmouth in the west. He had a fine ship called Maudelayne. He was clad in a gown of coarse cloth, and he carried a dagger hanging by a lace. He was an experienced sailor, the sun had made his face brown and his beard had been shaken by many a storm. In other words, he had sailed far and wide and faced many storms. He was an expert navigator and was well familiar with all the currents, dangers, harbours and weathers. He was not very honest, and did not hesitate to steal wine from the casks of the merchants, his customers, when they were asleep. If he won a battle, and captured some prisoners on the sea, he would not hesitate to throw them overboard.

#### 8.15 THE DOCTOR OF PHYSIC

The Doctor of Physic was matchless for his skill in medicine and surgery. He watched keenly for favourable hours and an auspicious ascendance of the stars for the treatment of his patients, because he was well-versed in astrology. He understood the cause of each disease, its humour whether it was hot, cold, dry or moist, and its source whence it had sprung. He was a skilful and consummate doctor of medicine. Having diagnosed the cause and the nature of the disease, he gave the sickman his prescription. He had his chemists ready to send him ointments and drugs, for each helped the other to make profit. Their friendship was not recent. He took a moderate diet, without anything in excess, but nourishing and really digestible. His study of Bible was negligible. He was dressed in a red and blue gown, lined with tafetta and thin silk. Yet he spent on dress moderately, and preserved what he earned during the pestilence:

*For Gold in phisik is a cordial,*

*Therefore he loved gold in special.*

### **8.16 THE WIFE OF BATH**

There was a good wife from near Bath, but she was a little deaf and that was sad. She was so skilful in making cloth that she excelled the clothmakers of Ypres and Ghent. There was no woman in her Parish who dared go before her to make offerings at the Church. If any woman had the boldness to do so, she would be angry with her, and be out of all charity. Her handkerchiefs were of excellent texture and the handkerchiefs upon her head on a Sunday weighed as much as ten pounds. Her hose was of a fine scarlet colour and was tightly fastened and her shoes were soft and new. Her face was bold, fair and red in colour. Throughout her life she had been an honourable woman and had married five husbands, in addition to other company in her youth.

This was not her first pilgrimage. She had been three times to Jerusalem, and had also been to a number of other pilgrimages in distant lands. The wide travel had taught her many things. Infact, she was gap-toothed, she sat comfortably on an ambling horse, wearing a fine wimple with a hat as broad as a buckler or a target on her head. She wore a short riding skirt on her feet. She could laugh and talk in company very well. She was fully conversant with love and its remedies, because she had herself played the old game of love-making.

### **8.17 THE POOR PARSON**

There was also a good man of religion, a poor Parson, who was rich in pious thought and action. He was a scholar, a clerk. He would sincerely teach Christ's gospel and instruct his parishioners with devotion. He had often shown himself humane, hardworking, and patient in misfortune. He was never harsh in the collection of tithe; rather he gave it to those of his parishoners who were in need. His parish was wide, but he would visit the farthest corner, even in rain and thunder if any of his parishioners were in trouble or happened to be sick. He went on foot with a staff in his hand. He presented to his followers a good example. First he practised, and afterwards

he preached; these words he had learned from the Bible and added this simile, “that if gold rust, what will iron do?” In other words, what he meant was that if a priest upon whom we rely, is corrupt, it is no wonder that an ignorant layman should also be degenerate; it is disgraceful that a shepherd should be corrupt and the sheep virtuous. A priest should set a noble example by his purity and thus, teach his followers, how they should lead their lives.

The Parson did not rent out his post as a parson, nor desert his sheep and run to London to St. Paul’s to get the comfortable and profitable office of a charity-priest, or to be engaged by some guild, lest some wolf should misguide them. He was not a mercenary, but a genuine shepherd to his flock. Though he was pious and virtuous, he was not cruel to sinners, nor rude in his speech. He was both wise and sympathetic in his preaching. He wanted to attract people to God by his noble life as an ideal example, but if a man was obstinate, whether of a high or low status, he would rebuke him sternly. There was nowhere a better priest than he. He aspired neither for show nor for reverence. He did not suffer from an over-nice conscience. But he preached the sermons of Christ and his apostles, and first he practiced them himself.

#### **8.18 THE PLOUGHMAN**

Parson’s brother, the Ploughman, the humblest of the company was equally virtuous. His humility is seen in the fact that he rode upon a mare. He was a good man and a true labourer. He loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour like himself. He lived in perfect peace and charity. He always “payed his tithes” regularly. After working on his own allotment, and on the field of his Lord, he was ready to work for any needy man without any hire – for the sake of Christ.

#### **8.19 THE MILLER**

The Miller was strongly built for any occasion. He had big bones and muscles. He displayed them excellently. Whenever he participated in a wrestling match, he always carried the prize. He was short-shouldered, broad, a thick and muscular fellow. There was no door which he could not take off its

hinges, or break with his head at a running. His beard was red like that of a sow or fox and also broad like a spade. He had a wart on the tip of his nose and on it there was a tuft of hair, as red as are the bristles on a sow's ears. His nostrils were black and wide. On his side, he bore a sword and buckler. His mouth was as wide as a furnace. He was very talkative and he was a ribald jester. His talk was mostly of sin and ribaldry. He was an expert in stealing corn and in taking his toil three times over and yet he had a golden thumb. He wore a white coat and a blue hood. He could play upon the bagpipe excellently, and with its music, he brought us out of town.

## **8.20 THE MANCIPLE**

The "Maunciple" was a very clever man of business. He purchased provisions for a group of more than thirty lawyers. Some of them were shrewd enough to have been the stewards of some Lord, and in that capacity to have managed his estate well. But this Maunciple, though he was illiterate could over-reach them all. There was no one to match him in cunningness.

## **8.21 THE REEVE**

The Reeve was a slender and choleric fellow. His beard was shaven as closely as could be, his hair was closely cropped and cut short in front like that of a Priest. His legs were long and thin, like a stick, he had no calf. He could well keep a granary and a big, strong box; there was no government inspector, who could get better of him. In dry or rainy season he could well predict the yield of his seed and grain. His Lord's sheep, cattle, dairy, swine, horses, sow and poultry were wholly under his control and he had been submitting the accounts according to the agreement since his Lord was twenty years of age; and nobody could ever detect him in arrears. There was no bailiff, no herdsman nor any other servant whose cunning practices were unknown to him. They were afraid of him as of death. His residence was a pleasant one upon a heath and it was shaded with green trees. He knew how to purchase land better than his master. He had hoarded riches stealthily and knew how to please his Lord by craftily lending out to him what was his own legally, and gain thanks in return and also a coat and hood. In his youth, he



had learnt a good trade; he was a skilful carpenter. He rode an excellent horse, which was dappled gray and was named Scot. He was putting on a long upper coat of blue cloth. He bore on his side an old sword. He came from Norfolk, from near a town called Baldeswell. His coat was tucked up around him like a Friar's, and he ever rode last of all the pilgrims.

## **8.22 THE SUMMONER**

The Summoner was also one of the pilgrims. His face was fire-red like that of an angel, it was pimpled all over, and his beard was thin and ragged. He had narrow eyes. He was as hot and lustful as a sparrow. Children were afraid of his appearance. No quicksilver, lead, brimstone, oil of tartar, ointment that could clean and burn, could cure his white blotches or the knobs on his cheeks. He was fond of garlic, onions and also of leeks. He also liked to drink strong and blood-red wine and then he would talk and rave like a mad man. When he was drunk, he could utter no word, but Latin, of which he knew a few terms, two or three, picked up from some legal document. There was nothing surprising in it because he heard it all day long. But if anybody tested his knowledge in any point, his learning was found to be spent. He was a gentle and a kind rogue. For a quart of wine, he would permit a good fellow to carry on his wicked sins for as long as a year, and completely connive at it; and secretly he practised the same sins himself. And if anywhere he came across a jolly fellow, he would assure him to have no fear of the ex-communication, unless a person's soul was in his purse. In his own way, he had under his power all the young men and women of his district, and had full knowledge of their guilty secrets and was their chief confidante. He had a garland on his head as large as an ale-house sign. He also bore a loaf of bread as if it were a buckler.

## **8.23 THE PARDONER**

The Pardoner was accompanying his friend, the Summoner. He came directly from the court of Rome. He sang love songs in a loud voice. He had hair as yellow as wax which hung smoothly, like a bank of flax. His locks

were spread over his shoulders in thin shreds. To be in fashion, he did not put on his hood, which was trussed up in his wallet. He rode with his hair dishevelled. He was bare-headed but for his cap. His glaring eyes resembled those of a hare. His wallet lay in front of him in his saddle. He had a goat-like shrill voice. He was without beard, he was unlikely ever to have it, for his face was as smooth as if freshly shaven. But so far as his trade was concerned, there was no other Pardoner like him anywhere. His bag contained a pillowcase, which according to him was a lady's veil and a small bit of cloth, which he said was a piece of the sail used by St. Peter when he walked upon the sea, till Jesus Christ caught hold of him. He also carried a cross of salin, studded with stones, and pig's bones in a glass. With these relics, when he met a poor person living in the country, he received from him more money in one day than that person got in two months. And thus with flattery, deception and cunningness, he was a noble dignitary of the Church. He could read a lesson or a tale well. For he was well aware that after singing a song, he must preach and smoothen his tongue to get as much silver as he could. Therefore, he sang in a jolly and loud voice.

#### **8.24 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson we have discussed the characters in the canterbury tale, These characters give us glimpses into the social life and culture of that period.

#### **8.25 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 In the "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," what is the setting where the characters gather to begin their pilgrimage?
- A) A castle
  - B) A tavern
  - C) A cathedral
  - D) An inn

- Q.2 What time of year does the pilgrimage take place in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) Spring
  - B) Summer
  - C) Fall
  - D) Winter
- Q.3 Chaucer describes the people on the pilgrimage as a diverse group representing different:
- A) Social classes and occupations
  - B) Religious orders
  - C) Nationalities
  - D) Age groups
- Q.5 Which character in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales” is known for being a scholar with a love for books?
- A) The Reeve
  - B) The Pardoner
  - C) The Clerk
  - D) The Friar
- Q.5 What does the Knight’s appearance and demeanor reflect in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) Humility and simplicity
  - B) Pride and arrogance
  - C) Arrogance and deceit
  - D) Modesty and quietness

- Q.6 Which character is known for wearing a brooch inscribed with “Amor vincit omnia” (“Love conquers all”) in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Wife of Bath
  - B) The Prioress
  - C) The Nun’s Priest
  - D) The Squire
- Q.7 What is the occupation of the character who is a religious figure but is criticized for neglecting his spiritual duties in favor of worldly pleasures in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Monk
  - B) The Parson
  - C) The Friar
  - D) The Prioress
- Q.8 Which character is known for being an excellent judge of the value of goods and for his effective bargaining skills in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Reeve
  - B) The Pardoner
  - C) The Merchant
  - D) The Miller
- Q.9 What is the profession of the character who is a man of law, highly knowledgeable, and well-spoken in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”?
- A) The Squire
  - B) The Clerk
  - C) The Knight
  - D) The Man of Law

Q.10 Which character in the “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales” is known for having a sweet singing voice and wears a brooch with the motto “Love conquers all”?

- A) The Nun’s Priest
- B) The Pardoner
- C) The Prioress
- D) The Wife of Bath

Answer: 1D, 2A, 3A, 4C, 5A, 6A, 7C, 8C, 9D, 10C

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 9**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

**UNIT - II**

**PICTURE OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY CULTURE AND SOCIETY  
AS REFLECTED IN THE *PROLOGUE***

**Unit Structure**

**9.1 Objectives**

**9.2 Introduction**

**9.3 14th Century Society**

**9.4 Conclusion**

**9.5 Self Assessment Questions**

**9.6 Multiple Choice Questions**

**9.7 Suggested Readings**

**9.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the picture of 14th century society as reflected in the *Canterbury Tales*.

**9.2 INTRODUCTION**

In the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer has presented a true picture of fourteenth century England with the exactitude, exactness, honesty, fidelity and finesse. The characters are portrayed alongwith the minute details—of their dress, their chivalry, bravery, physical features, behaviour, shortcomings, temperaments and tastes. He unites the characteristics of a profession and the personal features of his subject to make life-like portrait. Chaucer, thus acts as the mouthpiece of his age. He discards conventions of dream and fantasy and realistically, without any exaggeration, mirrors the social, economic and

religious conditions of his age. The very framework of his *Canterbury Tales* is realistic. Pilgrimages were very popular in the fourteenth century and were often undertaken in groups, partly for the sake of company and partly because of the danger of the roads. Chaucer's group of pilgrims constitute a picture of the society of his times, which has no parallel in any country.

### **9.3 THE 14TH CENTURY SOCIETY**

The portraits of the Knight and the Squire have a particular interest. The relationship between these two portraits are governed by, and arise out of the natural relationship of father and son. Consanguinity proves the base for a dramatic relationship and at the same time is the groundwork for a modestly generalized metaphor of age and youth. Each portrait is enhanced and defined by the presence of the other – the long roll of the Knight's campaigns and the little opportunity, a few raids enumerated in one line; a series of past tenses, a history for the Knight and for the Squire, a present breaking forth in active participles. The Squire accompanying the Knight shows the effect of bending all the youth, energy, colour and high spirit of the Squire to the service of his father, the Knight, with perhaps a suggestion of the present submitting to the serious and respected values served and communicated by the past, the natural and the imposed submitting of the son to his natural father, and beyond him to the supernatural goal, the shrine to which the father directs his pilgrimage.

In the late fourteenth century the Church had grown terribly corrupt. They heaped up wealth and lived in a Godless and worldly way; the rank and file of the Clergy were ignorant and careless; the mendicant Friars were notorious for their greed and profligacy. The result was widespread discontent among the people. Chaucer too, could not remain indifferent to the abuses of the Church. His ironical portraits of the different ecclesiastical characters reveal that Chaucer is impartial and realistic and paints both sides of the picture. While, through the portraits of the Monk, the Friar, the Pardoner etc., he ridicules the unscrupulous activities of the Church, he also gives the portrait of the Parson who was totally devoted to his job, and people like

him were becoming rarer in that age. He was like “a shepherd, who protects his flock from the wolf and is not a hireling.” He preaches sincerely and correctly and tries to practise what he preaches. He takes good care of his flock and visits the sick and the suffering at the farthest corner of the parish. He leads a simple, virtuous life of devotion and service. He is the instrument of divine mercy and love.

In contrast to him, all the other ecclesiastical characters typify the various aspects of the Church life of the day. The Friar, for example, is corrupt and greedy. He does not care for religion or for his duties. He is fond of merry-making and drinking. He is very charitable and his charitable spirit is highlighted by the fact that he has married off many a young woman at his own expense. He is so greedy that he accepts farthings, even from those who find it hard to earn their living. He avoids the poor and the needy and likes to make friends with rich persons and worthy women. Similarly, the Monk is a pleasure-loving individual. He has grown fat like a Lord, for he leads an easy life and passes his time in eating, drinking and merry-making. He is entirely unsuited to his vocation. He is fond of fine dresses. He wears fur-lined sleeves, gold pins and love knots. He likes hunting and has fine horses and hounds in his stable. Another ecclesiastical character, the Pardoner is a cheat. His bag is full of relics, which he sells to housewives. He earns a lot of money. He is a cunning rogue and he deceives people. He sings merrily and sweetly. In a similar vein, the Summoner is a hypocrite, who would permit people to continue in their sins and would grant them absolution for a small consideration. He would know the secrets of young men and women, and then exploit them to his own advantage. Even the Prioress, though a nun, is not at all self-sacrificing. She is a mincing creature with fine courtly manners. She smiles pleasantly and sings the divine service beautifully through her nose. She is used to society and knows how to carry a morsel to her mouth, so that not even a single drop falls on her fine dress and her fingers are also not spoiled. She is of such a charitable and kind nature that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in trap or a wounded hare. She wears a fine fashionable dress with a gold brooch on which are engraved the



words, "Love wins everything."

Thus, Chaucer's attitude towards religion is realistic. He is keenly alive to the evils and abuses of the day. He combines caustic observations of the weaknesses and hypocrisies of man, with innate reverence for all that is pure and noble. The fourteenth century witnessed the rise of a rich and prosperous merchant class. English trade was flourishing, merchants were earning huge profits, and consequently rising in importance in the life of the nation. For example, Chaucer's Merchant, Carpenter, Dyer, Tapicer, Weaver etc. represent the new power, these commoners were getting in those days and their wives too, were conscious of their growing importance in the life of the nation.

Through the portrait of the 'Doctor of Physic', Chaucer gives a realistic picture of the medicine man of his times. The science was primitive and was based on astrology. Chaucer's doctor is also well grounded in astrology and prescribes only when the stars are in the ascendancy.

Chaucer was a shrewd man of the world and he has also presented women in a realistic manner. Both the Host's and the Merchant's wives quarrel with them on the slightest pretext and make their lives a hell. In the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer warns husbands not to look for patient wives. He gives satiric advice to wives to stand no nonsense from their husbands, and that all would be well if only their husbands allowed them mastery. Many of *The Canterbury Tales* deal with the tricks by which faithless wives deceive their credulous husbands. The Shipman protests with brutal frankness that wives cost more than they are worth and the Merchant's tale conveys the bitter advice that servants are more valuable than wives. The Prioress is refined, delicate, conventional and sentimental. The Wife of Bath is coarse, but not ill-natured. She enjoys heartily all good food and other good things of life. She does not believe in the ideals of chastity. She had five husbands besides other good company in youth. She is a domineering woman who could easily achieve mastery over her successive husbands. She is all for matrimony,

and intends to marry again if and when her present husband dies. She has much practical commonsense and has full confidence in the correctness of her own opinion.

A brief consideration of Chaucer's female characters reveals that his attitude towards women is based on his wide experience of man and life. In the Franklin's tale, we are told that mutual understanding and patience are necessary for a happy married life. This is the sane and balanced advice of a shrewd man of the world. Thus, Chaucer's realism is nowhere seen to better advantage than in his treatment of womankind.

#### 9.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, Chaucer is fully committed to realism in the *Prologue*. He is fully conscious of the social realism and the above given survey shows that he has executed it with a lot of accuracy and creative finesse. Non-intervention by Chaucer in the *Prologue* is the surest instrument by which he is able to put forth an honest and true picture. He maintains aloofness from the pilgrims and acts as a subtle observer and at no stage does he expose them. They expose themselves on their own. He only presents them truly and has painted a realistic picture of his times. He has, in fact, presented a multidimensional or kaleidoscopic portraiture of human nature. Thus, the *Prologue* is prismatic in nature as like a prism through which, the true nature or the colours of Chaucer's age can be viewed. Chaucer's sole objective in painting the true picture of society of his times is that, he was a classicist by temperament and a perfectionist at heart. His main objective was to act as a reformer. He wanted to remove the mental or moral ugliness in human character. He hated this and wanted the deformities and ill-practices prevalent in his age to be abolished. He wanted a highly religious moral character. All the thirty pilgrims in the *Prologue* present a kaleidoscopic society which is hypocritical and mammon-worshipper. *They lust for money* – and this one single trait dominates all their deeds, action, thoughts, sentiments and it is now more

prominent because of the demonic society. Erosion of human values and lust for wealth is the single, strongest and most potent universal factor in the *Prologue*.

### 9.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Q.1. Central spokesman of *Prologue* is Man himself. Discuss and illustrate from the text.
- Q.2. The *Prologue* reflects “a cross-section of English life in the fourteenth century.” Discuss.
- Q.3. What are the distinctive poetic characteristics of Chaucer’s *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*? Enumerate in your own words.
- Q.4. Discuss Chaucer’s art of characterization with reference to *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*.
- Q.5. Discuss Chaucer’s narrative technique with reference to *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*.
- Q.6. Chaucer represents national portrait gallery of 14th century? Give an illustrative answer.

### 9.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Q.1 In the prologue of “The Canterbury Tales,” what does Chaucer’s portrayal of various social classes and occupations reveal about the 14th-century English society?
  - A) The society had a rigid class structure with limited mobility.
  - B) The society was characterized by equality and shared wealth.
  - C) The society had a strong emphasis on religious unity.
  - D) The society was predominantly agrarian and lacked urbanization.
- Q.2 Which character in the prologue represents the chivalric ideals and values of the knightly class in 14th-century England?

- A) The Monk
  - B) The Squire
  - C) The Pardoner
  - D) The Wife of Bath
- Q. 3 How does Chaucer's description of the Prioress's table manners reflect the cultural expectations and norms of 14th-century England?
- A) It demonstrates her modesty and humility, which were highly valued virtues.
  - B) It highlights her extravagance and disregard for social conventions.
  - C) It showcases her love for animals, which was uncommon during that time.
  - D) It signifies her knowledge of foreign languages, a rarity in 14th-century society.
- Q.4 What does the Merchant's portrayal in the prologue reveal about the economic concerns and values of 14th-century England?
- A) The Merchant's wealth indicates a booming economy and widespread affluence.
  - B) The Merchant's debts suggest economic instability and financial struggles.
  - C) The Merchant's generosity highlights a culture of sharing and communal living.
  - D) The Merchant's frugality reflects a strong emphasis on individual accumulation of wealth
- Q.5 What does Chaucer's depiction of the Summoner's appearance and behavior convey about the moral and religious attitudes of 14th-century England?
- A) The Summoner's devoutness and piety were highly esteemed during that time.

- B) The Summoner's disregard for personal hygiene reflects a common attitude towards cleanliness.
  - C) The Summoner's corrupt and dishonest nature represents concerns about religious hypocrisy.
  - D) The Summoner's commitment to charitable acts symbolizes the prevailing spirit of generosity.
- Q.6 How does Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath challenge or reflect the traditional gender roles of 14th-century England?
- A) Her independence and assertiveness align with the submissive role expected of women.
  - B) Her experience and dominance in marriage contradict the submissive role expected of women.
  - C) Her lack of knowledge and dependence on male characters reinforce gender norms.
  - D) Her religious devotion and humility exemplify the ideal behavior for women of that era.
- Q.7 Which character's physical appearance and personality traits reflect the idealized image of a clergyman in 14th-century England?
- A) The Pardoner
  - B) The Monk
  - C) The Parson
  - D) The Friar
- Q.8 Chaucer's representation of the Reeve in the prologue sheds light on the 14th-century attitudes towards what occupation?
- A) Farming and rural labor
  - B) Clergy and religious institutions

- C) Merchants and trade
  - D) Knights and chivalry
- Q.9 How does Chaucer's portrayal of the Clerk reflect the 14th-century emphasis on education and learning?
- A) The Clerk's lack of education highlights the prevailing illiteracy of the time.
  - B) The Clerk's eloquence and knowledge of books reflect the value placed on learning.
  - C) The Clerk's disregard for scholarly pursuits contrasts with the high regard for education.
  - D) The Clerk's focus on material wealth contradicts the importance of intellectual pursuits.
- Q.10 What cultural aspect is depicted through the various characters' diverse occupations, which mirrors the occupational diversity in 14th-century England?
- A) The prevalence of only agricultural labor
  - B) The lack of skilled trades and crafts
  - C) The decline of urban centers
  - D) The existence of a varied workforce

Answer: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5C, 6B, 7C, 8A, 9B, 10D

## 9.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Arthur Compton. Rickett. *History of English Literature*.
2. Alfred W. Pollard. *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*
3. Beryl Rowland. *A Companion to Chaucer Studies*
4. Ralph Baldwin. *The Unity of the Canterbury Tales*.
5. G.H. Gerould. *Chaucerian Essays*.
6. Bernard F. Huppe. *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales*.

**PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES****Unit Structure****10.1 Objectives****10.2 Introduction****10.3 Critical comments****10.4 Let Us Sum Up****10.5 Suggested Readings****10.1 OBJECTIVES**

This lesson familiarizes the learner with the critical comments on prologue to the Canterbury tales.

**10.2 INTRODUCTION**

Chaucer's most comprehensive work, 'The Canterbury Tales', a collection of over 20 stories written in middle English is without doubt largely the production of his later years. The tales mostly written in verse although some are in prose are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize of this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return. (Pilgrims would journey to cathedrals that preserved relics of saints, believing that such relics held miraculous powers. Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, had been murdered in Canterbury

cathedral by the knights of Henry II during a disagreement between Church and Crown. Miracle stories connected to his remains sprang up soon after his death, and the cathedral became a popular pilgrimage destination).

“There has been much speculation as to what suggested to Chaucer the idea of a pilgrimage for his tale. He may have been describing an actual experience or more than one. In the general device of a frame-story, or series of tales within an enclosing narrative, it has often been thought that he imitated Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. But the *Canterbury Tales* are unlike other collection of frame stories in the fact that the enclosing narrative is not formal or mechanical or merely introductory, but provides and keeps in action, a social group engaged naturally in mutual entertainment.” (F.N. Robbins). The device of the pilgrimage afforded Chaucer an opportunity to bring together a representative group of various classes of society, united by a common religious purpose, yet not so dominated by that purpose as to be unable to give themselves over to enjoyment. There is essentially poetic truth in the portrayal of the characters, in their sentiments and personal relations, and no less, in the representation of the pilgrimage as a social assemblage. Chaucer uses the tales and the description of the characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time and particularly of the church and its corrupt clergy.

“The plan of collecting tales and uniting them by a central idea is one of the stock methods of the world. The *Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron* are two of the most famous examples. The more compact collection known as the seven Sages had been known to Englishmen long before Chaucer's time. It is unnecessary, therefore, to seek for either a special or a general original of *The Canterbury Tales*. The thing was in the air or the time, when tales had to be told and pilgrimages were many. Chaucer's work is incomplete, both as a whole and in parts. It is sketched out but not filled in. The only clear string of connection from first to last is the pervading personality of the Host, who gives a unity of character to the whole work, inviting, criticizing, admiring, denouncing, but always keeping himself in evidence.”(George Sampson)

The plan of the *Canterbury Tales* was never brought anywhere near to



completion. It is provided in the Prologue that each pilgrim shall tell four tales, two on the outward and two on the homeward journey. But the company never reaches Canterbury, and only twenty three of the thirty pilgrims get their turn. While the structure of the tales is largely linear with one story following another, it is also much more than that. In the Prologue, Chaucer describes, not the Tales to be told, but the people who will tell them, making it clear that structure would depend on the characters rather than a general theme or moral.

The Prologue represents a gallery of portraits-weird and personal - a tribute to Chaucer's creative genius. Most critics believe that his characters were in some measure drawn from life. Harry Bailly, the host, known to have been the inn-keeper for example has the same name as Henrious Bailly an inn-keeper in Southwark and a member of Parliament from that borough.

### **10.3 CRITICAL COMMENTS**

“Individual as the pilgrims are, they are also representative. Many of them exhibit type of character or of professional conduct- the gentle Knight, the venal Friar, the hypocrite in the person of the Pardoner- such as were familiar in the literature of the age. And taken together, they cover nearly the whole range of life in Chaucer's England. The circle of the royalty and the higher nobility, to be sure, is not directly represented. Men of such rank and station could hardly have been included in the company. But the mind and manners of courtly society are well expressed by the Knight, who had seen honourable service at home and abroad; by his son, the Squire, the typical courtly lover; again, from a different angle, by the Prioress, who “peyned hire to countrefatechere of court”; and, best of all, by Chaucer himself, the accomplished courtier and man of the world, who as author creates the atmosphere and medium of the whole narrative. The clergy, regular and secular, are included in liberal number, and there are also represented the learned professions of law and medicine, the merchants and the craftsmen of the guild, officials of the manor, the sailor, and the common peasant farmer. Possibly Chaucer did not set out deliberately to make the group so inclusive and well distributed. But whatever chance or purpose governed his choice, it would be hard to find such a description of English society between the Beowulf, with

its picture of the heroic age, and the broader canvas of the Elizabethan drama.

In keeping with the miscellaneous character of the company is the wide range of tastes and interest represented by the stories they relate. The romance of chivalry, the courtly lay, the coarse realistic fabliau, the beast-epic, the legend or saint's life, the mock sermon with its illustrative examples all are included, along with the normal allegory and ethical treatise, which only by a stretch of terminology can be called a tale at all. Nearly every type of medieval fiction appears, and appears at its best. Just as Milton, in the seventeenth century, took up one literary form after another – the masque, the pastoral elegy, the epic, the Greek drama- and gave us a supreme example of each, so Chaucer used every important narrative type of his age, and in each was unsurpassed.”(F.N. Robbins)

“There is an open-air atmosphere about it all. His people are always on the move. Never do they become shadowy or lifeless. They shout and swear, and laugh and weep, interrupt the story-teller, pass compliments and in general behave themselves as we might expect them to in the dramatic circumstances of the narrative. It is never possible to confuse the story-teller; each is distinct and inimitable, whether it be the sermonizing Pardoner, the hot-tempered Miller, or the exuberantly vivacious Wife of Bath, who has had five husbands, but experience teaching her that husbands are transient blessings, she has fixed her mind on a sixth!!

There are tragedies as well as comedies in the Tales; some are grave and subdued, others ablaze with colour and merriment; but the thread of honest and kindly laughter runs through them all, serious and gay alike.”(Arthur Compton Rickett)

“The ever present humour of the work cannot be missed; and the exquisite and unlabored pathos which accompanies it has been acknowledged even by those who have failed to appreciate Chaucer as a whole. The stories cover nearly the whole ground of medieval poetry. The King's Tale is high romance on a full scale, told in heroic couplets. The tales of the Reeve and Miller are examples of the fabliau, the story of ordinary life with a farcical tendency. The Man of Law's Tale returns to romance, but it is pathetic romance, told in rhyme

royal. The Prioress's beautiful story is an excursion into hagiology- romance with a difference; and its neighbor, Chaucer's own tale of Sir Thopas, is a burlesque of all the weakness of the romances put into the weakest of the romance verse forms. The Tale of Melibeus illustrates the extraordinary appetite of medieval hearers for long, serious and (to our minds) boring and un-remunerative prose narrative. Chaucer, in some respects as modern as Dickens, is here medieval. The pilgrims, It should be observed are neither bored by Melibius nor shocked by the Wife of Bath. The Monk's Tale, objected to by the Knight on the score of its lugubriousness, may be intended as a set-off to the frivolous description of that ecclesiastic in the Prologue. After the admirable fabliau of the Cock and the Fox told by the Friar's tale, and the story of Griselda told by the Clerk, romance comes back in the "Half-told" tale of the Squire, the "story of Cambuscan bold". The romantic tone is kept up in The Franklin's Tale, one of the most poetical of all, and especially interesting in its portrayal-side by side with an undoubted belief in actual magic-of the extent of medieval conjuring, With The Canterbury Tales we reach, for the first in this story, the literature of everyman, that is to say, that kind of work that belongs to the same world as the work of Shakespeare and Dickens. It is idle to suppose that such expressions of the medieval mind as Cursor Mundi or even Confessio Amantis will ever be widely enjoyed. The best of The Canterbury Tales can be enjoyed by the people who enjoy Pickwick Papers and The Tempest.”(Arthur Compton Rickett).

“His humour, like Shakespeare's, is kindly and never cruel. It is broad and unashamed; but it never sides with evil or mocks at good. The charity of Chaucer is immense. He is, further, a great artist in verse. Earlier poets tended to stumble between English syllabic freedom (spaced by accent) and French syllabic rigidity (spaced by caesura). Chaucer took an unfaltering way between both. He made in English dialect into a first-rate literary medium. The old charge against him of Frenchifying English has been disproved, and he is so far modern, that though he wrote over five centuries ago, his language presents few difficulties to intelligent readers of to-day. His power to communicate poetic grace, and charm, and that large comprehension of humanity which we may call a criticism of life is clear beyond any controversy. And he really understood people and their

place in the world, and so could bring his crowd of pilgrims together with complete success. To the development of English as the means and matter of creative art he rendered true service, and he has fully earned his traditional title of father of our literature.”(Arthur Compton Rickett).

In almost every case Chaucer assigned to a pilgrim a tale suited to his character and vocation. He represented the party as engaged in free and nature social intercourse, and oftener than not the tales are evoked by the talks along the way. Sometimes they are told to illustrate a point or enforce an argument; sometimes they grow out of an altercation, as when the Friar and the Summoner abuse each other’s callings. Sometimes they are given simply in response to the Host, who is chosen at the outset to be toastmaster, or “lord and governour.”

The Canterbury Tales were written during a turbulent time in English history. The Catholic Church was the subject of heavy controversy. After the Black Death many began to question the authority of the established church. Some turned to Lollardy, an early religious movement led by John Wycliffe, which is mentioned in the Tales, as a specific incident involving pardoners who gathered money in exchange for absolution from sin. The incident also exposes church corruption in the behavior of the clergy, false church relics or abuse of indulgences.

Two characters - the pardoner and the summoner are both portrayed as deeply corrupt, greedy and abusive. A pardoner in Chaucer’s day was a person from whom one bought church indulgences for forgiveness of sin, but pardoners were often thought guilty of abusing their office for their own gain. Chaucer’s pardoner openly admits the corruption of his practice while hawking his wares. The summoner was a church officer who brought sinners to the church for possible excommunication and other penalties. Corrupt summoners would write false citations and frighten people into bribing them to protect their interests. These clergy also indulged themselves sensually and gastronomically while ignoring the poor famished peasants.

The pardoners or quaestors were sellers of papal indulgences. The Pardoner in the Prologue is a wicked character- one of the most memorable on the pilgrimage to Canterbury and in the whole of English literature. After the character

of the disgusting summoner Chaucer describes a still more iniquitous character the Pardoner of Rouncivale, (the hospital of the Blessed many of Rouncivale, near Charing Cross in London). Chaucer satirizes the Pardoner by using the word 'gentle'. He professes to give gullible people pardons for their sins in exchange for gold, silver and money as well as a view of his false holy relics supposed to bring benison to the viewer. He professes to have come straight from Rome but Chaucer implies that he probably had not been anywhere near Rome; claiming so was simply part of his pitch to the gullible. He is physically repulsive with yellow hair hanging in clumps on his shoulders." He wore no hood and rode bare-headed. His eyes glared like those of a hare. He wore a vernicle on his cap. (vernicle- a badge or a small copy of handkerchief/ veil of St. veronicawhish she is said to have sent to Christ to wipe his face as he was bearing his cross to Calvary). His bag was full of bits of paper or parchment purporting to be pardons come 'hot' from Rome. He had a small goatee otherwise he was all recently shaved. From Berwick unto Ware there was not another Pardoner like him so well-versed as he in his trade. He carried with him a pillowcase claiming it to be the veil of Virgin Mary as also a piece of the Sail of St. Peters boat as he sailed across the sea. He also carried false relics, actually pig's bones and tricked poor people into giving him money for pardons thus earning more money in one day than would the parson in a whole month. With artificial flattery and tricked and duped the common people. He was skilled in reading from the Bible and preaching and he sang the offertory the best. ( a point in the Mass when people make their offerings to the priest or the pardoner). Because he knew that he should embellish his sermon by singing well to win silver from the congregation , he sang merrily and loudly.

The portrait of the Pardoner shows him as deficient in body, absurdly vain, depraved in soul. His physical attributes a metaphor for his sterile spiritual state.

He is a supreme con artist manipulating people's religious gullibility, their shame, their greed, fear and superstitions. He uses his oratorical skills and rhetorical gift of the gab to 'stir' the people to devotion so that they will give their pennies and' namely unto me' as he says.

### The Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale

The Pardoner begins the prologue thus "Ladies and gentleman" says he "Whenever I give a sermon in church I take pains to speak in a loud and impressive voice that resonates like a bell. I know all my sermons by heart and they are all on one theme- Radix malorum est cupiditas' – Greed and the love of money is the root of all evils". (From the Epistle of St. Paul)

He then says that he lets the congregation know where he comes from as well as all the official letters authorizing him to preach and issue church pardons. (Bull – Latin bulla – a seal- is the name commonly given to official letters from the pope). These letters, say he, have been issued and signed by the Pope himself and his official seal guarantees that neither priests nor officials can question him. After that he tells his stories, shows all the letters signed by the Pope, cardinals and bishops and then sprinkles his sermons with a few Latin sayings to flavor them and to stir the worshipers to devotion.

He then says that he pulls out all his boxes full of crystals, old cloth and bones assumed to be holy relics- he has a piece of bone from the shoulder of a Jew's sheep that he keeps in a brass box and if that bone is dipped in a well it gets miraculous healing properties and that water can heal their cows, sheep or ox when they are infested with worms or bitten by a snake. Furthermore, any sheep that has the pox or scabies that drinks that water from the well would be cured. And if the farmer who owns the animals fasts and drinks some of the water before sunrise as a holy Jew had taught their ancestor to do, his farm animals would multiply. If a man is suspicious of his wife and falls into a jealous rage let his soup be made with this water and he will never mistrust his wife even if he knew about her infidelity, and even if she has had two or three priests as her lover. He also shows them a glove claiming that if anyone wore that glove it would increase their harvest whether it was wheat or oats provided they would offer him pennies or silver.

He then warns the ladies and the men that if in that church there are any person who had committed a heinous sin or crime or any woman young or old who had cheated her husband, then the relics will not bless them or bring them

grace and the others, whose sins are not so grave might come upto him and make him an offering in God's name and he would use the power vested in him by the Pope to pardon them and they would be absolved of their sins.

The Pardoner then boasts of his skill and astuteness in preaching that bring him profit, pride and pleasure. He says, "With this trick I have earned year after year about a hundred gold coins per year. I stand like a priest in a pulpit and tell the ignorant congregation a hundred lies like the one mentioned before and they soak up every word I preach. I make a good show of it, craning my neck to look at the people to the right and left of me just like a dove does setting in a barn. I am happy to see how my wild gestures and my glib tongue so work and preach of avarice and other sins, that the congregation is moved and they happily give away their pennies- namely to me. I am in this sermonizing to make money and not to purify the people of their sins. I don't care if after death their souls rot or go picking berries."

He then continues that he is not the first person to preach with an ulterior motive. Some priests flatter and please people so they may advance in the hierarchy through their hypocrisy, other preach to gain glory and still others to inflame hate.

He preaches, said he, to make money and to sometime to take revenge using his caustic tongue to lash out at fellow pardoners who have reviled or slandered him. He could harangue against a person in the audience and ruin his name without spelling it out; he would give such signs and innuendoes that everyone would know who he was talking about. This is how he repays his enemies by spitting out his venom under the guise of being holy and virtuous.

He then tells that he would tell them his intention very soon and that is that he preaches out of sheer covetousness. And that is why his sermons are about how avarice is the root of all evils. He continues to the pilgrims "Thus I preach about the same sin that I practice. But even when I am guilty of the sin of avarice I can make other folks turn away from greed and repent for it but that is not my purpose, I preach only to make money and that ought to be enough for you. "

He say he tells the people all the old familiar examples and stories because these ignorant foolish people love to hear them over and over again as they are easy to remember, "And do you think that since I help cure the people of their

greed by talking away all their gold and silver though my preaching would I ever live in poverty? I am not a simpleton who would labor with his hands and earn his livelihood by weaving baskets. I would rather be a peripatetic preacher making money in different places. I don't intend to beg in vain, I want none of the counterfeit of the apostles who live in holiness. No, I want wine and a cheerful woman in every town."

The Pardoner then says that since all the pilgrims want to listen to a tale from him and he has already had his ale he would tell them a story that he hoped they would like because even though he is a vicious, wicked man he would still tell them a moral tale which he is accustomed to tell to make money. He then tells them to relax and he begins his tale thus.

#### **10.4 LET US SUM UP**

The critical comments in this lesson enhance our reading of the Canterbury Tales.

#### **10.5 SUGGESTED READINGS**

*Chaucer : The Canterbury Tales* by Andrew Bennett.

*The Canterbury Tales : Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* edited by JohnM. Bowers.

*The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer* edited by Piero Boitaniand Jill Mann.

*Chaucer's Knight : The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* by Terry Jones and Alan Ereira.

*Chaucer's Pardoner and gender Theory : Bodies of Discourse* by Kathleen E. Lacey.

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**AGE OF SPENCER****Unit Structure****11.1 Objectives****11.2 Introduction****11.3 The Age Of Spenser****11.4 Comparative Analysis with The Contemporaries****11.5 Analysis of The Text****11.5.1 Historical Aspect****11.6 Analytical Aspect****11.7 Annotations of Sonnets****11.8 Examination Oriented Questions****11.9 Multiple Choice Questions****11.10 Suggested Readings****11.1 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson is :

- That the learner should read, with care this representative work of one of the major poets of the Sixteenth Century in England i.e. Edmund Spenser.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English

poetry in the Renaissance Age, especially with reference to Edmund Spenser's sonnets.

- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of poetry in the Elizabethan Age.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of poetry in sixteenth century England and of the poet cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of poetry from Sixteenth Century England in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to English poetry of the Renaissance Age, and to understand and apply appropriate literary convention.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the poem to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.

## **11.2 INTRODUCTION**

This lesson based on Spenser's sonnets, has been written with an aim to provide to the learner, the knowledge of certain aspects of the writings of the poet who was a leading exponent of his time. The scholars of English Literature rejoice in knowing about the author and his Age because there is a lot of intellectual, religious, political and social significance attached to the author and his Age. An attempt has been made to analyze Edmund Spenser as a writer and a comparison with his contemporaries has been incorporated to ascertain the actual position of the writer during his own time.

The text dealt with here, is the famous sonnet sequence Amoretti. The historical and analytical aspect of this work has been attempted to draw the attention of the

reader to certain facts, hitherto unknown and unrecognized. Critical notes have been provided for the sake of reference to enable the scholars to comprehend the background to this work, its historical significance and its current impact on the readers. Questions have been framed for the students to review their comprehension of the subject matter and a consolidated relevant bibliography along with the reference books has been provided.

### **11.3 THE AGE OF SPENSER**

It was in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign that England found herself as a nation, and became conscious of her destiny as a world empire. A very important aspect was the patriotic enthusiasm of the age. Nearly two centuries of trouble and danger had passed since Chaucer died, and no national poet had appeared in England. The Renaissance came, and then the Reformation, but they brought no great writers with them. During the first thirty years of Elizabeth's reign not a single important literary work was produced; then suddenly appeared the poetry of Spenser and Chapman, the prose of Hooker, Sidney and Bacon, the dramas of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and a scores of others, all voicing the national feeling after the defeat of the Armada, and growing silent as soon as the enthusiasm began to wane.

The Elizabethan age showed distinct literary characteristics. Next to the patriotic spirit of Elizabethan literature, its most remarkable qualities are its youthful freshness and vigor, its romantic spirit, its absorption in the theme of love, its extravagance of speech, its lively sense of the wonder of heaven and earth. The ideal beauty of Spenser's poetry, the bombast of Marlowe, the boundless zest of Shakespeare's historical plays, the romantic love celebrated in unnumbered lyrics, all these speak of youth, of springtime, of the joy and the heroic adventure of human living, which added a lot of flavor to life, thereby enriching the literary creations of the age.

This romantic zeal of Elizabethan poetry and prose may be explained by the facts that, besides the national impulse three other inspiring influences were at work. The first and foremost was the rediscovery of the classics of Greece and Rome, beautiful old poems, which were as new to the Elizabethans

as to Keats when he wrote his immortal sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"-'Much Have I Travell'd in the Realms of gold'. The second awakening factor was the widespread interest in nature and the physical sciences, which spurred many other Elizabethans besides Bacon to "take all knowledge for his province." This new interest was generally romantic rather than scientific, was more concerned with marvels, like the philosopher's stone that would transmute all things to gold, than the simple facts of nature. Bacon's chemical changes, which follow the "instincts" of metals, are almost at par with those other changes described by Shakespeare in his dramas. The third factor which stimulated the Elizabethan imagination was the discovery of the world beyond the Atlantic, a world of wealth, of beauty, of unmeasured opportunity for brave spirits, in regions long supposed to be possessed of demons, monsters, Othello's impossible cannibals that each other eat, The anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders.

Another significant addition to the scene was when Drake returned from his voyage around the world. He brought to England two things: a tale of vast regions just over the world's rim that awaited English explorers and a ship loaded to the hatches with gold and jewels. The queen and her favourites shared the treasure with Drake's buccaneers, and the New World seemed to them a place of barbaric splendor, where the savage's rattled hut was roofed with silver, his garments beaded with all precious jewels. Before the American settlements opened England's eyes to the stern reality of things, it was the romance of the New World that appealed most powerfully to the imagination, and influenced Elizabethan literature to an extent which we have not yet begun to measure.

There was a prominent role of foreign influence on all the developments of this age. It is possible to comprehend the imitative quality of early Elizabethan poetry if we go through it in the light of these facts: that in the sixteenth century, England was far behind other European nations in culture; that the Renaissance had influenced Italy and Holland for a century before it crossed the Channel; that, at a time when every Dutch peasant read his Bible, the masses of English people remained in dense ignorance, and the majority of the official classes could neither read nor write. So, when the new national spirit began to

express itself in literature, Englishmen turned to the more cultured nations and began to imitate them in poetry, as in dress and manners.

#### **11.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE CONTEMPORARIES**

A lot has been focused on the contemporary writers of Edmund Spenser in the passages above, dealing with the life history and Age of Spenser. According to the common literary notion, the life and works of Spenser are usually seen with reference to his great predecessor Chaucer. He was a contemporary of one of the greatest writers in English i.e. William Shakespeare. If we compare them, we find many similarities as well as dissimilarities. The birth-year of each poet is determined by inference. The circumstances in which each died are a matter of controversy.

It is quite interesting to compare Spenser with his predecessor Chaucer, What sure information we have of the intervening events of the life of each one is scanty and interrupted. So far as our knowledge goes, it shows some slight positive resemblance between their lives. They were both connected with the highest society of their times; both enjoyed court favour, and enjoyed it in the substantial shape of pensions. They were both men of remarkable learning. They were both natives of London. They both died in the close vicinity of Westminster Abbey, and lie buried near each other in that splendid cemetery. Their geniuses were eminently different: that of Chaucer was the active type, Spenser's of the contemplative; Chaucer was dramatic, Spenser philosophical: Chaucer objective, Spenser subjective; but in the external circumstances, so far as we know them, amidst which these great poets moved, and in the mist which for the most part enfolds those circumstances, there is considerable likeness. Spenser is frequently alluded to by his contemporaries; they most ardently recognized in him, as we shall see, a great poet, and one that might justly be associated with the one supreme poet whom this country had then produced, with Chaucer, and they paid him constant tributes of respect and admiration.

Although born to parents of modest income, Edmund Spenser was still able to receive an impressive education at the Merchant Taylors' School, and Pembroke College at Cambridge. He learned enough Latin to read and understand poets such as Ariosto and Virgil, both of whom his works are frequently compared to. Latin literature

reached its peak with the publication of the *Aeneid* shortly after Virgil's death. His epic heavily influenced succeeding poets throughout Western literature. Ever since people have compared *The Shepheardes Calender*, one of Spenser's early works, to Virgil's *Eclogues*, "Critics have judged Spenser's poetry by its fidelity to Virgilian models" according to Watkins. Spenser, who was referred to as the "English Virgil" by his contemporaries, was certainly influenced by Virgil's success says Kennedy. The idea of modeling one's career after Virgil's is known as the *rota Virgilli* or *cursus Virgilli*, meaning "the Virgilian wheel or course"

It was also assumed by his friends and contemporaries that he wrote the famous poem *The Faerie Queene* in hopes that Queen Elizabeth would be impressed by his work and bring him back to England from Ireland, reversing his exile. From what is known today, he has been known to despise the natives who live there; The Irish were highly discriminated against since they were considered the scum of England by a very large part of the population. *The Faerie Queene* has moral value, conveys important meanings, and pleases the reader. However, his storylines, characters, and ideas severely lack both creativity and originality. Some scholars believe Spenser did not have sufficient education to compose a work with as much complexity as *The Faerie Queene*, while others are still "extolling him as one of the most learned men of his time". Scholar Douglas Bush agrees "Scholars now speak less certainly than they once did of his familiarity with ancient literature". In contrast, Meritt Hughes "finds no evidence that Spenser derived any element of his poetry from any Greek romance."

Spenser was known to his contemporaries as 'the prince of poets', as great in English as Virgil in Latin. He left behind him masterful essays in every genre of poetry, from pastoral and elegy to epithalamion and epic. Although his prose treatise on the reformation of Ireland was not published until 1633, it showed even then a shrewd comprehension of the problems facing English government in Ireland, and a capacity for political office as thorough as his literary ability. Milton was later to claim Spenser as 'a better teacher than Aquinas', and generations of readers, students, and scholars have admired him for his subtle use of language, his unbounded imagination, his immense classical and religious learning, his keen understanding of moral and political philosophy, and his unerring ability to synthesize and, ultimately, to delight. He was criticized by the likes of Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson and Daniel but

at the same time poets like Charles Lamb called him, "the poet's poet" and Milton called him, "our sage and serious poet".

## **11.5 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT**

The text here deals with the sonnets of Edmund Spenser which have been selected from his famous sonnet sequence *Amoretti*. This work is famous for its autobiographical note as well as its technical perfection which brought appreciation to the author in his own time and is rated by scholars of the present day as a work of great eminence. In order to understand it to its depth, the scholars ought to dig deep into the historical and analytical aspects of *Amoretti*.

### **11.5.1 Historical aspect**

The literary period of great writers like Spenser and Shakespeare, or the English Renaissance period is roughly termed between 1485-1660. In 1557, the year before Elizabeth became Queen of England, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, were both inspired by the Italian humanist and poet Francis Petrarch, and were thus responsible for introducing Petrarch into England. The Petrarchan vogue illustrates how conscious the poets of Renaissance England were of their predecessors. Renaissance poets wrote with one eye on their subject and the other on what previous poets had said about the subject. They aimed at making new poems that used the themes and forms of older poems. Therefore, in other words, they were not known to be too creative in the themes. A kind of writing known as pastoral enabled poets and storytellers to portray leisured and educated people as though they were shepherds or other country dwellers. English poets also drew on their personal experiences, but they depended on traditional ways of expressing those experiences. During the Renaissance, all the poems were always in meter and rhyme.

Edmund Spenser is known as "the poet's poet" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because so many young writers learned the art and craft of poetry by studying him. He graduated from Merchant Taylor's school and then went to Cambridge University where he received the B.A. and M. A. degrees. His first book was *The Shepherd's Calendar* in 1579. In 1580, Spenser and his new wife went to Ireland. The locals did not like him because he was given an Irish castle and huge estate.

Spenser eventually met Walter Raleigh and the two met to discuss their current projects. Impressed by Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, Raleigh persuaded Spenser to join him on a trip to London in 1589, and while there, Books I-III of *The faerie Queen* were published. In 1591, he returned to Ireland. After his first wife died, Spenser courted and married Elizabeth Boyle, an Anglo-Irish lady. His sonnet sequence *Amoretti* and his marriage hymn *Epithalamion* have often been read autobiographically as records of his devotion to Elizabeth. During a raid in Ireland, Spenser's castle was burned and his infant son killed. Spenser then travelled to London and died in 1599. Along with Chaucer and Milton, Spenser has long been regarded as England's greatest nondramatic poet.

The *Amoretti* is a sonnet cycle or sequence composed of 89 sonnets. By Spenser's time, the collection of sonnets loosely organized around a poet's love for a lady was becoming a commonplace achievement. Sidney's example, *Astrophel and Stella*, was published in 1591, five years after the poet's death, and even before that time it had been circulating unofficially among the poet's friends and relatives in manuscript form. Other sonnet cycle poets were Samuel Daniel (*Delia*, 1592), Michael Drayton (*Idea*, 1594 and 1619), Fulke Greville (*Caelica*, 1633), and William Shakespeare (*Sonnets*, 1609).

The *Epithalamion* is a wedding song derived from Latin originals which, in the earliest days of the empire, actually were sung by choirs of young men and women who accompanied the bride and groom from her parents' house to her future husband's family's house where they would spend the wedding night. The name, a Greek loan word incorporated into Latin, means "at the bridal chamber", from "thalamus" or bridal chamber.

## **11.6 ANALYTICAL ASPECT**

Spenser wrote in a sonnet which varied interestingly from Sidney's in its rhyme scheme. Sidney, striking away from Wyatt's and Surrey's closer adherence to the Petrarchan octave and sestet, usually produced sonnets in the three-quatrain-and-couplet pattern, though he delighted in deceiving his readers by occasionally delaying the stanza break. The rhyme scheme, which usually plays in harmony with the stanza structure, followed a wide variety of patterns other than the typical English scheme



of abab cdcd efef gg or Wyatt's more traditional, concatenated Petrarchan octave and sestet scheme of abba abba cdc cdc. The "aa" rhyme in the middle of the octave and the "cc" in the middle of the sestet form two internal links in a "chain" of rhyme.

Spenser, looking back over these alternatives, decided that concatenation offered the best rhyme scheme, but also that the quatrain-couplet strategy gave him the most flexibility to tell a complex poetic "story" within each poem. So most of the Amoretti sonnets rhyme in this stanza form: abab bcbc cdcd ee. The chained linkage of his quatrains allowed them either to evolve logically from one another, or to suddenly wheel logically against the previous quatrain while turning on the "axle" of the concatenated rhyme. For an example of the cumulative logical development strategy, see the first sonnet in the sequence, especially its couplet's opposition of "subdew" (with its outrageously spelled pun on the waters that submerged the poets beach combing words) and "renew" (with its implied linkage of the lovers' souls via the wedding sacrament to their resurrection at the last judgment).

The Epithalamion is composed in 24 immensely complex 18-line stanzas whose rhyme schemes vary but use Spenser's typical concatenation strategy to link each stage of the stanza together. A. Kent Hieatt's *Short time's Endless Monument* (1960) demonstrated that each of the 24 stanzas corresponds to an hour of Midsummer's Day, very nearly the day on which Spenser married Elizabeth Boyle on 6/11/1594. Thus, the wedding poem is a compressed version of the larger cyclic view of the love we see in Amoretti. Each stanza but the last ends with some form of the phrase "your/our/theyre Ecco ring" and "Ne....nor your/our/theyre Ecco ring." At the poem's "midnight," in stanza 24, the speaker apologizes for "ornaments" that should have arrived but that this poem substitutes for making "for short time an endless monument". The poet's persona in these poems is very closely linked to Edmund Spenser, himself and the poet's beloved very closely linked to Elizabeth Boyle, who married Spenser in 1594, the year before these poems were published.

## 11.7 ANNOTATIONS OF SONNETS

According to literacy historians, sonnets originated during the Renaissance period of European history. The word sonnet means "a little song", and given the general literacy rate of Europe at the time, they probably were originally sung or

spoken, rather than read. There are three main varieties of sonnets, named after the poets that popularized them; these varieties are Petrarchan, Spenserian and Shakespearean. Regardless of variety, all sonnets share certain characteristics that make them sonnets.

All sonnets have these characteristics in common:

1. Fourteen lines
2. A regular rhyme scheme
3. Metrical composition, usually iambic pentameter.

It is clear that a sonnet is a poem of 14 lines, usually in iambic pentameter, and with a structural balance between the first 8 lines called the octave and the last 6 called the sestet. The arrangement of the fourteen lines, and the rhyme scheme, depends on the particular variety of sonnet. Introduced in 13th -Century Italy, the sonnet was established by Petrarch as a major form of love poetry, and was adapted in French and English vernacular literature in the late 16th-century. Sydney, Spenser, and Shakespeare wrote outstanding sonnets, a tradition that was continued by Donne, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth, Baudelaire, and Mallarme. The sonnet has remained one of the most popular and adaptable of all poetic forms. Among recent distinguished poets who have composed sonnets are Dylan Thomas, Robert Lowell, and Seamus Heaney. The conventions associated with the sonnet have changed during its history. The English poets usually use iambic pentameter when writing sonnets.

### **The Italian sonnet or Petrarchan sonnet**

The Italian sonnet or Petrarchan, named after Petrarch, the Italian poet, was probably invented by Giacomo da Lentini, head of the Sicilian School under Frederick II. He wrote almost 300 sonnets between 1250-1300, but the most famous early sonneteer was Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374). The Italian sonnet was divided into an octave, which stated a proposition or a problem, followed by a sestet, which provided a resolution, or a solution to the problem posed in the octave with a clear break between the two sections. Even in sonnets that don't strictly follow the problem/resolution structure, the ninth line still often marks a "turn" by signaling a change in

the tone, mood, or stance of the poem. In the sonnets of Giacomo da Lentini, the octave rhymed a-b-a-b, a-b-a-b; later, the a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a pattern became the standard for Italian Sonnets.

The first known sonnets in English, written by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, used this Italian scheme, as did sonnets by later English poets including John Milton, Thomas Gray, William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In addition to the rhyme scheme, English poets usually use iambic pentameter to structure their sonnets as Milton has done here. This is a rough equivalent to the hendecasyllable or Alexandrines usually used for Petrarchan sonnets in romance languages such as Italian, French and Spanish.

### **Spenserian sonnet**

Soon after the introduction of the Italian sonnet, English poets began to develop a fully native form of the sonnet. A variant of the English form is the Spenserian sonnet, named after Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) in which the rhyme scheme is a-b-a-b, b-c-b-c, c-d-c-d, e-e. Williams describes the Spenserian sonnet, a sonnet variation developed in the sixteenth century by English poet Edmund Spenser. While few poets have used this form, it serves as a bridge between the Italian sonnet and the form used by Shakespeare. In Spenserian sonnet, there does not appear to be a requirement that the initial octave sets up a problem which the closing sestet answers, as it happens in the Petrarchan form. . . . Instead, the form is treated as three quatrains that are linked by the connected rhyme scheme described above, followed by a couplet. Again, iambic pentameter is used.

### **Shakespearean sonnet**

The English sonnet is a form, which Williams says was "developed by Shakespeare himself to accommodate the Italian sonnet to relatively rhyme-poor English, avoiding the requirement for triple rhymes in the sestet." Williams goes on to say that "the rhetorical pattern of the poem changes slightly as the situation or problem presented in the octave is now dealt with tentatively in the next four lines and summarily in the terminal couplet. Some English sonnets develop through a series of three examples in three quatrains with a conclusion in the couplet." So the

content of an English sonnet is not coupled as closely to the form as it is in the Italian sonnet.

The rhyme scheme of the English sonnet is abab cdcd efef gg. As noted, Shakespeare has eliminated close linking, by the use of rhymes, of the individual quatrains, presumably to allow more flexibility in English, which does not provide as many rhyming possibilities as Italian. One of the interesting elements of Shakespeare's sonnets is the "enjambment" of "phrases" with "sonnet lines." In an "enjambment" line, the textual phrases extend beyond the end of the sonnet lines, and a textual phrase begins or ends in the middle of a line of iambic pentameter.

### **The modern sonnet**

As mentioned earlier, many English poets have used the sonnet form to a great effect. The sonnet so became popular in French poetry, with even such avant-garde figures as Arthur Rimbaud and Stephane Mallarme writing sonnets. With the advent of free verse, the sonnet came to be seen as somewhat old-fashioned and fell out of use for a time among some schools of poets. The 21st century has seen a strong resurgence of the sonnet form, as there are many sonnets now appearing in print and on the Internet. Richard Vallance publishes the Canadian quarterly journal *Sonnetto Poesia* which is dedicated to the sonnet, villanelle, and quatrain forms, as well as the monthly Vallance Review on historical and contemporary sonneteers. Burch publishes *The Hyper Texts* and there are sonnets from well-known poets on his site. William Baer has also recently published *150 Contemporary Sonnets*. Vikram Seth's 1986 novel *The Golden Gate* is written in 690 12-line stanzas, similar to sonnets, but in reality as adaptation of the stanza invented by the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin for his poem *Eugene Onegin*. Hence we see, the sonnet has undergone a long journey, with many zigzag phases as well as writers who acknowledged the significance of this poetic form, yet it continues to exist even today and we can hope a better future for it.

### **Spenser's Amoretti**

Spenser bestowed on his sequence of eighty-nine sonnets the Italian name of Amoretti. His heroine, his "sweet warrior" as he calls her in sonnet

57, is the child of Petrarch's *dolce guerriera*. His imagery is, at times, assimilated with little change from the sonnets of his contemporary Tasso, while Ronsard and Desportes give him numerous suggestions, although he rarely stoops to mere verbal translation of foreign verse. Spenser's *Amoretti* were addressed to Lady Elizabeth Boyle, whom he wooed and who finally became his wife. A strand of autobiography was woven into the borrowed threads. Yet it is very occasionally that he escaped altogether from the fetters of current convention, and gave free play in his sonnets to his poetic genius.

In this sonnet sequence, Spenser's sentiment professedly ranges itself with continental and classical idealism. In two sonnets he identifies his heroine with the Petrarchan or Neo-Platonic character of beauty, which had lately played a prominent part in numberless French sonnets by Du Bellay, Desportes, Pontus de Tyard, Claude de Pontoux and others. Many Elizabethan sonneteers marched under the same banner. Drayton, in conferring on his sonnets the title *Idea*, claimed to rank with the Italian and French Platonists. But Spenser sounds the idealistic note far more clearly than any contemporary. A very good example to this effect is sonnet 45. Like the French writers, Spenser ultimately disclaims any mortal object of adoration in ecstatic recognition of the superior fascination of the character as in sonnet 87:

Through contemplation of my purest part,  
With light there of I do myself sustain,  
And thereon feed my love affamish'd heart.

Analysis of Sonnet 15

Ye tradeful merchants, that with weary toil

Rhyme: a b a b; b c b c; c d c d; e e

It's an Elizabethan sonnet. It's a dramatic sonnet because it's dialogue with a merchant. The rhyme scheme is linked (concatenate) quatrains are self-contained.

It's a typical Petrarchan sonnet. It's similar to "My mistress eyes", but Shakespeare is more original and personal.

Ye: you

Tradeful: busy

Weary toil: great effort

Do seek: look for the....

Make your gain: gave money

Indian: America

What needeth: why do you need?

For: because

ween: pura

locks: strands

### **Contents:**

In the first quatrain the speaker feels that the merchants are wasting their time, looking for treasures so far away.

In the second quatrain there is an explanation to the above question. The poet feels so because his love has all these treasures.

In the third quatrain he describes the beauty of his beloved.

In the couplet comes the "turning point". He insists that his beloved is the fairest and she has not only a beautiful exterior but also a beautiful mind.

### **Devices:**

Line 2: "most make"= alliteration

Line 6: "far found" = alliteration

Line 13: "fairest ...few" = alliteration

3rd quatrain: anaphora of "if"

Series of metaphors like rubies, gold ivory, silver etc.

## Explanation of Sonnet 75

Line 3: Second hand= handwriting

Line 5: assay=try

Line 8: eek=also

Line 9: quoth=said

Spenser's poem is different from earlier poetry in the sense that it is personal in note. This becomes a striking feature. The poet places himself in the centre of the poem, telling us about his personal situation, emotions and convictions. Such poetry, which expresses the poet's emotions, is called lyric. Lyric poetry became very popular in Spenser's time, the Renaissance, because people began to be interested in the individual. As a literary fashion, in the Middle Ages man was seen as a part of a community but in the sixteenth century he came to be seen as an individual, unlike every other man. This individualism is reflected in Elizabethan poetry, of which Edmund Spenser is one of the greatest representatives.

In this sonnet, addressed to his wife, Spenser claims to give her immortality in his verse. He does so by starting from a very ordinary, very charming incident that may occur any day in summer by the seaside. The situation is therefore a general one, but Spenser handles it in such a way as to make it intimately personal. Spenser was well-skilled in making optimum use of his imagination, which creates a picture of tender young love through the conversation between his lady and himself, absorbed in each other, against the background of the eternal sea. He would like to preserve this experience for ever, but the waves wipe out her name just as cruel time destroys every man-made thing. He is reluctant to accept this situation. He feels confident that he will be able to immortalize his love by a different kind of writing, his poetry, no matter how short life on earth may be. At the same time the writing of the lady's name, which is the central image of the poem, is transferred from earth to heaven. Love, poetry and religious belief are closely associated, which make his sonnets richer to read.

If we make an analysis on the technical front, Spenser's poetry is at a very high level. He uses simple words so skillfully that they create a complete, harmonious picture. After the action of the first quatrain he switches to the dialogue in the second and third, to conclude with the couplet which summarizes the theme of the sonnet. Spenser's perfect handling of vowels and the wavelike rhythm of his poem can only be appreciated when the sonnet is read aloud so as to bring out its melody. His frequent use of alliteration binds the poem together. Hence he keeps up his level of perfection for which he is famous.

### **11.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Mention in detail, the analytical aspect of "Amoretti" and "Epithalamion".
2. Write a note on the subject matter of Amoretti in general. How many sonnets does it contain? Who is the inspiration behind this remarkable composition?
3. Compare Spenser as a writer with his predecessor Geoffrey Chaucer.
4. Write a brief note on the historical background of Spenser's sonnet sequence, "Amoretti".
5. Write a brief note on the achievements of Spenser.
6. What is a sonnet? Write a detailed essay on the origin of this poetic form and how it became a favourite genre of the English poets like Spenser and Shakespeare?
7. What are the literary characteristics of the Age of Spenser?
8. Give a comprehensive analysis of sonnet 15 of Amoretti.
9. Critically evaluate sonnet 30 of the sonnet sequence Amoretti.
10. How does Spenser show in sonnet 30 that love defies all sense and logic?
11. Throw light on the content of sonnet 75 of Amoretti.
12. What are the other famous works of Edmund Spenser? Mention a few in brief.



13. How would you characterize Spenser's style? It is music of modulation and lulling harmonies, or is it thin and function?
14. What is the overall effect of Spenser's poetry on the reader?

### **11.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 In Spenser's "Amoretti," what does the speaker's beloved represent metaphorically?
- A) A fleeting moment
  - B) A celestial being
  - C) A treacherous journey
  - D) An unattainable ideal
- Q.2 In Sonnet 65, what does the speaker assert about the enduring power of poetry?
- A) It can delay the passage of time.
  - B) It can make life eternal.
  - C) It can preserve memories forever.
  - D) It can challenge the laws of nature.
- Q.3 In Sonnet 86, what is the central theme of the poem?
- A) The impermanence of love
  - B) The power of beauty
  - C) The inevitability of aging
  - D) The struggle of unrequited love
- Q.4 Which of Spenser's works celebrates a wedding and portrays the journey of a bride from her chamber to the wedding feast?
- A) "Amoretti"
  - B) Sonnet 65

- C) Sonnet 86
  - D) “Epithalamion”
- Q.5 What is the tone of Spenser’s “Epithalamion”?
- A) Melancholic
  - B) Joyful and celebratory
  - C) Angry and resentful
  - D) Reflective and contemplative
- Q.6 In “Amoretti,” how does the speaker describe the process of falling in love?
- A) A calm and serene journey
  - B) A tempestuous and chaotic experience
  - C) A gradual and steady transition
  - D) A fleeting and ephemeral moment
- Q.7 What natural imagery does Spenser use in Sonnet 65 to convey the theme of the power of poetry?
- A) Stars and celestial bodies
  - B) Ocean waves and tides
  - C) Blooming flowers
  - D) Endless deserts
- Q.8 In Sonnet 86, what is the speaker’s response to the ravages of time on physical appearance?
- A) Resignation and acceptance
  - B) Anger and defiance
  - C) Despair and hopelessness
  - D) Determination to resist aging

- Q.9 In “Epithalamion,” what natural event does the speaker compare the bride’s beauty to?
- A) Sunrise
  - B) Thunderstorm
  - C) Eclipse
  - D) Earthquake
- Q.10 What does Spenser’s “Amoretti” primarily revolve around?
- A) A knight’s heroic deeds
  - B) A romantic journey
  - C) The theme of unrequited love
  - D) A political allegory

Answer : 1B, 2C, 3C, 4D, 5B, 6B, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10B

#### 11.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Skeltonic Anxiety and Rumination in *The Shepheardes Calender*-Kreg Segall
2. Glenn A. Steinberg. *Chaucer's mutability in Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*.
3. Louise Gilbert Freeman. *Vision. Metamorphosis and the Poetics of Allegory in the Mutabilitie Cantos*.
4. Adam Potkay. *Spenser, Donne, and the Theology of Joy*.
5. Adam McKeon. *Looking at Britomart Looking at Pictures*.
6. Jin-Ah Lee. *Reading Gender into the Virtue of Courtesy in Book 6 of The Faerie Queene*.
7. Sara: Litwiller. *The Prince of Rays: Spectacular Invisibility in Spenser's The Faerie Queene*.

**EPITHALAMION****Unit Structure****12.1 Objective****12.2 Introduction****12.3 Epithalamion - Glossary (Stanza -wise)****12.4 Multiple Choice Questions****12.5 Examination Oriented Questions****12.6 Let Us Sum Up****12.7 Suggested Reading****12.1 OBJECTIVE**

This lesson acquaints the learner with Edmund Spencer's ode "Epithalamion".

**12.2 INTRODUCTION**

'**Epithalamion**' Epithalamion, or in the Latin form "epithalamium", is a poem written to celebrate a marriage. Among its classical practitioners were the Greeks Sappho and Theocritus and the Romans Ovid and Catullus. The term in Greek means "at the bridal chamber," since the verses were originally written to be sung outside the bedroom of a newly married couple. The form flourished among the Neo-Latin poets of the Renaissance, who established the model that was followed by writers in the European vernacular languages, Sir Philip Sidney wrote the first English instance in about 1580, and fifteen years later Edmund

Spenser wrote his great lyric "Epithalamion," a celebration of his own marriage that he composed as a wedding gift to his bride. Spenser's poem follows, in elaborately contrived numbers of stanzas and lines, the sequence of the hours during his wedding day and night and combines, with unfailing ease and dignity, Christian ritual and beliefs, pagan topics and mythology, and the local Irish setting, John Donne, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and many other Renaissance poets composed wedding poems that were solemn or ribald, according to the intended audience and the poet's own temperament".(A glossary of literary terms-M.H. Abrams)

### **Critical Comments:**

**The 'Amoretti' and the 'Epithalamion'** - Soon after his return to Ireland in 1591, Spenser began his suit to Elizabeth Boyle, to whom are addressed the Amoretti sonnets and the superb Epithalamion which concludes them; these poems have a place to themselves among the works of Spenser. Only in them does he voice his feelings without recourse to allegory. Spenser's sonnets are unique by their purity. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse, its varying fortunes, the lover's sighs until the day on which he is accepted, and his final joy. In default of ardent passion, the Amoretti have the charm of a harmonious and pure atmosphere; they are bathed by a white light. They show better than anything else the quality in Spenser which Coleridge excellently named 'maidenliness', his love of the virginal in woman.

Charming though they be, the Amoretti are equaled, if not surpassed, by others of the illustrious sonnet series of the Renaissance, But the Epithalamion which is their conclusion has no equal. In amplitude and splendor it excels all other compositions of the same kind. Even antiquity produced no such poem, none which was unswelled by legends and yet carried so much sail. Its twenty-three stanzas, of from seventeen to nineteen lines, merely describe enthusiastically the whole of the poet's wedding-day, from the dawn of the sun which lits its glorious hours to the night which left the bride in her husband's arms. Each stanza frames a rite of the festival, and beneath the rich, ennobling mythological decoration simple, homely circumstances are revealed of this wedding celebrated

in a small Irish town on the 11th of June 1594. This song of joy finds matter in abundant and melodious realism. The poet's genius does not need the rare and the subtle in order to reach beauty, for he knows that beauty has an inexhaustible spring in the common incidents which seem vulgar to other eyes. Never did his genius show its sovereign power as in the *Epithalamion*. The breath which fills each ample strophe and passes unabated through them all to the end, the clear light which floods each successive picture, and the fine classical structure of the whole poem, simple, luminous, and inevitable, make this ode Spenser's most perfect production and the lyrical triumph of the English Renaissance. All his gifts are united in it and seem to be raised by happiness to a higher power.

The "*Epithalamion*" is an altogether more remarkable piece of work, and one of Spenser's highest achievements. This celebration of his own wedding (which took place in Ireland, probably in 1594) roused all Spenser's genius for enriching and transfiguring bare fact by poetic imagination and by the appropriate use of imagery and of rhythms. Convention and personal feeling here find their perfect meeting, and it is testimony to the way in which the whole tradition of European poetry had become part of Spenser's very personality that he should exploit that tradition most fully, most happily, and most originally when he came to express one of the supreme moments of his own life. The elaborate verse paragraph derives from the Italian canzone, but the handling of the melody, the use of refrain, the adaptation of a lyrical poem to a narrative structure, the blending of descriptive details with the celebratory mood, the mingling of elements from Catullus, from Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, from Irish setting, English folklore, and from classical tradition, shows original poetic genius in control of its richly diversified materials to a degree that English poetry had not yet seen. The architectonic quality both of the individual stanza and of the poem as a whole is remarkable and the chiming refrain subtly varied yet sufficiently the same to bind the poem together with its incantatory repetition is something to marvel at. Here is the New Poetry reaching to height of complex lyrical expression that were not before possible in English.

The narrative basis is simply the story of the wedding day: first the poet's announcement of his subject, then an account of the preparation for the wedding

and the bidding of the guests, then a summons to the nymphs of the local woods, streams and mountains to bring garlands for the bride and sing her praise, then dawn and the awakening of the bride. With the bride's appearance the verse takes on a new richness and a new excitement: her progress is described in language that echoes the Psalms.

The bride's beauty, both physical and spiritual, is now praised and by this time the wedding procession has reached the church, and the bride enters to the sound of the organ:

Open the temple gates unto my love,

Open them wide that she may enter in.....

There follow the ceremony, the homecoming, the poet longing for the end of days-

Ah! When will this long weary day have end,

And lend my leave to come unto my love?

How slowly do the hours their numbers spend!

How slowly does sad time his feathers move!

Haste thee, O fairest planet, to thy home,

Within the Western foam...

The bride's attendants are dismissed, night descends, and the poet invokes peace and blessing on his bride. The moon rises and looks in at the window, and she too is invoked to bless the marriage; Juno and Genius are asked to grant the blessing of fruitfulness, and the poem ends on a note of calm yet eloquent benediction, with a seven-line coda in which the poet commends his song to his love.

This is poetic celebration carried as far as it can go: it is Spenser at the very height of its genius. Only quotation of the whole poem could demonstrate to those who are not familiar with it its extraordinary artistry, for each part gains immensely by contributing to the total movement. Not quite so rich, but equally

brilliant in imagery and movement, is the "Prothalamion." A wedding poem written for the double wedding of Lady Elizabeth and Lady Catherine Somerset daughters of the Earl of Worcester, to Henry Guilford and William Petre in 1596. Here again we have the massive and musical stanza with its concluding refrain ("Sweet Thames run softly. till I end my song"), the adroitly varied line lengths, the movement from a hushed picture of early morning by the Thames to the ceremonious entry of the two swan who symbolize than the "Epithalamion"; it has a tapestry quality, an almost heraldic tone; yet the personal note is effectively blended with this, and the poet himself is the vividly presented observer of the ceremonious scene. The benediction pronounced on the swans by one of the nymphs has a grave stateliness unsurpassed in English poetry:

Epithalamion is an ode written by Edmund Spenser as a wedding gift to his bride Elizabeth Boyle on their wedding day. Spenser had also celebrated his love for Boyle in his sonnets *l'amour* in the *Amoretti*. The poem describes the couples' wedding day from the grooms impatient hours before dawn to the late hours of night.

1. The ode begins with an invocation to the Muses, as in most classical works, to aid the groom not in his poetic endeavour but to awaken the bride.

The supplication is that the poet calls upon the learned Muses who have often helped him in his work and who have embellished the works of other poets worthy of their blessing to come to his aid. Even the greatest of poets had turned to the Muses and taken pride in the praises showered on them. The Muses could also inspire the woods and water to sing the sad, mournful songs of death or unrequited love or lament their sad misfortunes. The poet then asks the Muses to leave their lamentations and with their garlanded head help him sing the praises of his beloved, unenvied. Just as Orpheus sang for his bride Eurydice he would sing these praises unto himself and the forests shall reverberate with his praises.

2. He tells the Muses to go to the bower of his beloved and wake his



innocent bride-to-be before the sun would rise to disperse the gloom of the night. The god of marriage Hymen is already awake to bless them. Many young unmarried men want Hymen to bless them. He tells the Muses that the most awaited day has come when all the pains and sorrows of his beloved would come to an end. And he supplicates the Muses to sing songs of joy and peace to his beloved and let the woods reverberate with those joyful songs.

3. He then tells the Muses to bring along with them the nymphs-divine maidens- who inhabited the rivers and the forest and they, bedecked with garlands, should bring his beloved a garland of lilies and roses bound by a blue silk ribbon of everlasting true love and also make posies for the bridal and decorate her bridal chamber with flowers. They should also strew her path with fragrant flowers so that her delicate feet don't get hurt and then awaken his beloved with his song of love which the woods would echo.
- 4 . Addressing the various nymphs of the other natural locales, the poet asks that they tend to their specific tasks to make the wedding day perfect. The nymphs of the pond and lakes near Mulla, a small hill in Ireland, should ensure that the water is unsullied and undisturbed by fish like the silver trout's or pikes, so that they could see their own clear reflection in the water and prepare themselves to be seen by the bride. The nymphs of the mountains and woods should with their steel darts keep the greedy ravenous wolves away from the deer and decorate the bride and sing the festal songs which the woods would echo. Spencer here wants all the nymphs and spirits of the forest to keep away any misfortunes from befalling him and his bride.
5. The poet now addresses his bride directly asking her to awaken as Aurora, the Goddess of Dawn has already left the bed of Tithonus, her beloved, and is on her way to awaken the world with her clarion call. Phoebus, the Sun-god, has risen with his glorious, majestic head and the blithe birds are singing their songs of love. The lark, the thrush are

singing the morning prayers, the mavis, the ouzel land the blackbird all are chirping away joyously in celebration of this merry day. The poet then admonishes his beloved asking her why she has slept so long when she should have been up early to listen to the love songs of the birds among the morning dew who sing of pleasant cheerful songs and the woods answer those songs.

6. The poet rejoices now that his beloved is awake and her eyes, lately dim because of the darkness of sleep are now shining more resplendently than Hesperus the evening star ( the planet Venus). The groom then urges the young daughters of happiness (delight) to attend to the bride and also summons the hours of day and night, the seasons, and the three handmaidens (attendants) of Venus The three sisters called the Graces. - who adorn her beauty, to adorn his bride as well. And as they adorn her, they should bestow her with graces and charm as they do on the Cyprian Queen (Venus) which the woods will echo in their song.
- 7 . The bride is now ready with her attendant bridesmaid (virgins) and it is time for the groom and his groomsmen to get ready and dress themselves in accordance with the joyful day. The groom then implores the sun to shine brightly but not let his intense rays burn his bride's beautiful skin. He then prays to Phoebus, who is both sun-god and the creator of the nine Muses (goddesses of different arts) that he should give this one day of the year to the groom , if he thinks the groom has always honoured him he should not keep this one boon away from him, while he may keep the rest of the days with himself. He would sing the praises of the sun and the all nature will join in those praises.
8. The wedding party and guests now celebrate the joyous day. The minstrels sing and play their instrument and the damsels play then tombourines and dance. Young boys run up and down the street singing the wedding song in one voice- Hymen! O Hymen! they shout till their voices reach the skies and those hearing them applaud them and join in the song-singing the praises of the god of marriage.

9. The groom beholds his bride approaching slowly like Phoebe (another name for Artemis-goddess of the Moon and twin of Phoebus) rising from the rest dressed in her wedding white. The virgin white bridal dress so becomes her that she looks like an angel. Her golden hair, decked with pearls and flowers, is flowing and looks like a golden mantle over her dress. Crowned with a green wreath she keeps her modest eyes fixed on the ground because so many eyes are on her and blushes to hear her praises being sung by the assembly.
10. The groom then eulogises about the perfect physical beauty of his bride. In an almost rhetorical tone. He asks the assemblage there if they had seen such a beautiful maiden in their cities. He then launches into a list of her beauty, grace and virtues. Her eyes are brilliant like sapphires, she has an ivory white forehead, her cheeks are like ripe red apples matured by the sun, her lips like cherries waiting to be kissed, her breasts are like an uncurdled bowl of cream, her nipples like the bud of lilies, her snow-white neck like a marble tower and her whole body a wondrous palace where honour and chastity occupy a stately place. The bride's overwhelming beauty causes the maidens to forget their songs and stare at her.
11. The groom moves from describing the wonderful beauty of the bride to sing a paean to her internal virtues which he claims to see better than anyone else. He praises her lively spirit embellished with other graces bestowed upon her by heaven itself - such virtues that would astonish people more than Medusa's head did ( People would turn to stone when they looked at her). Her sweet, pure love, her purity, her faith, her honour, her mild modesty-these virtues ruled her as comeliness does a queen and these rule over her baser instincts so her mind is not tempted towards ill of any sort. The groom sang that if the onlookers could see her inner beauty, they would be for more awestruck by her outward appearance.

Spencer in this stanza moves away from the emphases on outward

beauty - manifest in ode and pagan marriage ceremonies - to other classical mode - Platonism. He describes the ideal woman- unsullied by fleshly weakness or stray thoughts. The attendants would be astonished and become petrified by her true beauty.

12. The groom calls for the temple doors to be thrown wide open so his bride may enter and approach the altar with reverence while the attendants and postilions may receive her with due honour. A good Christian, his bride is an epitome of virtue for the observing maidens to emulate so their proudfaces learn humility when they would approach the altar in future .He then urges them to bring her to partake of the wedding ceremony and the choristers would sing the praises of the Lord to the accompaniment of the organ.

Spenser shifts the image from that of a pagan wedding ceremony to a Christian one taking place in a church. Instead of Hymen the bride approaches the Almighty and the minstrels have now become choristers or choir singers in a church.

13. The bride stands before the altar as the priest blesses her with happy hands. Her cheeks blush a fiery red causing the angels surrounding the godly altar forget their duties and fly around here looking wondrously on her fair face. Her downcast eyes are sad and serious with modesty ; she never once casts them in any direction lest any unwanted thought should come in her mind. The groom wonders why making a pledge to marry him should make her eyes sad and her cheeks blush while he urges the angels to sing the paeans to god.
14. The wedding ceremony being over the groom asks the bride to be brought home again and for their victory and joy-to be celebrated. He calls for feasting and drinking since heaven has showered them with an abundance of blessings. There should be no restraint in drinking or merry-making. He urges all to crown God Bacchus, god of wine and revelry with a coronet and Hymen with a wreath and let the Graces dance.

Spencer slips easily away from a Christian wedding to the pagan revelries by invoking Bacchus, Hymen and the Graces.

15. The groom urges the young men to leave behind their labours on this pious day and participate in the joyous celebration. He tells them to exult in their joy because it is the summer solstice, the longest day in the year when the sun is bright & beautiful and then the sun will slowly decline by degrees among the zodiac signs and it will leave behind the zodiac of cancer but suddenly the groom's tone has a note of regret because this makes the day reel faster by ringing in the night and make bonfires to celebrate and dance at his nuptials.
16. The groom reiterates his frustrations when he complains that the day is too long and tiresome since the hours are moving away slowly and melancholy time is flapping his feather slowly instead of flying away quickly. He grows hopeful when the sun moves towards the west with its tired horses and the evening star in the east heralds the coming of night.

This evening star Venus is the offspring of beauty and signifies love and leads all the other stars guiding lovers through gloomy night shining cheerfully from the night skies and participates in the joys of the newlyweds in by twinkling merrily and leads them to their marriage bed.

17. The groom now exhorts the damsels to leave their revels and take the bride to her bridal chamber as night was approaching fast. He wants the brides-maidens to make the bride lie down on her nuptial bed, cover her with fragrant flowers and surround her with curtains and fragrant sheets and he imagines how she lies there in proud humility waiting for her beloved like Maia - the mountain goddess who lay with Zeus in Tempe (A valley in Thessaly) on the grass after bathing in the Acidalian stream (A rivulet near Orchomenos in Boeotia where Venus bathed with the Graces) and conceived Hermes.

The comparison of the bride and groom to Maia and Zeus is symbolic of the desire of the groom for procreation. Besides being eager to make love to his new bride, he also hopes that the consummation of their marriage would result in a child. According to legend and tradition, a child conceived on the summer solstice grows into prosperity and wisdom..

18. The much awaited nuptial night has come and has dispelled the sadness of cruel love and the groom requests night to cover his bride and him in its sable mantle and protect them so no danger or horror or disturbance make them fret. He prays that the night be tranquil without any tempestuous storm just as it was when Jove lay with Almena and she conceived Hercules. (Almena was a daughter of Pleiades and through Zeus, gave birth to Hercules). Or begot Majesty through his union with the Night. He now want the bridesmaid and the young men to stop their singing so the woods also are now silent and he can consummate his marriage.
19. In this stanza the groom prays that no evil spirits or cries of lamentation should upset the newlyweds. No rumours or fears should disturb their sleep with doubts; no bad dreams should wait them; nor fires or lightning harm them or witches, goblins or other evil spirits put them under their spells. Night birds like the owl or storks or raven may not shriek with their inauspicious cries or frogs croak or sing in mournful accents.

This litany of superstitions, fears and dreads and night terrors are part of the Irish folklore which Spenser seems to have alluded to.

20. The groom wants silence to prevail and pious peace to shower its blessing; he implores sleep to come when its time arrives, in the meanwhile he desires hundred little winged loves (cupids) to flutter about the bridal bed showering the couple with love. He wants them to work subtly and pilfer for them bouts of delights throughout the night. He encourages these sons of Venus, the goddess of love to play away

throughout the night for 'greedy pleasure' and make the bridal chamber a paradise i.e. he want to make love to his bride as long as the cupids help him.

21. The groom notices Cynthia - the Moon golden and supplicates her not to envy his love for she too had passionately loved the Latmion shepherd-Endymion who lived on Mount Latmos and their pleasurable union had produced fifty daughters - the phases of the moon. He asks her that she make his brides chaste womb fertile that night with his seed so it could lead to procreation.

Spenser specifically calls a successful conception 'our comfort' because the fruit of the union is more important than the act of union itself.

23. Invoking Juno, wife of Jupiter patron goddess of the laws of marriage the groom implores her to bind their love for eternity with her blessing and asks that his marriage remain pure and their sweet union of the night be made fruitful through procreation. So too, he asks of Hebe, the goddess of youth and Hymen (god of marriage) that their wedding bliss be full of sacred love and alsoof fortunate conception.
23. The groom then utters an all-encompassing prayer to all the gods in the heavens who watch upon the mortals on earth to bear witness to their love and shower their blessings on the couple. He asks them to give him large posterity - many children that he may nurture generations who after asking happiness on earth may ascend to the heavens as a reward of their goodness and when on earth these saintly generations would sing the praises of the gods. He then tells his bride to rest.

The groom ends his song which he feels is a goodly ornament for his bride who he feels deserves many physical adornments as well. Time being too short for him to procure these for his beloved, he gives an everlasting monument to her - an altogether greater adornment for her his pure love in his Epithalamion.

### 12.3 EPITHALAMION - GLOSSARY (STANZA -WISE)

1. Lays - songs
2. Tenor - the highest adult male singing voice.
3. Doleful drerimentt - sad misfortunes
4. Orpheus - a legendary Greek poet, son of Calliope, one of the Muses, said to play on the lyre so that all who heard were spellbound. He went down to Hades and with his music he induced Persephone and Pluto to restore him his wife Euridyce.
5. Lampe - the sun
6. Hymen - In Greek mythology the God of marriage.
7. dight - dress
8. nymphs - a spirit or any of the minor divinities of nature ( in classical mythology) in the shape of a woman who live in the mountains, forests, meadows and water.
9. Blew- blue
10. Eeke- also
11. mead- meadow, grasslands
12. Mulla - a hill in Ireland
13. pike- a fish
14. chrestall - crystals, semi- precious stones
15. mayds- maids, nymphs young women.
16. hoary - very old
17. darts - small arrows
18. chace - keep away



19. Rosy morne - Aurora- Goddess of dawn
20. Tithones - Tithonus- in Greek mythology was a Trojan by birth, the son of king Laomedon of Troy by a water nymph Strymo and was a lover of Aurora.
21. clyme - climb
22. coche - coach or chariot
23. Phoebus - sun god.
24. matins - morning prayer or matins
25. Hesperes - planet Venus as its appears in the skies as the evening star.
26. Jove- Jupiter - Kings of the gods and the god of sky and thunder in Roman mythology.
27. Cyprian Queen - Venus
28. Muses - Greek goddesses of muics, song and dance and the source of inspiration to poets. They were also goddesses of knowledge.
29. soverayne- sovereign- one who rules supreme.
30. minstrels - tourbadours, singers or musical entertainers in the middle Ages.
31. tymbrels - a tombourne
32. smite - strike
33. firmament - sky
34. Phoebe - Moon goddess, sister of Phoebus.
35. perling - small pearls
36. sapphires - sapphire, blue coloured precious stone.
37. uncruldded - not curdled , pure

38. Garnisht - decorated
39. Medusa - in Greek mythology a monster or a Gorgon with a hideous female face- the head covered with living venomous snakes instead of hair. Gazing directly into her eyes would turn the onlookers to stone.
40. Saynt - saint, a good Christian
41. choristers- choir singers in a church.
42. vermill- vermillion, a bright orange colour
43. crimson - crimson a deep purplish- red colour
44. Alleluya - hallelujah, an expression used to express joy, praise or thanks to God.
45. Bacchus - God of wine and revelry in Greek mythology
46. Graces- three sister goddesses known in Greek mythology as Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia who dispense charm and beauty.
47. Barmaby - Sun
48. Crab - the zodiac of Cancer
49. Fayrest planet - Sun
50. western fume- western ocean
51. Arras - a tapestry of Flemish origin, specially for curtains and wall hanging.
52. Maia- daughter of Atlas and Pleione- is one of the seven Pleiades (a mountain nymph) According to Homer , Zeus in the dead of night secretly begot Hermes upon Maia in a cave of Cyliene.
53. Tempe- a valley in Thessaly
54. Acidalianbrook- a stream near Orchomene in Boeotia where Venus

bathed with the Graces.

- 55. Sable mantle- fur covering
- 56. Alemena-The mother of Herclues who she conceived of Zeus.
- 57. Tirynthian- Hercules-famous for his strength and adventures
- 58. Majesty- another name for Maia
- 59. Without- Outside, opposite of within
- 60. Pouke- Puck- a mischievous spirit
- 61. Sprights- spirit -a small creature that has magical powers like a fairy or an elf.
- 62. Goblins- a grotesque spirit that is malicious and causes trouble
- 63. Owl, stork and raven- all birds of ill- omen
- 64. Spels- magic charms
- 65. Sonnes of Venus- cupids
- 66. Cinthia- Artemis or Moon goddess
- 67. Latmion Shepherd- Endymion, a shepherd on Mount Latmos when first seen and loved by the Moon
- 68. Sith- since
- 69. Juno- in Roman mythology wife of Jupiter; Hera in Greek
- 70. Hebe- the goddess of youth in Greek mythology equivalent to Roman Juventus; daughter of Zeus and Hera she was the cup bearer for the gods and goddesses on Mt. Olympus serving them nectar and ambrosia
- 71. Succour- help
- 72. Guerdon - reward

73. Tabernacle - a place of worship; a box in which holy bread and wine are kept in a Catholic church
74. Benedect- a newly married man
75. Monument- monument-a building or a statue that is made in honour of a person.

#### 12.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The work that contains Spenser's love sonnet is :
  - a. Shepherds'Calendar
  - b. Amoretti
  - c. Arcadia
  - d. The Faiere Queen
2. 'Epithalamion' means \_\_\_\_\_
3. The Cyprian Queen is
  - a. Medusa
  - c. Venus
  - b. Moon
  - d. Hera
4. Who is the Godden of dawn
  - a. Hesperus
  - c. Venus
  - b. Phoebus
  - d. Aurora
5. The God of marriage is \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Hymen
  - c. Tithonus
  - b. Phoebus
  - d. Hera

#### 12.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

1. What is the significance of the invocation of the Muses in the classical tradition?

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- 
2. What does the groom ask the nymphs to do?

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- 
3. Describe the festivities that the wedding party enjoys.

- 
- 
4. Describe the physical beauty of the bride as described in stanza ten.

- 
- 
5. How does the groom eulogise the internal virtues of his bride?

- 
- 
6. What is the groom's desire when he compares himself and his bride to Zeus and Maia.

- 
- 
7. Explain the following lines with reference to the content

'dylce as when love with fayreAlemena lay'

When he begot the great Tirynthiongroome'.

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- 
- 
8. Explain the mythological and allegorical references in the poem.
- 
- 
- 

## 12.6 LET US SUM UP

“Epithalamion” by Spenser is a radiant wedding song, celebrating the union of two lovers. Through vivid descriptions of nature’s beauty and the joyous ceremony, the poem captures the blissful harmony of love. As dawn breaks, the poem exudes a sense of triumph, portraying the culmination of love’s journey and the hope for a bright future together. Spenser’s lyrical prowess paints a vivid tapestry of love’s triumph, evoking both the earthly and the divine in a joyous symphony of verse.

## 12.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Edmund Spenser’s Amoretti and Epithalamion : *A Critical Edition* by Kenneth J. Larsen

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 13**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**SPENCER**

**UNIT - III**

***AMORETTI (SONNET 63 AND 86)***

**Unit Structure**

**13.1 Introduction**

**13.2 Objectives**

**13.3 Elizabethan Sonnet Tradition**

**13.4 Amoretti- Introduction**

**13.5 Sonnet 65 - Text**

**13.5.1 Sonnet 65- Summary**

**13.5.2 Sonnet 65- Analysis**

**13.5.3 Sonnet 65- Glossary**

**13.6 Sonnet 86-text**

**13.6.1 Sonnet 86-summary**

**13.6.2 Sonnet 86-analysis**

**13.6.3 Sonnet 86- Glossary**

**13.7 Themes**

**13.8 Symbols and Imagery**

**13.9 An Assessment of Amoretti**

**13.10 Let Us Sum Up**

**13.11 Examination Oriented Questions**

### **13.12 Multiple Choice Questions**

### **13.13 Suggested Readings**

## **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

*Amoretti* is a sonnet sequence consisting of eighty nine sonnets. The sonnet sequence is composed by the great Elizabethan poet Edmund Spencer. The sonnet sequence traces the development in Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle whom he eventually married.

## **13.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to make the learner familiar with Edmund Spencer's sonnet sequence *Amoretti*. Spencer is regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Elizabethan age. The lesson will deal with the two sonnets (Sonnet 63 and Sonnet 86) from Spencer's sonnet sequence *Amoretti*.

## **13.3 ELIZABETHAN SONNET TRADITION**

The sonnet as a literary form originated in Italy during the thirteenth century and Petrarch and Dante were the pioneers. Petrarch is credited with originating the love sonnets whom he addressed to Laura. Dante, similarly addressed his love sonnets to Beatrice. The Italian sonnet made its way to England during the early sixteenth century through the works of Wyatt and Surrey. Wyatt also introduced the Petrarchan model and his example was followed by many of his imitators. He introduced the vogue of writing love sonnets and left behind thirty one sonnets of rare excellence and beauty all written in the imitation of Petrarch. Henry Howard the Earl of Surrey, carried further the vogue of sonnets writing and gave a new turn to the sonnet. Instead of adopting the Petrarchan form accepted by Wyatt, he perfected the new form which Shakespeare later on used with ease and grace. Surrey's sonnets were love sonnets written to Geraldine or lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald. They embodied in their structure the love-lorn crisis of the poet's heart.

After Wyatt and Surrey the sonnet form was taken up by a number of Elizabethan



poets and the sonnet form became the most common form used by the poets. Sir Philip Sidney composed one hundred and eight sonnets and eleven songs all put in *Astrophel and Stella*. These poems are addressed to Penelope Devereux, afterwards Lady Rich, and express the intensity of the poet's heart for a lady who broke off with him to marry Lord Rich. These sonnets which owe much to Petrarch in tone and style, place Sidney as one the greatest Elizabethan sonneteers.

After the publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* there was a rich harvest of sonnets procured by a host of writers of whom Spencer and Shakespeare are the most important. Edmund Spencer is known for his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* which consists of eighty nine sonnets of love and are addressed to Elizabeth Boyle.

Shakespeare's sonnets, one hundred and fifty four in number, were published in 1609. The first series i.e. 1-126 is addressed to a young man and the second series, i.e. 127-154 consists of sonnets to or about a certain 'dark' mistress whom the poet in some sense loves, or has loved, but whom he also despises, and despises himself for loving. Speculations have been made regarding the identity of the young man and the dark lady but no certainty has been achieved.

Another poet who wrote in the same tradition of sonnets was Samuel Daniel. He depended on foreign inspiration in his *Delia*, a collection of love sonnets, addressed to an imaginary mistress without conviction and faith.

Michael Drayton was another Elizabethan sonnet writer of prominence. Drayton reached the highest level of poetic feeling and expression. His well known sonnet sequence was *Idea*. However, Drayton's sonnets do not give the impression of true passion and we do not know if his *Idea* represents one woman or several or none.

So the Elizabeth poets developed a rich tradition of sonnet writing borrowing from the Italian models. The original source of inspiration of all these sonnet sequences was, of course, Petrarch whose love sonnets to Laura had started the fashion in Italy and then in France. The English poets imitated, borrowed, sometimes simply

translated from their Italian or French masters. Because of this, some critics have condemned the whole lot as artificial and only Spencer, Sidney, and Shakespeare had sincere motives and originality.

### 13.4 *AMORETTI*-INTRODUCTION

*Amoretti* is a sonnet sequence consisting of eighty nine sonnets. It is a remarkable example of Spencer's handling of a convention of his time, that is, love sonnets in the Petrarchan mode so dear to the Elizabethans. Spencer began his suit to Elizabeth Boyle, to whom are addressed the *Amoretti* and the superb *Epithalamion* soon after his return to Ireland in 1591. To what extent these sonnets celebrate his love for Elizabeth Boyle, his marriage to whom he celebrated in his *Epithalamion* is an unprofitable question: they tell the story of the poet's wooing of a mistress who at first rebuffed him, then relented and returned his love, and finally, as a result of some unhappy incident, turned against him again. If the *Epithalamion* represents the true end of his story, then we must suppose that the lady changed her mind yet again, and permanently this time.

*Amoretti* traces Edmund Spencer's long courtship and eventual wooing of his beloved Elizabeth Boyle. The sonnet-sequence can be divided into three parts depending upon the changing nature of Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle. In the first two sonnets, the poet addresses his own poetry and hopes to win his lady love with the power of words. These two sonnets form a group of their own and can be excluded from the tripartite division of the sonnet sequence. These two sonnets work as a sort of exposition introducing the reader to the poem. The first group, therefore, comprises of sonnets from three to sixty two. In this group, the poet dwells upon the beauty of his beloved describing both her outer and inner beauty. In this section, however, the poet is emotionally frustrated as his beloved refuses to respond positively/favourably to his efforts.

The next division comprising the sonnets from 63 to 85 abruptly changes the tone of the poem with Elizabeth Boyle responding favourably to Spencer's wooing. Until now, the beloved had been ignoring the poet's efforts at courtship, but now she gives in and accepts the courtship. The poet's long and laborious efforts at wooing

his beloved have been rewarded and she accepts him as her fiancée.

In the third division of the poem, that is, from Sonnet 86 to Sonnet 89, the poet enters into a relationship with his beloved. The tone again changes in this set of sonnets and the poet undergoes a brief separation from his beloved. The poet again becomes miserable but there is an indication that this separation will not last long and ultimately they will be united.

### **13.5 SONNET 65- TEXT**

*The doubt which ye misdeeme, fayre love, is vaine,  
That fondly feare to loose your liberty;  
when loosing one, two liberties ye gayne,  
and make him bond that bondage earst dyd fly.  
Sweet be the bands, the which true love doth tye,  
without constraynt or dread of any ill:  
the gentle birdefeeles no captivity  
within her cage, but singes and feeds her fill.  
There pride dare not approach, nor discord spill  
the league twixt them, that loyal love hath bound:  
but simple truth and mutuall good will  
seekes with sweet peace to salve each others wound.  
There fayth doth fearlesse dwell in brasen towre,  
and spotlesse pleasure builds her sacred bowre.*

#### **13.5.1 Sonnet 65 - Summary**

Edmund Spenser's Sonnet 65 is part of his collection of sonnets called "Amoretti." The sonnet is a reflection on the passage of time and how it affects love.

The sonnet is a deliberation over the age-old sexist tradition of men exercising control over women. This sonnet expresses the feelings of fear and anxiety that the beloved feels about losing her sovereignty in marriage. For a sixteenth century woman, this was a relevant and justified fear. However, if she remained unmarried, she would be under the control of her father. An important aspect of gender politics is men controlling women, and this poem sidesteps the issue by arguing that by losing one liberty, you gain two – your own and your spouse's, who also used to fear bondage. The allegiances undertaken without any coercion and constraint do not feel like bonds because you are happy like caged birds who eat and sing.

The traditional Petrarchan poem is construed as an argument where the male speaker or the wooer provides an argument to ensnare the passive and coy female. Here the argument revolves around the male speaker's attempt to allay the fears of his love about losing her freedom post marriage, a genuine fear that almost every sixteenth century woman had. Married women had to give up their personal, financial freedoms to their husbands. That the speaker needs to address this issue says much about the woman whom he is addressing. If the woman feels that she will lose her independence, she definitely seems independent minded.

The speaker, who acknowledges her independence, wants to make some sort of arrangement with her nonetheless. There are many images of bonds, bounds, bands, and cages which are repeated to demonstrate that he considers marriage to be a bond and an agreement that must be entered into. He argues that her bondage will not be one which stifles her sense of self. If she enters into it willingly and gently: As he writes, "the gentle bird feels no captivity/within her cage, but sings and feeds her fill" (7-8). Edmund Spenser employs an anagram of 'birde' is scrambled becomes bride to convey the idea that he is addressing his future wife.

After these initial arguments to woo his lady love, we are presented with an ideal description of marriage. Melissa Femino argues that "the first two quatrains play with the word bond from the phrase bonds of marriage- punning on bonds as "bondage" and then moving to the word bands in the next four lines. These lines are both an affirmation and a contradiction of common Petrarchan conceit" (Sauer, 20). A traditional feature of Petrarchan love poetry is the captive lover. The argument

itself is a paradox, as the poet argues that if the lady gets married, she will inevitably gain more independence than if she remains unfettered by the bonds of love and marriage. However, Spenser's use of the conceit is different: he places this idea within the context of marriage rather than an affair or a platonic relationship. Most Petrarchan lovers sing to women who are unattainable: those of higher social classes or those who are already married.

In reference to Christianity, Femino makes an interesting observation. She argues:

The placement of the poem within the structure of the sonnet sequence adds yet another caveat to Spenser's use of Petrarchan conceits. The poem takes place on March 28, the Thursday before Easter (Maundy Thursday). This day celebrated the institution of the new covenant, sealed by Resurrection. The day was associated with marriage in Spenser's time through the common reading of the Psalm 128. Which was often read at evening prayers on that day; it was also read during the marriage service. Spenser's application of post-Reformation covenantal thought to a Petrarchan poem about marriage is a clear departure from the traditional use of the form by the 16<sup>th</sup> century English poets (Sauer 20).

### 13.5.2 Sonnet 65 - Analysis

*Amoretti* was published in 1595 along with *Epithalamion*, Spenser's wedding poem to his second wife, the Englishwoman Elizabeth Boyle. In this sonnet sequence, Spenser lays bare the pleasures and the miseries of wooing his wife-to-be and (among other things) persuading her to come to Kilcolman to live with him. She married him in 1594 in Munster and settled with the poet at Kilcolman, until they lost their home to rebellion in 1598. This sonnet can be understood in the context of the sonnet sequence and what comes before and after sonnet 65.

Sonnet 65 occurs in the sequence just after (in #64) the speaker catalogues the many endearing and majestic features of his beloved. He compares her visage to colorful and sweet-smelling flowers. Sonnet 65 comes soon before #67, wherein his bride is finally "goodly wonne with her owne will beguiled" like a chased and tamed deer. Then, in #68, the speaker celebrates Easter (including the sacrifice of Jesus Christ). In #69, he celebrates the success of his "loves conquest... gotten at

last with labour and long toyle”. His “labour” in wooing Elizabeth Boyle has finally concluded in her “purchase,” or his attainment of her (the word has strong financial overtones). Just like in Shakespeare’s sonnets, the speaker and the beloved are thereby made eternal as subjects and their name will be etched in eternity because they have been immortalised as the subjects of this poem. (the theme of poetic immortality is also explored in Sonnet 75).

In Sonnet 65, however, the speaker is trying his best to persuade the beloved to accept his proposal and the “bond” of marriage, which is alluded to in the word “bands” (like a wedding *band*, or ring; note also the echo of the word *banns*, or an announcement of betrothal). With these bonds, and ring, he tries to capture her and bind her to him. Nonetheless, the meaning of line four is ambiguous: is she or is he the person who is fleeing the “bondage” of marriage? Apparently, Elizabeth still “doubts” whether he should be her husband.

### 13.5.3 Sonnet 65 - Glossary

*misdeeme* = “misjudge”

*earst* = “first”

*salve* = to “heal” or “cure”

*brasen* = “strong”, “bold”, and/or “brassy”

### 13.6 SONNET 86-TEXT

*Since I did leave the presense of my love,  
Many long weary days I have outworn;  
And many nights, that slowly seemed to move  
Their sad protract from evening until morn.  
For, when as day the heaven doth adorn,  
I wish that night the noyous day would end:  
And, when as night hath us of light forlorn,*

*I wish that day would shortly reascend.  
Thus I the time with expectation spend,  
And fain my grief with changes to beguile,  
That further seems his term still to extend,  
And maketh every minute seem a mile.  
So sorrow still doth seem too long to last;  
But joyous hours do fly away too fast.*

### **13.6.1 Sonnet 86 - Summary**

The poet says that ever since he has become estranged from his beloved, he has endured many sad and tiresome days which last longer than the usual days. The poet's nights are as wearisome as his days and they also progress slowly. His nights linger on and do not seem to end, beginning with evening and entering well into the morning.

The poet again describes his sad plight at the break of day and says that when the heavens adorn the day and the day rises, the poet gets exhausted with the day and wishes that the annoying day would come to an end. And again when the night falls and abandons the day off light, the poet wishes that the situation again comes up to its former position and the day rise again. The poet wants the quick day/night shift as he wants that the time during which he is separated from his beloved soon passes and he reunites with his beloved.

The poet says that he spends his days and nights in expectation that his 'griefe' will 'faine' or happily lead him to consider 'chaunges to beguile'. His grief is trying to convince and trick Spencer into thinking that his beloved's affections may alter while they are separate. The result of this mischievous thinking is that he is tricked into believing that the absence 'seemes his terme still to extend' and thus his worries make the deprivation seem to endure even longer. 'Every minute seem[s] a myle' reaffirms this impact.

The poet concludes the poem with a couplet and laments about the irony of time's moments of pleasure and misery. The poet says that the sorrowful days last longer than the usual days, and joyful and happy days fly away too quickly, i.e. they end very quickly.

### 13.6.2 Sonnet 86 - Analysis

*Amoretti*, as it consists of eighty nine sonnets depicting Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, deals with the different phases in his courtship. Sonnets 86 to 89 depict the change which occurred in Spencer's relationship with Elizabeth Boyle after his engagement with her. Their relationship takes another turn and now again, Spencer's relationship with Elizabeth Boyle becomes a bit distressed. The poem is written in a very straight forward manner addressing the particular issue of his beloved's estrangement from him and its impact upon him. Spencer very unequivocally says that since his beloved has become estranged from her, he is spending his days and nights in great misery.

This poem is also written in the form of Spencerian sonnet consisting of three quatrains and a concluding couplet with the rhyme scheme *ababbcbccdcdee*. In the first quatrain, the poet laments that ever since he has become estranged from his beloved, he is spending his days and nights in great misery. His days also seem to be longer than usual because of his despair. In the next quatrain, the poet further develops this thought and says that he wishes that the days and nights should pass quickly, thereby lessening the time for which he has to stay away from his beloved. In the third quatrain, the poet introduces a new idea and says that he fears that the brief separation will distance him more from his beloved as theirs is a new love. In the concluding couplet, the poet says that the happy times move fast and the sad days linger on and last longer than the usual days.

### 13.6.3 Sonnet 86 - Glossary

*protract* – prolong

*adorne* – wear

*noyous* – annoying or irritating



*forlorne* – abandoned, deserted  
*faine* – happily  
*beguile* – to deceive with charm  
*ioyous* – presumably just a variant spelling of joyous

### 13.7 THEMES

The first important theme in *Amoretti* is, of course, love. The sonnet sequence is, in a way, a celebration of Spencer's courtship of his lady love Elizabeth Boyle. *Amoretti* depicts the love which Spencer had for his beloved. His love for her remains the same throughout the sonnet-sequence. However, Elizabeth Boyle's love undergoes a change as the sonnets progress. In a considerable large part of the poem, i.e. up to the sonnet 62, she remains aloof and does not return Spencer's favours. But then comes a sudden shift with sonnet 63 when she accepts Spencer's love and responds in a favourable manner. This journey of love takes a final turn in the third part of the sonnet sequence and Elizabeth Boyle again becomes indifferent to Spencer. However, this indifference is rather short lived as the sonnet-sequence ends with the hope that the lovers will be reunited and this becomes true as Spencer later composed Epithalamion in the celebration of his marriage to Elizabeth Boyle.

Another important theme is that of courtship. The entire sonnet cycle of the *Amoretti* is about courtship. The poems chart the different dimensions of Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle. *Amoretti* is about courtship and it depicts the poet's efforts at courtship. It also describes the beloved's reaction to this courtship, ranging from indifference to acceptance to a brief separation. Spencer's efforts at courtship yielded the desired result and Elizabeth Boyle accepted his suit. The sonnets, therefore depict the journey of Spencer's courtship and its conclusion.

Another important theme in *Amoretti* is that of journey. On one level, Spencer's whole effort at wooing his mistress can be seen as a long journey, a journey full of hardships and perils. Sonnet 63 describes this journey of the poet by comparing it to a tumultuous sea journey. In this sonnet, the poet compares his journey of wooing his mistress to a sea journey which is full of tempest, storms, and the fear of death. The poet describes the hardships which he faced during the course of his wooing of his

mistress, and the eventual ecstasy which he got when she accepted his wooing. This ecstasy he compares with safely reaching the shore which holds the promise of a happy life. Another important theme is that of perseverance in love. Spencer persists in his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle even after she responds unfavourably to him for a long time. This indifference of Elizabeth Boyle Spencer records from sonnet 3 to sonnet 65. So, he has devoted a large portion of his sonnet sequence in depicting the indifference of his beloved. However, Spencer perseveres in spite of all the odds and this perseverance leads to the eventual acceptance by Elizabeth Boyle of his love which he records in the sonnet 63 onwards.

Sonnet 65 is about the fear the beloved expressed about losing her liberty in marriage – and indeed, that was a justified fear for a 16th-century young woman, except that being unmarried, she remained in power of her father. The poet glosses over the gender politics anyway, arguing that by losing one liberty, you gain two – your own and your spouse's, who also used to fear bondage. The bonds assumed freely and without constraint are really no bonds, and you are as happy as a caged bird, who sings and eats.

Time and the conception of time is another important theme in Amoretti. This theme is delineated in sonnet 86 which deals with the concept of time. The sonnet describes Spencer's brief estrangement from Elizabeth Boyle after she had accepted his courtship. This brief separation leads Spencer to ponder over the conception of time. In the sonnet, Spencer hopes that the time flies quickly so that he can again be united with his beloved. He also makes an ironic reference to time and says that time flies during the happy times and it drags when one is sad. Separation is another important theme delineated in Amoretti. Sonnet 86 records the brief separation of Spencer from Elizabeth Boyle after their engagement. This brief separation, however, leaves Spencer in a sorry state and he becomes wretched during that brief separation. Spencer wishes that the days and nights pass in quick succession and this brief period of separation comes to an end. He even doubts that this brief separation will lead to more differences between the two as theirs is a new love.

### **13.8 SYMBOLS AND IMAGERY**

The first important symbol is that of a journey. In sonnet 65, repeated images

of bonds, bounds, bands, and cages demonstrate that her bondage will not be an unpleasant one. If she enters into it willingly and gently: As he writes, “the gentle birdefeeles no captivity/within her cage, but singes and feeds her fill” (7-8). The anagram implicit in Edmund Spenser’s spelling of “birde” as bride, if scrambled correctly, seems to strengthen the idea that he is addressing his future wife.

In sonnet 86, he brings about the ironic nature of time. Time means different things for the poet in different situations. For example, time seems to move fast when we are in a happy and joyous mood and it seems to move slowly when we are in a sad and depressed state. For the poet also, time seems to drag when he is estranged from his beloved, so he wishes that the time passes quickly so that he can be reunited with his beloved.

### **13.9 AN ASSESSMENT OF AMORETTI**

Soon after his return to Ireland in 1591, Spenser began his suit to Elizabeth Boyle, to whom are addressed the Amoretti sonnets. These are sonnets of love and have been given the Italian name of Amoretti, which means little love poems. In them the poet gives expression to the feeling of his heart in a sincere and unaffected manner without any recourse to allegory. There is not here the unquiet of Sidney’s love for Lord Rich’s wife nor the complaining tone of Shakespeare whose mistress deceived him, Spenser’s sonnets are unique for their purity. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse and there is the purity of tone in them.

The *Amoretti* sonnets are written with an easy and familiar grace, at once clear and melodious, capable of touching into beauty the ordinary changes and chances of the lover’s fortune or of voicing the ecstasy so typically Spenserian of the sonnet. As a series they are incomplete, for when the lover seems already to have reached the goal, venomous tongues cause misunderstanding and separation and the last four sonnets are in the minor key. The consummation is to be found in the Epithalamion which concludes them. The style ranges from utter simplicity to highly wrought and coloured imagery, and draws alike upon the resources of medieval superstition and classic myth. The intricate stanza was suggested by Petrarch.

Modern criticism which has made so damaging an assault upon the sincerity of Elizabethan sonnets could hardly be expected to leave Spencer's beautiful sonnet sequence unassailed, and the view has lately been advanced that Amoretti sonnets are addressed for the most part to lady Carey than to Elizabeth Boyle. Spencer's passion was verbal painting for which the sonnets did not afford any scope. Naturally in these sonnets one will feel the lack of passion. The heroine is just the embodiment of the Petrarchan idea of beauty rather than a woman of flesh and blood. Lack of earthly passion is a defect in some of them. But in spite of the absence of general passion, we cannot fail to admire them, for they represent the best traditions of the Elizabethan sonnet.

### 13.10 LET US SUM UP

The two sonnets Sonnet 65 and Sonnet 86 depict the two different phases in Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle. Sonnet 65 marks the beginning of a new phase in Spencer's relationship with his beloved Elizabeth Boyle as she begins to respond positively to his wooing. The poet tries to alleviate her fears regarding losing freedom post marriage and loving describes a marital relationship. He further asserts that paradoxically the lady will gain more liberty once she is captured by bonds of marriage than if she remains unfettered by these bonds.

Sonnet 86 depicts the brief estrangement in their relationship after Elizabeth Boyle has accepted his suit. In this sonnet, the poet describes his turbulent and tumultuous feelings during this period of separation.

### 13.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. The sonnet sequence *Amoretti* is a record of Spencer's wooing of his mistress. Discuss.
2. Discuss the different phases of Spencer's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle.
3. Amoretti depicts the poet's efforts at courtship of his lady love. Was the poet successful in this courtship? Discuss with reference to the sonnets in the collection.
4. Some critics might read the bride here as a *metaphor* for Ireland itself, that is, the country Spenser (and his bride to be) is currently colonizing. If so, how might that change our understanding of the Sonnet 65?

5. Sum up the central idea of Sonnet 65 from *Amoretti*.
6. Based on your reading of Sonnet 65, what do you make out of Spencer's relationship with Elizabeth Boyle?
7. Sum up the central idea of Sonnet 86 from *Amoretti*.
8. How does Spencer respond to his separation from his beloved in Sonnet 86?
9. In Sonnet 86, Spencer brings out the ironical nature of time. Comment.
10. Discuss the various symbols and images employed by Spencer in his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* with special reference to the sonnets prescribed in your syllabus.
11. Love and courtship is an important theme of the sonnet sequence *Amoretti*. Discuss.
12. Discuss separation as a theme delineated by Spencer in *Amoretti*.
13. Discuss *Amoretti* as a sonnet sequence placing it in the Elizabethan tradition of love sonnets.
14. What is a sonnet? What are its types? Which form was employed by Spencer in his *Amoretti*?

### **13.12 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 In Spenser's "Amoretti," what is the overall theme of the sonnets?
- A) Political revolution
  - B) Nature's beauty
  - C) Love and courtship
  - D) Religious devotion
- Q2. What is the rhyme scheme commonly used in the "Amoretti" sonnets?
- A) ABAB

- B) ABBA
  - C) ABCC
  - D) AABB
- Q.3 In “Amoretti,” what poetic form is primarily used for the sonnets?
- A) Blank verse
  - B) Petrarchan sonnet
  - C) Spenserian stanza
  - D) Villanelle
- Q.4 How many sonnets are there in Spenser’s “Amoretti” sequence?
- A) 18
  - B) 56
  - C) 89
  - D) 154
- Q.5 What is the central narrative thread in “Amoretti”?
- A) A knight’s quest for honor
  - B) A journey through the countryside
  - C) A lover’s pursuit of his beloved
  - D) An allegorical depiction of nature
- Q.6 What is the role of the speaker in the “Amoretti” sonnets?
- A) A critical observer
  - B) A divine being
  - C) A wandering minstrel
  - D) A passionate lover

- Q.7 What is the significance of the title “Amoretti”?
- A) It means “eternal love” in Italian.
  - B) It refers to a collection of romantic poems.
  - C) It symbolizes courtly intrigue and deception.
  - D) It represents the poet’s pseudonym
- Q.8 What literary tradition heavily influenced Spenser’s “Amoretti” sonnets?
- A) Greek epic poetry
  - B) Elizabethan drama
  - C) Medieval ballads
  - D) Petrarchan love poetry
- Q.9 In “Amoretti,” what natural imagery is often used to describe the passage of time?
- A) Storms and lightning
  - B) Blooming flowers
  - C) Celestial bodies
  - D) Flowing rivers
- Q.10 How does the speaker portray the progression of his relationship with the beloved in “Amoretti”?
- A) From indifference to passionate love
  - B) From courtship to separation
  - C) From devotion to betrayal
  - D) From friendship to rivalry

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Answer: 1C, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5C, 6D, 7B, 8D, 9C, 10B

### **13.13 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- (1) The Elizabethan Love Sonnet: J.W. Lever
- (2) Edmund Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion: A Critical Edition by Kenneth J. Larsen
- (3) Companion to British Poetry before 1600: Michelle Sauer

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**SHAKESPEARE AND THE HISTORY OF SONNET****Unit Structure****14.1 Objectives****14.2 Shakespeare's Life****14.3 Brief history of Sonnet****14.4 Sonnets of Shakespeare****14.5 Conclusion****14.6 Examination Oriented Questions****14.7 Let Us Sum Up****14.8 Suggested Reading****14.1 OBJECTIVES**

The Lesson consists of biography of Shakespeare and the history of sonnet. Shakespeare as a sonnet writer has been discussed to acquaint learner with these concepts.

**14.2 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE**

William Shakespeare was born on 23rd of April, 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. His father was a farmer with many business connections. His mother came from a rich family and inherited some small landed property. William was their third child. Till the age of thirteen, William lived in prosperous conditions. But business losses in the next few years obliged his father to remove him from school, and put him into his business.

At the young age of eighteen years, William Shakespeare was forced to marry Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior. She was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer of a nearby village. This marriage was hasty and ill-advised, and brought unhappiness. In the following year a daughter was born, whom they named Sussana. Twins followed in the year 1569 and were named Janet and Judith.

It is said that William fell into bad company, and his act of deer-stealing drove him from home to escape the police. There is another story which says that he lived the life of a school master in a village near Stratford. He had been married for four years when he decided to leave his native town and try his luck in the great city of London. He had seen the players at Stratford, and he searched for them in London.

In London, Shakespeare made his way through difficulties. He began as a horseboy attached to a stable outside a theatre. From there he found his access to the stage inside. It took him about six years to become a member of the best acting company. This was the time when drama was becoming very popular. From acting, Shakespeare turned to writing.

His success story started. He began to produce an average of two plays a year. His fame and wealth grew with the passage of time. He became a share-holder in two of the leading theatres of the time, the Globe and the Black Friars. He purchased property in Stratford and London. Then came a period of domestic sorrows. His only son, his father, his brother and his mother died. In 1610, he returned to Stratford and brought the biggest house there. At the age of fifty-two, his health broke down and he died on 23rd April, 1616, which was also his birthday.

### **14.3 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SONNET**

A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem having a fixed rhyme-scheme. It is a short lyric poem, complete in itself. Like many other literary genres, the sonnet in England was imported from abroad. It most probably originated in Italy with Dante who wrote a number of sonnets to his beloved named

Beatrice. But the flowering of the sonnet came with Petrarch (1304-74), a generation later. It was Wyatt who introduced the sonnet in England. Though he wrote much earlier, it was in 1557, a year before Elizabeth was coronated ( and some fifteen years after his death), that his sonnets were published in Tottel's *Miscellany*. Wyatt's lead was accepted by Surrey whose sonnets were likewise published after his death, in the *Miscellany*. Wyatt was much under the spell of his model Petrarch, and out of his thirty-two sonnets, seventeen are but adaptations of Petrarch's. Moreover, most of them follow the Petrarchan pattern, that is, each has two parts—an octave (eight lines) followed by sestet (six lines). In between the octave and the sestet, there is a marked pause indicated on paper by some blank space. With the ninth line, comes the volte or the turn of thought. The thought in a Petrarchan sonnet may be compared to a wave which goes on rising and reaches its highest altitude with the eighth line and then starts petering out till it dies at the end. The octave in a Petrarchan sonnet always has the rhyme-scheme abba abba, though the sestet may have one of the various patterns such as cdcd cd or cddcee. Whereas Wyatt mostly adhered to the Petrarchan pattern, Surrey invented a new one for his sonnets, which later was to be adopted by most Elizabethan sonneteers, the most prominent of whom was Shakespeare. This pattern came to be termed as the Shakespearean pattern. The feature of the Surrayesque pattern is the division of the fourteen lines into four units-three quatrains ( four lines) and the ending couplet (two lines). The rhyme-scheme followed is ab ab, ab ab, ab ab, cc.

In England, Milton and Shakespeare put their own stamp on the sonnet, Milton followed the Petrarchan style. He divided his sonnet into octave and sestet.

But Shakespeare gave up the Italian style of rhyme - scheme and thought division. He wrote his sonnets consisting of three quatrains (or stanzas) followed by a couplet. The rhyme- scheme in his sonnets is:

ab ab, cdcd, ef ef, gg,

In the first three stanzas, he gives an idea and in the couplet, he rounds off the whole poem with an epigram.

#### **14.4 SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE**

Shakespeare's sonnets are a miscellaneous collection of poems, written at different times, for different purposes, and with very different degrees of poetic intensity. They vary from the most trivial of occasional verses to poems in which a whole range of important emotions is involved and in the latter we find, in embryonic form, many of the themes of the later plays. Shakespeare's sonnets are famous for his dramatically expressive way of writing. The subject matter and the rhetoric may be that of the Petrarchan tradition. The effect may sometimes seem metaphysical, but the uniquely Shakesperean quality of the sequence is not to be explained by either of these labels. We have here what we might expect – a dramatist describes a series of emotional situations between persons (real or fictitious) in a series of separate short poems. The Petrarchan instruments turn the great human emotions, desires, jealousy, fear, hope and despair, the dramatic reactions of pity and terror, by his implication, in the lives and into fates of the persons depicted.

Shakespeare's sonnets have proved an attractive bone for generation after generation of critics to gnaw at. The sonnets are beautiful expressions of various feelings and emotions—love, joy, jealousy, hope, hatred, despair etc. The feelings expressed in the sonnets are based on real experiences of life.

The sonnets of Shakespeare have been held in great esteem by poets as well as critics. These sonnets, some one hundred and fifty four in number, were first published in a body in 1609; though there is clear evidence that they were in circulation as early as 1598 and were written most probably in 1595-96. The first one hundred and twenty-six sonnets are addressed to a young and handsome man, who has been variously interpreted as the Earl of Southampton and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. The next twenty-six sonnets are addressed to a “dark” and wanton lady who betrays the poet for the young man. Last two Elizabethan sonnets may be termed as sort of an epilogue.

Albert Baugh in *Literary History of England* observes, “of all the Elizabethan sonnet sequences Shakespeare's is the least typical. It celebrates, not the idealized love of an idealized mistress, but the affection of an older man for a gilded and wayward youth.” Like his dramas, the sonnets of Shakespeare are very popular. His genius lies in his ability to make universal statements concerning the complex issues of life and death. In his sonnets, Shakespeare frequently bewails his anguish and misfortunes. He feels like an outcast, the young patron starts liking a rival poet, and the poet's mistress deserts him for the young man. In expressing his anguish, Shakespeare lends his verses, a rare glow of lyrical melody and meditative energy which strikes one as coming from a heart which really feels what it articulates. Shakespeare is very exasperatingly impersonal in his dramatic works, but in the sonnets, to use the words of Wordsworth, he “unlocked his heart.” There seems to be more of genuineness and less of convention in his sonnets. Even then, we cannot accept Wordsworth's sweeping statement. Some of the sonnets are, to quote Albert C. Baugh, “obstinately private and elusive” and some are conceits, exercises in reaching old conclusions by new ways. But the happiest of them reach the old conclusions through series of metaphors of incomparable suggestive power. The style is largely free from the ingenuities of the early plays and from the dense figurativeness of the later.” In spite of the agonised tone and the rather lugubrious atmosphere of the sonnets, they end on an optimistic note, for there is the triumphant affirmation of the transcendence of love (the poet's love for his patron). Thus, even in the sonnets, as elsewhere, we are convinced of Shakespeare's insistent sanity of outlook.

These sonnets are the overflow of the life and mind of Shakespeare as Petrarch's were the outflow of his life and mind. In an English modification of Petrarch's form, Shakespeare created a series of poems comparable only to those of Petrarch. All that goes between fades with insignificance. F.T. Prince writes, “These two writers transfused their inner life into the sonnet. It is only by means of such a comparison, that we can see how much the sonnet form needed a new imaginative impulse, and how Shakespeare was able to give it.”

These sonnets are characterized by boundless fertility and laboured condensation of thought, with perfection of sweetness in rhythm and metre. It is sufficient to point out that they deal with love, and express the lover's mood in many different aspects, and that for perfection of form, for choiceness of expression, and for the harmony of their cadences, they rank with the best of his work.

#### **14.5 CONCLUSION**

Concerning the literary quality of the sonnets, there can be no dispute. In the depth, breadth and persistency of their passion, in their lordly but never overweening splendour of style, and above all, in their mastery of a rich and sensuous phraseology, they are unique. Byron once remarked, that the tissue of poetry cannot be all brilliant, any more than the midnight sky can be entirely stars; but throughout the series of the sonnets, the frequency of lovely phrasing is great indeed.

#### **14.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Shakespeare as a poet.
2. Give the history of sonnet writing.

#### **14.7 LET US SUM UP**

Shakespeare's sonnets encompass a diverse range of themes, emotions, and reflections on love, time, beauty, and mortality. Through 154 sonnets, he explores the intensity of romantic love, the passage of time's effects on beauty and youth, and the complexities of desire. The poems reveal a profound interplay of emotion, often expressing both ecstasy and agony. As a whole, the sonnets form a rich tapestry of human experience, inviting readers to contemplate the transient nature of life, the enduring power of art, and the timeless allure of love.

#### **14.8 SUGGESTED READING**

1. *A year in the life of William Shakespeare* - James Shapiro

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**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN SONNET****Unit Structure****15.1 Objectives****15.2 Introduction****15.3 Poet's Friend and Young Patron****15.4 The Friend's Reluctance to Marry****15.5 The Friend's Self-love or Narcissism****15.6 Shakespeare's Tribute to the Youth and Beauty of his Male Friend****15.7 The Friend's Robbery of Shakespeare****15.8 The Charge of Duplicity against the Friend****15.9 The Friend's Superficiality and Unresponsiveness****15.9.1 Character of the Dark Lady****15.9.2 An Emphasis on the Mistress's Dark Beauty****15.9.3 The Mistress's Cruelty towards the Poet****15.9.4 The Strange Fascination for the Dark Lady****15.9.5 The Poet's Slavery to her, and her Excessive Pride****15.9.6 The Dark Lady's capture of the Poet's Friend****15.9.7 Her Unworthiness and her Hold on the Poet****15.9.8 No Sublime or Exalted Love****15.9.9 Character of the Rival Poet****15.10 Examination Oriented Questions****15.11 Multiple Choice Questions**

## **15.12 Let Us Sum Up**

## **15.13 Suggested Reading**

### **15.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson briefly explains to the learner the themes of friendship and lover with special reference to dark lady and Shakespeare's male friend.

### **15.2 INTRODUCTION**

Shakespeare's characters are the rightful progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find, unaffected alike by the vagaries of fashion, the accidents of custom and the changes of opinion. They run the whole gamut of the world, the flesh and the devil, motivated by general passions and principles and conforming to the common pattern of life.

The three groups of sonnets taken together constitute Shakespeare's early expression of his perceptions of friendship, of love and lust, of honour, of growth through experience, of sin and of mutability, platitude, and the knowledge of good and evil. Though there is much that is traditional and conventional in them, they are also a record of the poet's genuine experiences, of what happened to his soul during the period of his love and friendship, of treachery and intrigue, of passions overcome and serenity regained. What binds the sonnets together is the inter-relationship among the three persons, who figure prominently in them. These persons are the Earl of Southampton, the young friend to whom the first one hundred and twenty-six sonnets are addressed, the dark lady to whom the next twenty-six sonnets are addressed, and a contemporary poet, not named in the sonnets who seems to have been a rival of Shakespeare and around whom ten or eleven of the sonnets (nos. 76 to 86) centre.

### **15.3 POET'S FRIEND AND YOUNG PATRON**

The sonnets are patronage poems, written by an Elizabethan poet in

course of duty to his patron. It was appropriate decorum that an impecunious actor-poet should address a star in the Elizabethan firmament, a figure coming to the fore at court and in society, in polite, differential, flowery language. Shakespeare's love for his beautiful young lord was real, and in the sonnets one can watch its growth and progress; its complications and setbacks ; concern, anxiety, regret over the entanglement of the youth with the promiscuous Dark Lady, for which Shakespeare feels himself responsible.

As we know that sonnets 1-126 are addressed by the poet to his young friend, the Earl of Southampton, and most of these are a glowing tribute to his male friend.

#### **15.4 THE FRIEND'S RELUCTANCE TO MARRY**

The first cardinal fact that we learn about the poet's friend is the friend's reluctance to marry. First seventeen sonnets show the poet's concern about this reluctance. In these sonnets, the poet urges his friend, the Earl of Southampton to marry and to beget children. The poet tries to convince his friend of the strong desirability and advisability of getting married and producing children. Children are necessary to perpetuate the friend's name and memory. Children are necessary to preserve the friend's beauty and good looks. If the friend does not marry and have children, he will die single and his image will die with him :

But if thou live remembered not be,

Die single and thine image dies with thee.

#### **15.5 THE FRIEND'S SELF-LOVE OR NARCISSISM**

Another fact that emerges from the first seventeen sonnets is the narcissism or self-love of the friend. If the friend is not inclined to marry and beget children, it is evident that he is in love with himself and with his own image. Instead of chasing a female partner, who will return the affections he lavishes on her, the friend enters into a loving relationship with his own image and spends fruitlessly the energy which marriage would have put to creative purposes.

The friend is “contracted to his own bright eyes and feeds his light's flame with self-substantial fuel.” As a victim of self-love, the friend is committed to delusion.

### **15.6 SHAKESPEARE'S TRIBUTE TO THE YOUTH AND BEAUTY OF HIS MALE FRIEND**

His friend is so beautiful in Shakespeare's eyes, that Shakespeare says in one of the sonnets that the various flowers have borrowed their charm and their fragrance from his friend. In another sonnet, Shakespeare expresses the view that all the descriptions of beautiful ladies and handsome knights written by poets in the past were intended to be prophecies of “this our time” and anticipations of the beauty of his friend. Shakespeare goes on to say in this sonnet that those poets of the past failed in their efforts to depict in advance the beauty of his young friend. And the climax comes when Shakespeare writes in the closing couplet of the same sonnet that even poets of the present, who can actually see his young friend with their own eyes, do not have the capacity or skill to describe the beauty of his friend. In the sonnet “When to the sessions of sweet silent thought” we find an idealization, glorification and exaltation of the young friend's beauty.

### **15.7 THE FRIEND'S ROBBERY OF SHAKESPEARE**

In one sonnet, Shakespeare complains that his young friend has taken his mistress away from him, and thus caused him much loss. He then describes both his friend and his mistress as “loving offenders” whom, however, he is willing to forgive. “I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief.” And again he says, “Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all.” Shakespeare also points out that when a woman woos a man, the man cannot help feeling tempted and that, for this reason, the poet cannot really blame his friend.

### **15.8 THE CHARGE OF DUPLICITY AGAINST THE FRIEND**

As a critic points out, Shakespeare hints at his friend's duplicity early in the sequence. This duplicity is, of course, most obvious in the friend's

betrayal of the poet and it confirms a feature of the friend's character indicated in the first seventeen sonnets. The friend deceives himself by wasting his reproductive energy upon a shadow; he cheats Nature of her proper return by refusing to pay back her loan in a child; and by dividing himself between the substance and the shadow of his being he acquires a doubleness of person— himself both as lover and beloved, actor and admiring audience. This 'doubleness' completes the friend's hypocritical behaviour. Sonnet 20, "A woman's Face with Nature's own Hand Painted" varies the terms in which the friend is presented, but continues to insist upon his doubleness. As "master- mistress" of the poet's emotions, he is at once both male and female, and capable of arousing in the poet both, the affections of a friend and the passion of a lover.

### **15.9 THE FRIEND'S SUPERFICIALITY AND UNRESPONSIVENESS :**

In short, we find that the poet's friend is self- loving, sexually ambivalent and creative only to the extent of duplicating lifeless images of himself. From the initial situation of the sequence, where the friend is urged to marry, the poet admits a series of failures to join the friend to himself in a firm relationship. The friend is absent, or the poet himself goes on a journey. The friendship cools, the poet must be dropped for diplomatic reasons, or a rival usurps his place in the friend's regard. The friend betrays the poet's trust by seducing his mistress. The poet's appeals for affection, forgiveness or understanding are matched by his constant readiness to overlook the friend's faults, to condone his misdeeds, and even to encourage him to alienate himself. Thus, these sonnets are not an account of love and friendship reciprocated.

#### **15.9.1 Character of the Dark Lady**

She is identified with a certain Mrs. Marry Fitton, who was a maid of honour in a rich and exalted household.

#### **15.9.2 An Emphasis on the Mistress's Dark Beauty**

The main features of the portrayal of the dark lady, who is the subject

of sonnets 127 to 152, are that she is dark but attractive, a woman of loose morals, who falls in love with the poet's friend, thus betraying the poet, being most unreliable, where sexual relations are concerned. In at least two of the sonnets, "In the old age black was not counted fair" and "Thine eyes I love," the poet emphasizes the fact of the mistress being dark. She has dark hair, dark eyes, and dark eye-brows. In former times, black colour was not thought to be beautiful, but now black is proper heir to beauty, while beauty itself is maligned as something artificial. Everybody tries to look fair by using cosmetics. The result, a fresh and naturally fair complexion is not much respected. In fact, the poet feels that anyone who does not have a black or dark complexion cannot be regarded as beautiful.

### **15.9.3 The Mistress's Cruelty Towards the Poet**

The mistress is depicted as being very callous indeed towards the poet. In the sonnets "Thou art as tyrannous", "she is shown as being extremely cruel like those beautiful women who are too proud of their beauty and who therefore become heartless. And yet she is regarded by the poet as the fairest and most precious jewel. The poet is absolutely certain that her face makes him sigh with desire for her, not once but a thousand times. The dark complexion of the mistress is regarded as attractive, but at the same time she is strongly condemned for her black deeds, "In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds." "The charge of cruelty against the mistress occurs again in the sonnet, "Be wise as thou are cruel." She is here depicted as being contemptuous towards the poet. This idea appears also in the sonnet beginning, "O call not me to justify the wrong," where the poet appeals to the mistress not to hurt him by turning her eyes towards others in his presence.

### **15.9.4 The Strange Fascination for the Dark Lady**

Although the poet admits his own lust, he is not blind to the sordidness and repulsiveness of lust. In spite of the fact that the poet condemns it in strong terms, he continues to lust after the Dark Lady. In one of the sonnets, the poet envies even the keys of the instrument on which she is playing because the keys of the musical instrument are in a position to kiss her fingers. In another sonnet,

Shakespeare complains that Cupid, the blind god of love, has distorted the poet's vision because he cannot now see his mistress in the proper perspective. The poet's eyes have been corrupted by his partiality for his mistress, with the result that his rational judgement has lost its validity. Sonnet 137, once again shows the poet's own abjectness, and his complete self-surrender to the woman, though at the same time candidly pointing out that she is a loose woman.

#### **15.9.5 The Poet's Slavery to Her, and Her Excessive Pride**

In the sonnet "In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes", the mistress's hold upon the poet is once again recognised. The poet's eyes find a thousand faults in her, but he loves her with his heart and not with his eyes or ears or with any of the other senses. His heart forces him to be the slave and attendant of her proud heart. This sonnet unambiguously expresses the true situation – the poet's slavery to the mistress, and her excessive pride and her many defects of character.

#### **15.9.6 The Dark Lady's Capture of the Poet's Friend**

Shakespeare is suffering a three-fold torment. He is deprived of his friend, his mistress, and himself too. The dark lady is giving him hell by luring the poet's noble friend away from him. The poet is willing to forfeit himself if only she agrees to restore to him, his friend, whom he needs because his friend has been a source of comfort to him.

#### **15.9.7 Her Unworthiness and Her Hold on the Poet**

In one of the sonnets, Shakespeare wants to know from what supernatural source she derives her extraordinary power to sway his heart with her very defects. He urges her not to join with others in detesting his condition and his circumstances. If her unworthiness made him love her, then he is all the more worthy of her love.

#### **15.9.8 No Sublime or Exalted Love**

It is clear that the dark lady is depicted as being devoid of any virtue whatever, barring her physical charm and her sex-appeal, everything about

her is contemptible. She is fickle, false, cold- hearted and cruel, faithless and has insatiable sexual desire. She is made to appear thoroughly despicable and poet's love for her is not at all sublime or exalted: It is a craving of the flesh; it is carnal desire with nothing spiritual about it. It is indeed a fever, a disease, a form of insanity which perverts the judgement and robs a man of his reason.

### **15.9.9 Character of the Rival Poet**

There is a small group of sonnets in which Shakespeare expresses his sense of rivalry with a fellow-poet, who also sought the Earl of Southampton's patronage. The identification of the rival poet, whose "richly compiled" "comments" of his patron's praise excited Shakespeare's jealousy, is a more difficult inquiry than the identification of the patron. The rival poet might have been Chapman or Marlowe, or Nashe, or he might have been a composite personality built up in the poet's imagination on the basis of those three men. In the opinion of Massey, Marlowe is the poet referred to. He points out that "proud full sail" would exactly describe the poet's style of the master of the "mighty line", and the allusions to supernatural assistance refer, not to the poet himself, but to his great dramatic creation Dr. Faustus. In Sonnet 79, Shakespeare gives expression to his apprehension that he is being ousted from his friend's favour by some other poet who has been able to ingratiate himself with that friend. Shakespeare must have felt that he had been pushed into second place and that the Earl of Southampton was showing a distinct preference for the other poet. This poet has entered the arena, and is usurping the regard and the esteem which his friend used previously to bestow on Shakespeare. But we must admit that even here Shakespeare shows his large- heartedness in spite of his sense of competition and his feeling of being ignored by his patron. In one of the sonnets of this group, he refers to his own poetry as his "sick muse", and refers to the rival poet as "a worthier pen". In another sonnet, he refers to the rival poet as "a better spirit." The rival poet is like a tall ship, "He of tall building and of goodly pride." While Shakespeare is like a small boat. A tall ship is more impressive than a small boat. But Shakespeare has a consolation also. A small boat can keep floating even upon shallow waters, while a tall ship can sail only



upon deep waters :

*Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat*

He makes clear that no writer could tide over economic difficulties without having a wealthy patron.

### **15.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the character of Dark Lady.
2. Throw light on the Character of Shakespeare's friend, Earl of Southampton.

### **15.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Which group of sonnets in Shakespeare's collection is primarily associated with the theme of the Dark Lady?
- A) Sonnets 18-25
  - B) Sonnets 40-42
  - C) Sonnets 127-154
  - D) Sonnets 60-70
- Q.2 The "rival poet" in Shakespeare's sonnets is often thought to represent:
- A) A historical figure
  - B) A symbol of time
  - C) A fictional character
  - D) Shakespeare himself
- Q.3 Which sonnet is one of the most famous and celebrates the timeless beauty of the beloved?
- A) Sonnet 18
  - B) Sonnet 29
  - C) Sonnet 73

- D) Sonnet 130
- Q.4 In Shakespeare's sonnets, the speaker often uses the image of time as a metaphor to:
- A) Emphasize the value of wealth
  - B) Convey the pain of unrequited love
  - C) Highlight the power of youth
  - D) Address the fleeting nature of life
- Q.5 Which sonnet expresses the idea that love's endurance outlasts the ravages of time?
- A) Sonnet 18
  - B) Sonnet 29
  - C) Sonnet 73
  - D) Sonnet 130
- Q.6 In Sonnet 130, how does Shakespeare's speaker describe his beloved in contrast to traditional beauty standards?
- A) He exaggerates her virtues to praise her.
  - B) He criticizes her appearance harshly.
  - C) He compares her to the sun and the moon.
  - D) He humorously celebrates her unique qualities
- Q.7 Which theme is predominant in Sonnet 116?
- A) Beauty's fleeting nature
  - B) The power of romantic love
  - C) The rivalry between poets

- D) The agony of unrequited love
- Q.8 In Sonnet 130, the speaker claims that his beloved's eyes are:
- A) Brighter than the sun
  - B) Darker than coal
  - C) Sparkling like stars
  - D) As lovely as roses
- Q.9 The theme of jealousy and rivalry with other poets is prominent in which group of sonnets?
- A) Sonnets 1-17
  - B) Sonnets 18-25
  - C) Sonnets 106-126
  - D) Sonnets 138-154
- Q.10 Which sonnet explores the idea of immortality through the act of creating poetry?
- A) Sonnet 18
  - B) Sonnet 29
  - C) Sonnet 60
  - D) Sonnet 130

Answer: 1C, 2D, 3A, 4D, 5C, 6B, 7B, 8B, 9C, 10C

### **15.12 LET US SUP UP**

Shakespeare's sonnets encompass a diverse range of themes, emotions, and reflections on love, time, beauty, and mortality. Through 154 sonnets, he explores the intensity of romantic love, the passage of time's effects on beauty and youth, and the complexities of desire. The poems reveal a profound interplay of emotion, often expressing both ecstasy and agony. As a whole, the sonnets form a rich tapestry of

human experience, inviting readers to contemplate the transient nature of life, the enduring power of art, and the timeless allure of love.

### **15.13 SUGGESTED READING**

1. *Shakespeare After All* - Majorie Garber

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 16**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

**UNIT - III**

### **THE PRINCIPAL THEMES OF THE SONNETS**

#### **Unit Structure**

**16.1 Objectives**

**16.2 Introduction**

**16.3 The Theme of The Need of Marriage**

**16.4 Power of Time**

**16.5 Poet's Eternal Devotion to His Friends**

**16.6 Change And Stability**

**16.7 The Theme of Mutability and Death**

**16.8 The Theme of The Artificiality of Cosmetics**

**16.9 The Theme of Self-love**

**16.10 The Theme of the Power of Poetry to Immortalize a Human Being**

**16.11 The Theme of Poetry as an Art**

**16.12 Examination Oriented Questions**

**16.13 Let Us Sum Up**

**16.14 Suggested Readings**

## **16.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson attempts to acquaint the learner with the themes of Shakespearean sonnets.

## **16.2 INTRODUCTION**

Shakespeare's Sonnet-sequence falls into two major groups. Sonnets 1-126 pertain to Shakespeare's relationship with a young nobleman who has been identified as the Earl of Southampton, while sonnets 127 to 152 pertain to the poet's relationship with the 'dark lady' who has been identified as, Mary Fitton. The two dominant themes of the whole sequence, then, are the poet's friendship with the Earl of Southampton, and his love for the dark lady and the betrayal of that love by her. In addition to these two leading motifs, there are certain subsidiary themes also, such as the power of poetry to immortalize human beings; time's ravages, the sin of self-love; reflections on mutability and death; the evil of lust and sensuality; and the folly of using cosmetics and false hair to add to one's attractions.

The subject matter of these sonnets is love and beauty. The central theme of the sonnets, taken collectively is Shakespeare's deep love for, and his profound admiration for, the Earl of Southampton. The first one hundred and twenty- six sonnets contain many tributes to the Earl of Southampton, and they also express Shakespeare's profound attachment to him, though a few of them contain his grievances against the eminent personage. Another theme which emerges, more particularly in the sonnets of the second group ( 127 to 152), is Shakespeare's adulterous love affair with the lady. The situation presented to us in the sonnets, taken collectively, is quite interesting, and even intriguing. It seems that Earl of Southampton began to feel attracted by Shakespeare's mistress ( the dark lady) and that, in course of time, was able to win her heart and wean her away from Shakespeare. The Earl of Southampton thus became guilty of betraying Shakespeare's trust in him. The Earl of Southampton's behaviour naturally offended Shakespeare, who thought that the young

lord had let him down badly, and that his mistress too had played him false. Shakespeare, therefore, began to nurse a grievance against both the guilty persons, though he was unable to give up either of them. The sonnets of the second group clearly show that, while Shakespeare severely condemns the dark lady for her treachery towards him, he still loves her passionately, though his love for her is merely sensual. And the sonnets of the first group show equally clearly that Shakespeare still continues to love and admire his friend.

### **16.3 THE THEME OF THE NEED OF MARRIAGE**

In sonnets 1-17, Shakespeare urges his friend to get married and produce children. Shakespeare offers several arguments to support this view. In the first place, a man must perpetuate himself through his offspring. Secondly, Nature has endowed the Earl of Southampton with the gift of supreme beauty, and the Earl must repay his debt to Nature by having children. Thirdly, if the Earl has children he will be able to feel even in his old age, the warmth of his blood even though at that time his blood will have become cold. The Earl's reluctance to get married and to have children, says the poet, shows the Earl's self-love or narcissism, which is not a desirable trait of character.

In a number of sonnets, Shakespeare dwells upon the theme of his friend's exceptional beauty. These sonnets are written in a tone which most sonnet-writers of the time adopted while writing about their mistresses. Here, Shakespeare addresses his male friend as if he were a woman. The praise which Shakespeare lavishes on his friend's beauty is, indeed, eloquent to the extreme degree. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" is a famous sonnet among such poems. In another sonnet, Shakespeare says that all the flowers seem to him to have stolen their hues, their charm, and their fragrance from some aspect or the other of his friend's personality. In another sonnet, the poet says, - "To me, fair friend, you never can be old." "When in the chronicle of wasted time" is a well-known sonnet in which the poet says that all the praises of beauty written

by the old poets were merely prophecies of the present time, all of them referring to his friend.

#### **16.4 POWER OF TIME**

There is another, important theme which seems to have become as great an obsession with Shakespeare as his friendship with the Earl of Southampton and his love for the dark lady had become. This theme is the power of "Time". In fact, Time may also be regarded as a character in the entire drama which is enacted before our eyes in the sonnets. Shakespeare repeatedly refers to the destructive power of Time; and he points out to his friend again and again the havoc which Time plays in this world. Time is depicted as the great destroyer. Nothing can withstand the assaults of Time. All things in this world, including youth and beauty, are subject to the destructive power of Time. But there is another emphasis from Shakespeare. This other theme is the greatness of Shakespeare's own poetic genius. Shakespeare expresses a very high opinion about the sonnets which he has written, telling his friend several times, and with great force, that these sonnets would preserve his friend's youth and beauty for ever, and that these sonnets are, therefore, more powerful than Time. Time conquers everything, but these sonnets would conquer even Time, and would perpetuate the youth and beauty of his friend. These sonnets would continue to be read by all the coming generations and would thus keep his friend's name, eminence, and merits alive for ever and ever. In one sonnet, for instance, Shakespeare speaks of the lofty towers thrown down, and brass memorials destroyed by mortal fury. Such reflections make the poet think that Time will take away his dear friend also. In another sonnet, beginning "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea" the poet speaks of the power of "sad mortality". In other words, time will not spare even the poet's friend who is Nature's minion or darling, and so the poet, thus, warns his friend. Although, the poet does not forget his friend even in these sonnets, their real theme is the destruction which times works.



## 16.5 POET'S ETERNAL DEVOTION TO HIS FRIENDS

There are a large number of sonnets in which Shakespeare vows his everlasting friendship for the Earl of Southampton and his eternal devotion to the Earl. In one of the sonnets, for instance, Shakespeare says, "My love shall in my verse ever live young." In another sonnet, he says that he is fortunate enough to "love and be loved" by his friend and that he will never change towards his friend. In another sonnet, he addresses his friend as "Lord of my love," and speaks of himself as being a vassal to the latter. Well-known among these sonnets is the one in which Shakespeare says that, when he broods over his misfortunes, the thought of his friend makes him feel as rich as a king. The most famous of this category of sonnets is the one beginning "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought," in which, he says that his friend is a compensation to him for all his past sorrows, woes, misfortunes, and losses. In one of the sonnets, Shakespeare declares that he loves his friend so much that he is ready even to debate against himself for his friend's sake, and that he can never love any man his friend hates. One of the sonnets addressed to the friend ends here :

*For nothing this wide universe I call,*

*Save thou my rose; in it thou art my all*

However, the poet's love for his friend is idealized in the famous sonnet beginning "Let me not to the marriage of true minds". This is a poem in which the writer celebrates the greatness and glory of true love.

## 16.6 CHANGE AND STABILITY

Change and Stability are important themes in Shakespeare's sonnets, Shakespeare's mind seems to have been haunted by thoughts of transitoriness of beauty and youth. In fact, his mind seems to have been obsessed by the transience of all things not only in the world of human beings, but also in the world of Nature. That is why the thought of Time passing and bringing about changes in human life and in the sphere of natural phenomena, figures prominently in his sonnets. He personifies Time and

speaks frequently in these sonnets about the destructive effects of Time upon all things, and more particularly upon beauty and youth in human being. But he also speaks about stability. All things are in a state of flux; but there are things which endure and which have the capacity to withstand the destructive effects of Time. Stability is to be found in true love, in art, and in virtue or moral guidedness. In Sonnet no. 30, beginning with the line "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought", Shakespeare says that many of the sights, which he used to see, have now vanished, and that all his precious friends have died, and are now hidden in death's dateless night. He feels grieved by the thoughts of the disappearance of those familiar sights, and he weeps once again over the deaths of his friends. Thus, Time has worked havoc upon him. This is Shakespeare's comment upon the changes which have taken place in his life. But there is also something which is stable, and it is behind that something stable, that he takes shelter. As soon as the thought of his dear friend, namely the Earl of Southampton, comes to him, all his losses are restored, and all his sorrows end.

In another sonnet beginning "Full many a glorious morning", Shakespeare dwells only on the change which takes place in the life of Nature and in the life of man; and here he does not mention anything stable or lasting.

In sonnet No. 34, which begins with "Why didst thou", Shakespeare speaks in metaphorical terms about the change which has taken place in his friend's attitude towards him, saying that his friend has once again been very kind and affectionate towards him, just as the weather in the morning seems to herald a bright and sunny day. Stability is once again found in the love which binds human beings.

In the sonnet beginning, "O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem," Shakespeare says that there is change in the sphere of Nature. The beauty of the objects of Nature is prone to destruction with the passing of time. Shakespeare's friend would also love his lovely youth and his

beauty with the passing of time. But the friend's other qualities can be preserved through Shakespeare's poetry (the sonnets), in which these excellences of the friend would be found in distilled form, as the perfume of the roses can be preserved if their essence is extracted.

In Sonnet no. 65, Shakespeare says that rocks will crumble, and gates of steel will collapse in course of time. The swift foot of Time cannot be held back. Time would deprive Shakespeare's friend also of his beauty. But perhaps, Shakespeare's poetry might be able to preserve the beauty of his friend. Here, once more, change is perceived as something inevitable, something universal, and something operating like the law of Nature; and the only exceptions to his rule are love and poetry.

Perhaps the most categorical view of stability is to be found in the famous sonnet "Let me not to the marriage of true minds", in which Shakespeare asserts emphatically that love is something enduring and everlasting. Love is not love, if it alters when it alteration finds.

In another sonnet, Shakespeare says that his love for his friend, is eternal, and that it would remain unaffected by "the dust and jury" of old age and would not diminish in any way. Here the sense of the stability of his love for his friend is greater than his sense of change and decay. In the next sonnet Shakespeare says that in this wide universe, his friend is his only possession, "in it thou art my all." Here, the sense of stability comes from the feeling that his friend is a precious asset and that his love for his friend is the most durable aspect of his life.

### **16.7 THE THEME OF MUTABILITY AND DEATH**

In the sonnets, Shakespeare's interest in the passage of time and the allied theme of death and mutability is sufficiently obvious. Not only does it provide the main theme of many of the more important sonnets, it continually encroaches on other interests and overshadows them.

In "Thou survive my well contented day," Shakespeare speaks of his approaching death and refers to himself as his friend's "deceased lover" and,

in the sonnet beginning "No longer mourn for me when I am dead" he foresees the day when he will have "fled from this vile world with vilest worms to dwell". Another reference to his own death occurs in the sonnet, in which he says to his friend, "After my death, dear love, forget me quite". In one of the sonnets, Shakespeare refers to his old age, saying that he symbolizes winter when "yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang upon the boughs". He makes yet another reference to his own death, by speaking of the time "when that fell arrest without bail shall carry me away."

#### **16.8 THE THEME OF THE ARTIFICIALITY OF COSMETICS**

Shakespeare condemns in some of the sonnets, the use of cosmetics to improve one's looks. In one of the sonnets, he speaks of the fashion of "false painting" by means of which men and women try to look attractive. In another sonnet, he deplores the fact that people try to cover their dark complexion with cosmetics in order to look beautiful. Shakespeare also condemns persons who wear on their heads "the golden tresses of the dead."

#### **16.9 THE THEME OF SELF-LOVE**

In some of the opening sonnets, Shakespeare scolds his friend for his self - love and an incapacity to love others. In at least one sonnet, Shakespeare condemns himself for what he calls the sin of self-love. He regrets the fact that his sin completely possesses his eyes, his soul, and every other part of his being. "And for this sin there is no remedy", he says, because "it is so grounded inward in my heart." He fully realizes the "iniquity of this egoism or self- love; " self, so self-loving were iniquity."

#### **16.10 THE THEME OF THE POWER OF POETRY TO IMMORTALIZE A HUMAN BEING**

There are a number of sonnets in which Shakespeare shows his awareness of his genius as a poet, by promising immortality to his friend through his verses. In one sonnet Shakespeare tells his friend :

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see*

*So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

In a famous sonnet, beginning “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments”, the poet claims that his verses will live longer than all the stone monuments and memorials. Shakespeare claims that his friend will live in his poems till the very Judgement Day and then, of course, the friend will come back to life in his own person. In another sonnet, Shakespeare says that his friend's beauty will live in his black lines, which will keep the memory of his friend green. In yet another sonnet Shakespeare writes :

*Your monument shall be my gentle verse.*

The couplet of one of the sonnets reads as follows :

*And thou in this shalt find thy monument,*

*when tyrant's crests and tombs of brass are spent.*

#### **16.11 THE THEME OF POETRY AS AN ART**

While in some of the sonnets Shakespeare promises immortality to his friend through his verses, in a few others, he speaks of his own traditional way of writing poetry, thus contrasting himself with other poets who were experimenting with new verse-techniques. One sonnet beginning with the words, “Why is my verse so barren of new pride,” indicates this clearly. In at least one sonnet, Shakespeare deplores the fact that he has to earn his livelihood through acting on the stage, or through writing plays. He feels sorry that Fortune did not provide for him better "than public means, which public manners breeds".

In view of this variety and multiplicity of themes, these sonnets are for us a rich storehouse, and a rich treasure of ideas and feelings. The light which these sonnets throw on Shakespeare's own nature and temperament greatly enhances our knowledge of the great bard.

### 16.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the themes of Shakespearean Sonnets.
2. Comment on the major themes in the sonnets of Shakespeare with examples from the sonnets you have studied.

### 16.13 LET US SUM UP

Shakespeare's sonnets encompass a rich tapestry of themes. Love, both romantic and platonic, is a prevailing motif, ranging from idealized beauty in Sonnet 18 to the agony of unrequited affection in Sonnet 29. The transient nature of time and mortality is a recurrent concern, as captured in Sonnet 73's contemplation of aging. The rivalry between poets, particularly the "rival poet," offers glimpses into Shakespeare's personal struggles. The "Dark Lady" sonnets delve into the complexities of desire and infidelity. Overall, Shakespeare's sonnets explore human emotions, the passage of time, creative immortality, and the multifaceted nature of love in its various shades.

### 16.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Who Wrote Shakespeare ?* - James Shapiro
2. *A year in the life of William Shakespeare* - James Shapiro

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### **USE OF NATURE IN SONNETS**

#### **Unit Structure**

#### **17.1 Objectives**

#### **17.2 Introduction**

#### **17.3 Nature As Presented In Sonnets**

#### **17.4 Conclusion**

#### **17.5 Suggested Readings**

#### **17.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson is specifically dedicated to the theme of nature in the prescribed sonnets of Shakespeare. The attempt is to acquaint the learner in depth with the themes and the message of the poet.

#### **17.2 INTRODUCTION**

“Shakespeare came out of Nature’s hand like Pallas out of Jove’s head, at full growth and mature.”(George Colman). He was an eminent instance of the truth of that rule, *Poeta non fit sed nascitur*; one is not made, but born a poet.

#### **17.3 NATURE AS PRESENTED IN SONNETS**

Shakespeare, the name itself is a milestone, and his work specially his poetry alone can be said to possess the organic strength and infinite variety, the throbbing fullness, vital complexity, and breathing truth of Nature itself. The poetry of Shakespeare was an inspiration indeed, and he is not

an imitator of Nature, but Nature is used as an instrument and it speaks through him. The sonnets depict the amalgam of music, nature, blind love and panorama of his personal experiences. The Sonnets of Shakespeare provide a luscious treat of Nature. The immense use of Nature and natural components in the sonnets is marvellous. They reveal a true and perfect sense of melody. Musical sounds in every line of the sonnets lift us upto paradise.

In the opening or beginning sonnets, the poet advises his friend to marry and procreate as it is the law of Nature. Arguments are given in order to persuade the fair youth to marry and have children. Marriage is wisdom, it means increase. It is through marriage that one can persevere one's youth and beauty in one's children. Remaining single is folly, decay and death. But Nature has been bountiful to him and he must return her bounty by leaving out images of his beauty in children. Shakespeare says that his friend is Nature's seal; he must print copies of his beauty and not let it die.

The poet has mentioned Nature in the following lines :

*Let those whom nature hath not made for store,  
Harsh, featureless and rude, barrenly perish;  
Look, whom she best endowed, she gave the more,  
Which bounteous gifts thou shouldst in bounty cherish  
She carved thee for her seal , and meant thereby  
Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.*

Again in Sonnet XVII, poet indulges in comparison of his friend's beauty using images from Nature. He talks about friend's eternal summer which does not fade, like the rose. Poet wants to compare his friend with summer's glory,

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ?*



*Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May.  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st.*

In sonnet 33, Nature is symbolised again when Shakespeare writes that he has witnessed many glorious mornings with a splendid sunrise, with the sun flattering the mountain-tops, he is speaking of a natural phenomenon in poetic terms. Here, Shakespeare speaks of the beauty of a natural phenomenon which is sunrise and which offers a splendid sight. The sun is here depicted as kissing with its golden face, the meadows green and brightening the streams with its heavenly alchemy and then being dimmed by a passing cloud. Similarly, the bright light of the friend's love was dimmed. He compares his friend to the sun :

*Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
With all triumphant splendour on my brow,  
But out alack, he was but one hour mine.....  
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.*

Then moving forward, the poet uses nature imagery to console his friend in committing sensual error in Sonnet 35. He tells him not to be grieved at the error. All men make faults—there is nobody on the earth who is perfect. Besides :

*Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud,  
All men make faults.....*

Shakespeare loves his friend so much that he forgets his sin and declares that constancy and truth in love make physical beauty more beautiful. After

the friend's physical beauty is no more, the poet would immortalise his beauty of character in his poetry. Wild rose, which is only beautiful to look upon, soon fades away, but the beauty of the rose is preserved in the form of perfumed essence. So also the poet would preserve the beauty of his friend's character in his verse :

*The rose looks fair, but fairer will it deem.  
For that sweet odour which doth in it live;...  
of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made;  
And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,  
When that shall fade, my verse distills your truth.*

Poet is in full of praise for his friend and says that even time cannot touch him. Time can dig wrinkles on beautiful faces but the poet's verse will immortalise his friend. He uses nature beautifully to symbolise time :

*Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.*

Nature is again used when he compares his friend to a rose :

*For nothing this wide universe I call,  
Save thou my rose, in it thou art my all.*

In Sonnet 99 Shakespeare has related, point by point, the violet, the lily, the marjoram, and the rose (red and white) together with the "vengeful canker" of destruction, to separate the excellences of the beauty of his friend.

Roses had an intense poetic appeal for Shakespeare because of the rich impressions of human loveliness and pathos which the word "roses"

conveyed.

Shakespeare was also very sensitive to the musical part of Nature. In Sonnet 102, he refers to the “wild music” that “burthens every bough”. The songs of the birds, like the skylark and the nightingale appeal to him. In sonnets 29 and 102, he writes of “the lark at break of day arising” and the nightingale who :

*In summer's from doth sing...*

*And stops her pipe in growth of ripen days*

At the advent of the winter, he gives a picture of desolation in Sonnet 73 :

*The bare ruin'd choirs,*

*Where late the sweet birds sang...*

*In Sonnet 97 :*

*And The dull cheer of birds song.*

Sensitive to the charms of music, Shakespeare's love for music is seen in the sonnets :

*Mark how one string, sweet husband in another,*

*Strikes each by mutual ordering ;*

*Resembling sire and child and happy mother,*

*Who all, in one pleasing note do sing.*

Like a gardener, Shakespeare knows in Sonnet 18, how a storm or frost can spoil the flowers :

*Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May*

Objects of Nature are clearly portrayed when poet talks of love. He says love is not love, which alters when it alteration finds. It is a fixed beacon. In Sonnet 116, he defines love :

*Is an everfixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,  
It is a star to every wandering bark.*

Poet also expresses the transience of beauty in the defeat of summer with its vigorous sap and lusty leaves, at the hands of “hideous winter” and “never-resting time.” Impersonal nature has acquired human properties, without violation, without ceasing it to be itself. Time, winter and summer are protagonists of a universal drama :

*For never resting time leads summer on  
To hideous winter and confound him there  
Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone  
Beauty over snow'd and bareness everywhere.*

In this sonnet, the Friend is not directly addressed, he appears, however, in the next group, described through the same pattern of images :

*Then let not winter's rugged hand deface  
In thee thy summer.*

Shakespeare has used nature not for a decorative purpose. But he has blended it in such a way that his poetry becomes a spiritual achievement, and in a deep sense shows a procession of a mysterious splendour. The rich gems of earth and sea are regarded as a natural love-comparison :

*And every fair with his fair doth rehearse,  
Making a couplement of proud compare  
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems*

Though cruel, the dark lady is “ the fairest and most precious jewel,” and the image of Shakespeare's friend hangs “like a jewel ” before Shakespeare's soul at night. Even the friend's faults are to be valued as a poor “ jewel”

as the basest jewel is valued when worn by “a throned queen” on her finger. The friend's tears are as pearls, and are called rich :

*Ah but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,*

*And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.*

One of the sonnets is full of suggestions of “rich”, “treasure”, “stones of worth”, “chest” and “robe” and contains the splendid line : “Captain jewels in the caranet”. In Sonnet 65, we come across these striking lines :

*Where alack*

*Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid ?*

Such symbols blend with rich merchandise and sea-voyages. Love is surely too rich to be treated in terms of merchandise and sea- voyages. Shakespeare regarded this love as “the star to every wandering bark” whose worth is unknown although its height be measurable. This love was “the crowning glory of creation,” and more than that, jewels, as already pointed out, suggest spiritual values, and this love is also religious.

Then there are sonnets in which clusters of king, gold, and sun appear together in “the gilded monuments of princes”. Sun and gold come together, when the sun's “gold complexion ” is dimmed. All three (king, gold, and sun) figure together in Sonnet 25, where great princes' favourites are compared to the marigold opening to the sun's eye; and the sun makes his “golden pilgrimage” till finally he sets. Just as Nature has been humanized, so human personality is assimilated to nature; and by means of the imagery both nature and man take their parts in a single drama which, dispensing with the need for a multiplicity of stage-characters, centres upon the fate of the sonnet-hero.

Such is the experience, or phenomenon, calling forth the sweetest and grandest symbols—natural, human and divine—to depict and describe “this composed wonder of your frame ”.

## **17.4 CONCLUSION**

Shakespeare is above all writers, the poet of Nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of man and his environment, manners and life. The vast use of symbols and images from Nature in sonnets make them melodious, lyrical and musical. Whether it is to describe the positive aspect of love and beauty or the darker side of it, Nature plays a vital role in describing them aesthetically, morally, spiritually — and justifies the poet's point of view.

## **17.5 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *The Women in Shakespeare's life* - Ivor Brown
2. *The complete works* - William Shakespeare

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**THE IMAGERY, SYMBOLISM AND METAPHORS IN  
SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS**

**Unit Structure****18.1 Objectives****18.2 Introduction****18.3 Imagery****18.4 Symbolism****18.4.1 The Rose As A Symbol****18.4.2 The Lily And Some Other Flowers As Symbols****18.4.3 Kingship As A Symbol And The Association Of Gold With Kingship****18.4.4 Earthly Kingship, Related to the Sun (The King Of Nature)****18.4.5 King, Gold And Sun Figures****18.4.6 The Gems And The Pearls As Symbols****18.5 Use Of Metaphors And Similes****18.6 Examination Oriented Questions****18.7 Suggested Readings****18.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson is specifically composed to highlight the major symbols, images and metaphors in the sonnets. How imagery, symbolism and metaphors go in the making of Shakesporean style of writing is discussed at length.

## 18.2 INTRODUCTION

The works of Shakespeare have an eternal freshness about them. Though three hundred years have passed since his works were written, yet their freshness and their appeal is permanent in literature. Age cannot wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety. Though we may read the poetry or sonnets for the hundredth time, yet not a jot or little of their beauty is abated. In Dr. Johnson's words, "The stream of time, which is continually washing dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare." Poetic reputations blaze up and dwindle and the fire which heartened one generation will be cold ashes to the next. Yet for four centuries, Shakespeare's fame has glowed so steadily that he has come to be looked upon as the supreme expression not only of the English race but of the whole world.

*Others abide our questions,*

*thou art free*

*Our topping knowledge*

## 18.3 IMAGERY

Shakespeare's imagery is a fascinating subject of study and it throws valuable light on the various aspects of his art and of his personality. The imagery in his poetry has been studied in depth by noted scholars. They have shown that many of Shakespeare's images are conventional and literary, drawn from a host of contemporary and ancient writers. As Sidney Lee says, "The typical collection of Elizabethan sonnets was a mosaic of plagiarism, a medley of imitative or assimilative studies. Echoes of the French or the Italian sonneteers are distinctly heard." His imagery is increasingly drawn from his own close observation of the world around, from the every day scenes and sights of nature and the facts of everyday life. It becomes more vivid, more pictorial and throws more valuable light on the mind and art of the poet. The imagery gives immediacy and precision and it demands and fosters an alert attention. But the range of emotions liberated by any



one image is narrower, though not always less intense.

### **Flower Imagery**

A number of images cluster round flowers. The use of flower imagery was a fashion of the times, but Shakespeare's flower images are startling and even though conventional, show the hand of the master. In Sonnet 94 we get :

*The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,  
Though to itself it only live and die.*

Here, the poet talks of people who can hold their passions in check, who can be seen loving yet keep a cool heart, who move passion in others, yet are cold and unmoved themselves—they rightly inherit from heaven large gifts, for they husband them; whereas passionate, intemperate natures squander their endowments. These self contained persons may seem to lack generosity; but then, without making voluntary gifts, they give inevitably, even as the summer's flower is sweet to the summer, though it live and die only to itself.

Shakespeare was extremely sensitive to fragrance. He loved “the sweet smell of different flowers.” Rose and lily occur frequently. In Sonnet 54, he pays homage to the “rose,” the symbol of youth and beauty and says that unlike other flowers, roses, even when faded, never give an offensive smell :

*Of the sweet deaths are sweetest odours made.’*

The poet hates flowers, which are so beautiful and fragrant while alive and give out foul smell like that of weeds when dead. In Sonnet 69, he says. “To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds.”

Again in Sonnet 94, Shakespeare compares the Dark Lady to a festering lily :

*For sweetest things sourest by their deeds,  
Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds.*

## Images Drawn from the World of Music

Shakespeare was also very sensitive to sound. In Sonnet 102, he refers to the “wild music” that “burthens every bough”. The songs of the birds, like the skylark and the nightingale, appeal to him. In sonnet 29 and 102, he writes of, “the lark at break of day arising” and the nightingale who in summer's from doth sing,

*And stops her pipe in growth of riper days.*

At the advent of the winter, he gives a picture of desolation “the bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang”. Sensitive to the charms of music, Shakespeare's love of music is seen in the Sonnets :

*Mark how one string, sweet husband in another,  
Strikes each by mutual ordering :  
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,  
who all, in one pleasing note do sing.*

Like a gardener, poet knows in Sonnet 18, how a storm or frost can spoil the flowers :

*"Rough winds do shake the darkling buds of May."*

A number of metaphors and images are concerned with fire, furnace, a blast and lightning.

“It has become a common place,” says L.C. Knight” “that one of the most consistently developed themes of Shakespeare's sonnets is time.” There is a sharpness and urgency of phrase and however fast we hold to the thread of sense and argument, the imagery involves us in a world where Everything that grows :

*Holds in perfection but a little moment      ...  
Where in short, nothing stands  
but for time's scythe to mow.*

The word time appears for as many as seventy-eight times in sonnets 1-126, although strangely enough, there is no reference to 'Time' in the sonnets which follow. Time is the old fleet-footed gipsy man, who is always moving fast; and Time is the grim and destructive force, who is a devourer, a spoiler and a thief, at whose touch cities, buildings and empires crumble down like a pack of cards. Time "Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth," It devours youth, bloom and beauty.

*"And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow."*

#### **18.4 SYMBOLISM**

The various natural and cosmic symbolisms of the sonnets grow from a soil of normal Shakespearean imagery : flowers, crops, and seasons; moon and stars; effects of winter, cloud, storm and tempests, inundation and wrecks. According to G. Wilson Knight, the use of symbols by Shakespeare in his sonnets, makes the sonnets throb and vibrate with a greater vitality, and imparts to them greater vigour and appeal. The use of symbols in these sonnets deepens our sense-perception, and enables us to enjoy a rich physical apprehension, the flush and bloom of a young life, with all the perfumes of spring in company. G. Wilson Knight identifies five principal symbols which occur in the course of the sonnets most frequently. These are the rose, the king, the sun, gold and jewels. The first, namely the rose, which represents the other flowers as well, occurs on the natural plane. Kingship and gold belong to the human plane; the sun is universal in its significance and implications ; and the jewels, ironically enough, have been used for spiritual purpose.

##### **18.4.1 The Rose as a Symbol**

Sonnet 109 closes with the following couplet :

*For nothing this wide universe I call,  
Save thou my rose, in it thou art my all.*

Here, the rose symbolizes truth and is contrasted with the shames and the vices which prevail in this world. If there are any faults in Shakespeare's friend, then justification for those faults has been provided much earlier where Shakespeare says that roses have thorns and silver fountains have mud. The beauty of Shakespeare's friend encloses his sins as the rose may hide a canker.

#### **18.4.2 The Lily and some other Flowers as symbols**

The lily, being also one of the prettiest flowers, may be bracketed with the rose in this context. "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds", says Shakespeare. Shakespeare's friend is the pattern of both the lily's white colour and the rose's deep vermillion. In Sonnet 99, Shakespeare has related, point by point, the violet, the lily, the marjoram and the rose (red and white) together with the "vengeful canker" of destruction, to separate the excellences of the beauty of his friend.

#### **18.4.3 Kingship as a symbol and the Association of Gold with Kingship**

As for the symbol of Kingship, Shakespeare has addressed his friend as "Lord of my love", and describes him as his sovereign who radiates worth. The friend is crowned with various gifts of nature and fortune especially "all those beauties whereof now he's king."

Kingship is always associated with gold, and golden images occur repeatedly. There is "gilded honour shamefully misplaced". Poets flatter Shakespeare's friend with a "golden quill". The hair of Shakespeare's friend is contrasted with false "golden tresses". Shakespeare's poetry can make his friend live longer than "a gilded tomb". More important is the eye of Shakespeare's friend "gilding the object" on which it gazes.

#### **18.4.4 Earthly Kingship, Related to the Sun (the King of Nature)**

The sun is Nature's king, and also pre-eminently golden. Throughout the sonnets, the king and the sun are compared and brought into a relationship with each other.

#### **18.4.5 King, Gold and Sun figures**

There are sonnets in which groupings of king, gold and sun appear together. King and gold are mentioned together in “the gilded” monuments of princes. Sun and gold come together, when the sun's “gold complexion” is dimmed. All three i.e. king, sun and gold figure together where great princes, favourites are compared to the marigold opening to the sun's eye and the sun making his “golden pilgrimage” till finally he sets.

#### **18.4.6 The Gems and the Pearls as Symbols**

The rich gems of earth and sea are regarded as a natural love comparison. Though cruel, the dark lady is “the fairest and most precious jewel and the image of Shakespeare's friend's hangs “like a jewel” before Shakespeare's soul. The friend's tears are as pearls. One of the sonnets is full of suggestions of “rich”, “treasure,” “Stones of worth,” “chest”, and “robe,” and contains the splendid line “captain jewels in the carcanet.”

### **18.5 USE OF METAPHORS AND SIMILES**

In simile, Shakespeare's bias is towards expressiveness. A majority of Shakespeare's similes are drawn from the familiar experience of simple humanity and, therefore, they impart to the particular sonnets, a sense of immediate emotional contact. In one of the sonnets, Shakespeare compares himself to a baby crying for his mother when the mother is running to catch one of her chickens, which has broken loose from her grip. In this sonnet, the emotional relationship between a mother and a child is defined and made immediate by the simile. In sonnet 52, Shakespeare compares himself to a rich miser whose “blessed key” enables him to open his sweet treasure box. Here, it is the human emotion implicit in the comparison which produces the chief effect.

In Sonnet 1, the poet tells his friend that according to Nature's law, all beautiful things should procreate themselves. It is the law of Nature and he should also act according to this law. He should marry and have children. The friend is represented as a “rose”, a metaphor drawn from the world of nature

where the rose is the most beautiful of all in the world of vegetation. The rose metaphor is deftly humanized in the phrase, “darling buds of May.”

**Conclusion.** The immense use of metaphors, similes and symbols and images makes the sonnets a feast to the eyes, ears and minds of readers. A paradigm of eternal music, rhyme and verse, gets amalgamated in the form of the sonnets.

### **18.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q. 1. What are the themes of Shakespearean sonnets ? Discuss with illustrations from the prescribed sonnets.
- Q. 2. What is the nature of love as depicted by Shakespeare in the sonnets addressed to the Dark Lady ?
- Q. 3. Consider Shakespeare’s sonnets as a “criticism of life”.
- Q. 4. How far is it true that Shakespeare’s sonnets are autobiographical ? Analyse critically.
- Q. 5. Explain the metaphors, similies and satire in the sonnets of Shakespeare.
- Q. 6. Explain the structure of Shakespearean sonnets.

### **18.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- 1. Ivor Brown. *The Women in Shakespeare’s Life*.
- 2. William Shakespeare. *The Complete Works*.
- 3. Wilson Knight. *The Wheels of Fire*.

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**TIRED WITH ALL THESE, FOR RESTFUL DEATH I CRY  
(SONNET - 66)**

**Unit Structure**

- 19.1. Objectives**
- 19.2. Introduction to Sonnets and Type**
- 19.3. Sonnet and its History**
- 19.4. When I consider anything that grows**
- 19.5 Tired with all these**
  - 19.5.1. Summary of the Sonnet**
  - 19.5.2. Paraphrase of the Sonnet**
  - 19.5.3. Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet**
  - 19.5.4. Theme of the Sonnet**
  - 19.5.5. Let us sum up**
  - 19.5.6. Glossary**
- 19.6. Self-Assessment Questions**
- 19.7. Multiple Choice Questions**
- 19.8. Fill in the Blanks**
- 19.9. Examination Oriented Questions**
- 19.10. Answer Keys**
- 19.11. Reference and Suggested Readings**

## 19.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this lesson are

- a) To acquaint the learner with sonnets.
- b) To explore sonnets; types; and trace its history.
- c) To familiarise the learner with the structure of Shakespearean sonnet.
- d) To acquaint the learner with the thematic concerns of the sonnet.

## 19.2 INTRODUCTION TO SONNETS AND TYPE

Sonnet word is derived from the Italian word *Sonetto*, which means a ‘little sound’ or ‘song’. Sonnet consists of fourteen lines (except for Curtail sonnets) usually in iambic pentameter with considerable variations in rhyme scheme.

There are three basic sonnets forms namely:

- a. The Petrarchan or Italian sonnet: This comprises of an Octave (eight stanzas), rhyming ‘abbaabba’ and a sestet (six stanzas), rhyming ‘cdecde’ or ‘cdcdcd’ or in any combination except a rhyming couplet.
- b. The Spenserian sonnet: This comprises of three quatrains (four stanzas) and couplet (two stanzas) rhyming abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee.
- c. The Shakespearean or English sonnet: Formed of three quatrains (four stanzas) and a couplet, rhyming abab, cdcd, efef, gg.

Petrarchan or Italian sonnet originated in Italy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was perfected by Petrarch (1304-74). It is a fourteen lines poem divided into two parts: the first eight lines comprises of ‘octave’ or ‘octet’ rhyming abba, abba; the second part is formed of six lines or ‘sestet’ usually rhyming cde, cde and other times with variations. As a rule the octave presents the theme or problem of the poem: the thesis, and then there is a turn or ‘volta’ followed by six lines (sestet), resolving it.

The Spenserian sonnet is quite different from that of the Petrarchan sonnet. It is divided into four parts: three quatrains (three paragraphs of four stanzas each)



and a concluding couplet rhyming abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee. The Spenserian sonnet is also called 'linked sonnet' because of its peculiar rhyme-scheme where the three quatrains are linked together: the last line of the first quatrain rhymes with the first line of the second quatrain; and similarly, the last line of second quatrain rhymes with the first line of the third quatrain. The last concluding couplet sums up the idea which had been developed in the preceding three quatrains.

The Shakespearean or the English sonnet is very similar to the Spenserian sonnet having only few difference i.e. the three quatrains in the Shakespearean sonnet are not linked together, whereas in the Spenserian sonnet they are linked together. The other difference relates to rhyme scheme, the Shakespearean rhyme-scheme forms: abab, cdcd, efef, gg. Though Shakespeare and Spencer did not follow the Petrarchan mode of sonnets into the octave and the sestet, yet there is an invisible division of Shakespearean and the Spenserian sonnets into octaves and sestets, because the arguments in a great number of sonnets of both have silent pauses at the eighth line.

### 19.3 SONNET AND ITS HISTORY

The sonnet originated in Italy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and developed when the spirit of the *dolce stil novo* (sweet new style) in poetry was raging the country. It is generally accepted that it was Giacomo da Lentino or Jacopo da Lentini who flourished in the early part of 13<sup>th</sup> century, invented the sonnet form. The sonnet arrived in England in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is generally accepted that Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) were the pioneers of sonnet. The Elizabethan England became the heyday of the sonnet, and most of the poets of that period tried their hands in sonnet, and many of them composed some beautiful-sequence.

The first major English sonnet cycle was *Astrophel and Stella*, written by Sir Philip Sidney (1580-83) and printed in 1591. There followed in rapid succession Daniel's *Delia* (1592), Thomas Lodge's *Phyllis* (1593), Henry Constable's *Diana* (1594), Michael Drayton's *Idea's Mirror* (1594) and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595). The greatest sequence of all was Shakespeare's sonnets' not printed until

1609, but some have circulated for at least eleven years before. He wrote 154 sonnets and are generally divided into two broad groups: sonnets 1-126 are devoted to a Fair Youth who is supposedly the poet's friend, and therefore are called the 'Fair Youth Sonnets'; and sonnets 127-154 are devoted to a 'Black Mistress' to whom the poet was spiritually and, perhaps, carnally, attracted, and so these sonnets are called the 'Dark Lady Sonnets'.

#### **19.4 WHEN I CONSIDER EVERYTHING THAT GROWS**

##### **Discussion and Analysis:**

In Sonnet 15's first eight lines, the poet surveys how objects mutate — decay — over time: "... everything that grows / Holds in perfection but a little moment." In other words, life is transitory and ever-changing. Even the youth's beauty will fade over time, but because the poet knows that this metamorphosis is inevitable, he gains an even stronger appreciation of the young man's beautiful appearance in the present time — at least in the present time within the sonnet. Ironically, then, the youth's beauty is both transitory and permanent — transitory because all things in nature mutate and decay over time, and permanent because the inevitable aging process, which the poet is wholly aware of as inevitable, intensifies the young man's present beauty: Generally, the more momentary an object lasts, the more vibrant and intense is its short life span.

Sonnet 15 also introduces another major theme that will be more greatly developed in later sonnets: the power of the poet's verse to memorialize forever the young man's beauty. "I ingraft you new," the poet says at the end of the sonnet, by which the poet means that, however steady is the charge of decay, his verses about the young man will keep the youth's beauty always fresh, always new; the sonnets immortalize this beauty. Ironically, the poet's sonnets serve the same purpose as a son whom the poet wants the young man to father: They perpetuate the youth's beauty just as a son would. In fact, the sonnets are even more immortal than a son. The sonnets continue to be read even today, whereas the young man's progeny may have completely died out.

### 19.5 Sonnet 66 ‘Tired With all these, for restful death I cry’ (text)

*Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry, —  
As, to behold Desert a beggar born,  
And needy Nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest Fair unhappily forsworn, 4  
And gilded Honour shamefully misplac'd,  
And maiden Virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right Perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,  
And strength by limping Sway disabled, 8  
And art made tongue-tied by Authority,  
And Folly, Doctor-like, controlling Skill,  
And simple Truth miscall'd Simplicity,  
And captive Good attending captain Ill: 12  
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone —  
Save that, to die, I' leave my love alone.*

#### 19.5.1 Summary of the Sonnet

The poet sees in the world and the arrangements of society so many things abnormal and wrong, that, in his weariness and loathing, he cries out for death, though unwilling to leave his friend. The tone of the sonnet pervades a great intense melancholy and the poet is wearied by his observations of many painful facts like depravity, worthlessness, betrayal, violation, rudeness, suppression, and all that is dominated by the ill over good deeds in the world he lives, that he is crying for absolute rest in the form of his death. The poet certainly desires to die as early as possible, but he stops short of desiring so, because he knows that if he dies, he will have to leave behind the Fair youth all alone.

#### 19.5.2 Paraphrase of the Sonnet

*Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry, —  
As, to behold Desert a beggar born,  
And needy Nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest Fair unhappily forsworn,*

In the first quatrain the poet tries to emphasize the depravity of the world and because of which, he (first line) wishes for a restful death. (Second line) The poet says that like an empty, barren desert, he was born a poor man and that he got no help from anyone. In the third lines he says that he has seen worthless person (*needy Nothing*) full of (*trimm'd*) mirth and carelessness. And finally adds a painful observation, (the last line) that sometimes absolutely faithful persons (*purest Fair*) are deceived and left in desolation.

*And gilded Honour shamefully misplac'd,  
And maiden Virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right Perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,  
And strength by limping Sway disabled,*

In the second quatrain the poet continues his view about the ways of society and says that, (first line) that at times professional honour or positions are shamelessly conferred upon undeserving persons. In the second line he expresses his disgust about how chastity of maidens is sometimes violated by force and how genuinely honest persons or good deeds of such people are sometimes wrongly disgraced by none other than persons who are in power (third line) and how little strength/goodness existing are slowly crippled to non-existence (last line).

*And art made tongue-tied by Authority,  
And Folly, Doctor-like, controlling Skill,  
And simple Truth miscall'd Simplicity,  
And captive Good attending captain Ill:*

In this third quatrain the poet further expresses the aggravated situation of society and says that, (first line) how art which has the power to praise good and criticize evil is controlled by the people in power, and how unintelligent persons or foolish people assume or pretend the air of intelligence (second line), and how straightforward and sincere honest people are wrongly thought to be stupid or dishonest (third line) and how, goodness being enslaved by the rising ills and making it subservient to evils.

*Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone —*

*Save that, to die, I' leave my love alone.*

the poet in this last couplet concludes his sonnet and says that, he is tired with all these harsh realities and wishes to be gone far away (first line) and death is the only way for this deliverance, but then, he also realizes that it is hard to accept this because if he dies, he naturally has to leave behind his love all alone which he do not want to (last line).

### 19.5.3 Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet

John Kerrigan has aptly compared this sonnet in his *William Shakespeare: The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* with the Hamlet's famous soliloquy 'to be, or not to be', where the Prince describes '*Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely*'. However, here the poet is wearied by his observations of many painful realities of his society and therefore he is crying for an absolute detachment in the form of death. Ingram and Redpath's comment on the expression '*needy nothing*' in the third line as 'a personification of worthless creature of no gifts of qualities', with no social pity extended by fellow human beings. '*Nothing*' as applied to person is a strong term in Elizabethan English. Cloten is '*that harsh, noble, simple nothing*', *Cymbeline* Act III Scene IV; and to Hamlet Claudius is '*a thing....of no thing*', *Hamlet* Act IV Scene II quotes Ingram and Redpath and makes clear that the term '*nothing*', in the Elizabethan age, often meant a person of no significance.

Ingram and Redpath write about lines 9 and 10: "*Learning and science are silenced by those in authority, and stupid ignorance, giving itself the air of an expert, controls and directs the real technicians. 'A number of commentators have either seen or conjectured a reference here to censorship difficulties of the players; but we regard the point as inconclusive'*". However, it won't be wrong to say that there may be some allusions in this sonnet to the anomaly in the ideal social order or hierarchy during the Elizabethan period, by some of which the poet might have been painfully affected.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> line, the poet repeats what he has said in the very beginning '*Tir'd with all these*' dejected unsocial experiences and wishes for a peaceful death. But

he stops short of so desiring, because he knows that if he dies, he will have to leave behind the Fair youth all alone.

#### **19.5.4 Theme of the Sonnet**

The central theme of the sonnet is poet's lament about the corrupt and dishonest world, from which he desires to be released. The sonnet strikes a chord in almost any age, for it quite rightly epitomize the man's miseries; where graft and influenced people reign supreme, and whereas the one with inherent merit is never guaranteed of success. The dependent social structures and conditions aid and promote the unworthy, the malicious, the wealthy, the incompetent and those who are just good at manipulation of the system. The corrupt system is so malice that it has gripped all forms of intellectual development within its vicious circle and desiring to do well and be good is paid with social castration.

#### **19.5.5 Let Us Sum Up**

This sonnet belongs to the first group of sonnets or the 'Fair Youth Sonnets' and is dedicated to supposedly a poet's close friend and lover, the anonymous Fair Youth. The poet expresses his unconditional love for the person whom he loves and, though he hates the society and its lowly fellow dwellers to the extent of detest, he is willing to accept this social condition if he has the opportunity to live by his side.

#### **19.5.6 Glossary**

*trimm'd in jollity*: Full of mirth or ignorance.

*forsworn*: to reject or renounce under oath.

*strumpeted*: dishonored; to take away with force or to be sold.

*Limping Sway*: a very slow injured, helpless movement.

#### **19.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. With whom the poet is tired of?
2. Why the poet rejects the idea of dying?
3. To whom the sonnet is addressed to?
4. How many types of sonnet are there?

### 19.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The sonnet '*Tired With all these, for restful death I cry*' is addressed to
  - A. Dark Lady
  - B. The Earl
  - C. The Fair Youth
  - D. None of the above
2. *William Shakespeare: The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* was written by
  - A. Ingram and Redpath
  - B. John Kerrigan
  - C. Dr. Samuel Johnson
  - D. John Dryden
3. The first major English sonnet cycle was
  - A. *Shakespearean Sonnets*
  - B. *Amoretti*
  - C. *Astrophil and Stella*
  - D. None of the above
4. The word sonnet is derived from Italian word *Sonetto*, which means a
  - A. 'little sound' or 'song'
  - B. A Poem
  - C. A Short Lyric
  - D. A Verse

### 19.8 FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The three basic forms of sonnets are namely \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ sonnets.
2. The rhyming scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Sonnets are formed of \_\_\_\_\_ lines iambic pentameter.

4. Sonnet 66 the poet does not want to die because of his love for\_\_\_\_\_.

### 19.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Briefly analyze the central idea of the sonnet 66.
2. Discuss the themes of Shakespearean sonnets.
3. Write a note on the theme of sonnet *Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry.*

### 19.10 ANSWER KEYS

#### Multiple Choice Questions

1. C, 2. B, 3.C, 4. A.

#### Fill in the Blanks

1. Petrarchan or Italian; Spenserian; and Shakespearean or English.
2. abab, cdcd, efef, gg
3. Fourteen
4. Fair youth.

### 19.11 REFERENCE & SUGGESTED READINGS

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**NO MORE BE GRIEV'D AT THAT WHICH THOU HAST DONE**  
**(SONNET - 35)**

**Unit Structure****20.1 Objectives****20.2 Let me not to the marriage of true minds****20.3 Sonnet 35 'No more be griev'd at that which thou has't done' (text)****20.3.1 Summary of the Sonnet****20.3.2 Paraphrase of the Sonnet****20.3.3 Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet****20.3.4 Theme****20.3.5 Let us sum up****20.3.6 Glossary****20.4 Self-Assessment Questions****20.5 Multiple Choice Questions****20.6 Fill in the Blanks****20.7 Examination Oriented Questions****20.8 Answer Key****20.9 Reference and Suggested Readings****20.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this lesson are

- a) To acquaint the learner with the sonnet.

- b) To explore the sonnet and analyse it critically.
- c) To analyse the thematic concerns of the sonnet.

## 20.2 LET ME NOT TO THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

### Discussion:

This sonnet 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 one. In the second quatrain, the speaker tells what love is through a metaphor: a guiding star to lost ships ("wand'ring barks") that is not susceptible to storms (it "looks on tempests and is never shaken"). In the third quatrain, the speaker again describes what love is not: it is not susceptible to time. Though beauty fades in time as rosy lips and cheeks come within "his bending sickle's compass," love does not change with hours and weeks: instead, it "bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom." In the couplet, the speaker attests to his certainty that love is as he says: if his statements can be proved to be error, he declares, he must never have written a word, and no man can ever have been in love.

### Analysis

Along with Sonnets 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") and 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), Sonnet 116 is one of the most famous poems in the entire sequence. The definition of love that it provides is among the most often quoted and anthologized in the poetic canon. Essentially, this sonnet presents the extreme ideal of romantic love: it never changes, it never fades, it outlasts death and admits no flaw. What is more, it insists that this ideal is the only love that can be called "true"—if love is mortal, changing, or impermanent, the speaker writes, then no man ever loved. The basic division of this poem's argument into the various parts of the sonnet form is extremely simple: the first quatrain says what love is not (changeable), the second quatrain says what it is (a fixed guiding star unshaken by tempests), the third quatrain says more specifically what it is not ("time's fool"—that is, subject to change in the passage of time), and the couplet announces the

speaker's certainty. What gives this poem its rhetorical and emotional power is not its complexity; rather, it is the force of its linguistic and emotional conviction.

The language of Sonnet 116 is not remarkable for its imagery or metaphoric range. In fact, its imagery, particularly in the third quatrain (time wielding a sickle that ravages beauty's rosy lips and cheeks), is rather standard within the sonnets, and its major metaphor (love as a guiding star) is hardly startling in its originality. But the language is extraordinary in that it frames its discussion of the passion of love within a very restrained, very intensely disciplined rhetorical structure. With a masterful control of rhythm and variation of tone—the heavy balance of “Love's not time's fool” to open the third quatrain; the declamatory “O no” to begin the second—the speaker makes an almost legalistic argument for the eternal passion of love, and the result is that the passion seems stronger and more urgent for the restraint in the speaker's tone.

### 20.3 SONNET 35 ‘*NO MORE BE GRIEV'D AT THAT WHICH THOU HAST DONE*’ (TEXT)

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done:  
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud; 4  
All men make faults, and even I in this,  
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing their (thy) sins more than their (thy) sins are: 8  
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense —  
Thy adverse party is thy advocate—  
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:  
Such civil war is in my love and hate 12  
That I an accessory needs must be  
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

#### 20.3.1 Summary of the Sonnet

In this sonnet the poet comforts his friend and tells him not to feel grieved at

the past deeds which his friend should not have done. He says that even the most perfect things in nature also come with shortcomings. The beautiful rose have thorns, pristine water fountains have mud, clouds and eclipses (solar and lunar) cover beauty of moon and sun, and sweetest buds of flowers are sometimes infested with Cankers and never have a chance to bloom. Likewise, the poet enforces that, all perfect men make fault and even the poet himself, at moment, is at fault when he ignores and compares the errors done by his beloved friend with nature and hence forgiving him. He further adds that in this process of ignoring he is corrupting and thus encouraging his friend in his misdeed therefore the poet is himself the petitioner and the advocate of this wrong.

### 20.3.2 Paraphrase of the Sonnet

*No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done:  
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud;*

In the first quatrain the poet develops the argument of the sonnet, (first line) the poet pleads to his friend that he should not feel sad at what he has already done, because (second line) he says that every beautiful or perfect things come with an ugly or fault part, even roses have thorns, and fresh water fountain has mud, and adds that sun and moon are also stained by clouds and eclipses (third line), and that sweetest buds of flowers are infested with pests (fourth line).

*All men make faults, and even I in this,  
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing their (thy) sins more than their (thy) sins are:*

In the second quatrain the poet while persuading his friend against his remorse tells him that all men commit error and even the poet himself is at one (first line) when he encourage his friend against his mistake and further compares it with nature (second line) and thus corrupting him and being an accomplice (third line) in the same. The poet also expresses the fact that forgiving his fault, he himself

(poet), is committing a grave error (fourth line).

*For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense –  
Thy adverse party is thy advocate—  
And ‘gainst myself a lawful plea commence:  
Such civil war is in my love and hate*

In these lines the poet further accuses himself of arguing for, or justifying the Fair Youth's sensual error (first line). In the next line the poet expresses his troubled situation (dilemma) where he is himself the petitioner and advocate of his complaints against his friend (second and third line). This is the cause of the poet's harboring hatred for the youth for whom, all at the same, he has all love and therefore there is a mental conflict within him regarding whether he will love the youth or whether he will hate him (last line).

*That I an accessory needs must be  
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.*

In these concluding couplets the poet says that, both he and the youth are involved in corruption, and the poet himself is, of necessity, rather, an accomplice of the youth in this act of misdeed (first line). He further very intimately calls his friend an affectionate burglar who has cleverly robbed him.

### **20.3.3 Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet**

The poem is among the better-known and more frequently anthologized of the sonnets and fall in the group of 'The Fair Youth sonnets'. It is in continuation with the theme with two sonnets that precede it, in which the poet expresses and lay charges against the fair youth for his betrayal. In this sonnet while forgiving his beloved's error, because he loves him too much to continue resenting him, he is also absolutely aware that in justifying the offense of the fair youth, he too has become an accomplice of the crime. What is most striking thing about this sonnet is not that the poet forgives the youth, but the fact that the poet actually blames himself for the youth's betrayal more than who has actually committed the crime. His sense of guilt is emphasized by the legal terminology incorporated in the sonnet: "*Thy adverse party is thy advocate — / And ‘gainst myself a lawful plea commence.*"

Shakespeare is commonly regarded as an expert at evoking ambivalence and creating complex personae. One of the most apparent points that critics have addressed in this sonnet is the duality of the poem's tone. In the first quatrain the poet describes what at first appears to be praise and is followed by the other two quatrains, in which the speaker addresses lover's grave sensual sin against which he himself tries to defend. This ambivalence further develops confusion and dilemma as the poet poses himself as the pleader as well as the defender of his fair Youth's error and finally concluding as an accomplice and justifying to his mistake.

In the first quatrain of the sonnet, the poet is rationalizing for the wrong done to him by the youth, and he persuades him not to grieve anymore for the wrongs done by him as it is only natural and an inseparable quality of the creation. Therefore, the poet is justifying the wrongs done to him by the fair youth. On the other hand, once he has justified the deed, the poet at once feels the vainness of his decision, because he is justifying a comparison between the youth's sensual faults to the faults in the nature. The poet further acknowledges his own fault because he is ignoring the fair youth's offences, and thus, he says, he is himself doing corruption.

The last line of the second quatrain is very confusing. Many critics and editors of Shakespearean text are of opinion that the word '*their*' which occurs twice in the line is a misprint of the word '*thy*'. Kerrigan, one of the supporter of this view, explained this line thus: "As he (poet) provides the young man (fair youth) with comparisons potent enough to excuse him from sins worse than those he has actually committed, the poet makes fault not only by tolerating misconduct but by displaying the doting weakness which makes him overindulgent to his beloved, and by bringing sophistry to the defense of *sensuality*, using a faculty which should know better than to absolve an instinctive amiss".

The poet further accuses himself for justifying the fair youth's carnal corruption and the phrase '*sensual fault*' may refer to the fair youth's promiscuity and physical relation with the dark lady. This might be the cause of the poet's developing hatred for the fair youth along with the spasmodic affectionate feeling.

Therefore, the poet is confused whether to curse him or to accept his mistake and there is a mental conflict which is creating dilemma whether he should love the youth or whether he should hate him. Finally in the concluding couplet, the poet agrees that both he and the youth are equally involved, and that the poet himself is compulsively an accomplice of the sweet youth in his act of carnal corruption whereby the youth has stealthily robbed the poet of his possession which might refer to the Dark Lady.

#### **20.3.4 Theme**

Sonnet 35 is based on the theme of forgiveness whereby the poet though being utterly shattered by the unfaithfulness of his friend, the Fair Youth, he unwillingly overlooks his mistake and decides to continue loving him. To console himself he takes the advantage of nature and compares the fault in his friend with the lack and contrary in the nature. It begins with parallel objects that, although beautiful, contain some sort of imperfection: "*Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud.*" Likewise, clouds, which are a recurring image in the sonnets concerning moral transgressions, darken both night and day, additional favorite images used by the poet. The poet therefore absolves the young man and defends the youth's betrayal.

#### **20.3.5 Let us sum up**

This sonnet belongs to the first group of sonnets or the 'Fair Youth Sonnets' and is dedicated to supposedly a poet's close friend and lover, the anonymous Fair Youth. It also insinuate, along with sonnets 36, 40, 41 and 42, the relationship between the Poet, the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady and it is in this sonnet that we hear about the Dark Lady and her association with the youth and the poet for the first time.

#### **20.3.6 Glossary**

*griev'd*: To feel sad.

*Loathsome*: Causing hatred or disgust; repulsive.

*Canker*: Flower buds infest.

*Trespass*: To cross prohibited area.

*Salving*: to be slave

*Amiss*: Mistake

*Accessory*: Accomplice, Assistant.

*Sourly*: Bitterly, cruelly

#### **20.4 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q.1. Against whom the poet is complaining and what sin has he committed?

Q.2. Why the poet feels that he too is at fault?

#### **20.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

Q.1. The statement, "*Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud*" is

- |             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| a. Simile   | b. Metaphor          |
| c. Aphorism | d. None of the above |

Q.2. Who claims to be the accessory of the culprit?

- |             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| a. The poet | b. The poet's friend |
| c. Nature   | d. None of the above |

#### **20.6 FILL IN THE BLANKS**

Q.1. The poet refers to himself as an \_\_\_\_\_.

Q.2. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ stain both moon and sun.

Q.3. The poet calls his friend \_\_\_\_\_ which sourly robs from him.

#### **20.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

Q.1. Critically analyse Sonnet 35.

Q.2. How far the poet is able to justify the error done by his friend as an excusable mistake?

Q.3. Does true love transgresses the physical morality; explain with reference to the poem at hand.



## 20.8 ANSWER KEY

### Multiple Choice Questions

Q.No.1. C

Q.No.2. A

### Fill in the Blanks

Q.No.1. Accessary

Q.No.2. Clouds and eclipses

Q.No.3. Sweet thief

## 20.9 REFERENCE AND SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Kerrigan, John. *William Shakespeare: The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*. Penguin Books, 1986.
2. Ingram, W.G. and Redpath, Theodore, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, B.I Publications, Bombay, etc., 1979.
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**THOU BLIND FOOL LOVE, WHAT  
DOST THOU TO MINE EYES**

**(SONNET - 137)**

**Unit Structure**

**21.1 Objectives**

**21.2 Introduction to Shakespearean Sonnets**

**21.3 About the Sonnet**

**21.3.1 Background of the Sonnet**

**21.3.2 Introducing the Sonnet: Thou Blind Fool Love, What Dost Thou  
To Mine Eyes**

**21.4 Text of the sonnet**

**21.4.1 Summary of the Sonnet**

**21.4.2 A Paraphrase of the Sonnet**

**21.4.3 Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet**

**21.5 Theme**

**21.6 Imagery**

**21.7 Let us sum up**

**21.8 Glossary**

**21.9 Self Assessment Questions**

**21.10 Multiple Choice Questions**

**21.11 Fill in the Blanks**

## **21.12 Examination Oriented Questions**

## **21.13 Suggested Readings**

## **21.14 References**

### **21.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this lesson are:

- a) To acquaint the learner with Shakespearean sonnets.
- b) To explore the sonnet and analyse it critically.
- c) To familiarise the learner with the structure of Shakespearean sonnet.
- d) To acquaint the learner with the thematic concerns of the sonnet.

### **21.2. INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS**

Published in 1609, Shakespearean sonnets were dedicated to Mr. W.H., whose identity remains a mystery. It is generally held that Sir Thomas Wyatt and his literary disciple and colleague, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey were the harbingers of the sonnet into English language. Unlike in the Italian form of the sonnet, in the Shakespearean form, different ideas or thoughts are expressed in three quatrains. The first quatrain may be called the argument which is an explanation of what is going to happen in the following verses. The second quatrain may be called the theme or the central idea which may be expressed directly or indirectly. And the third or the last quatrain may be called the reason or logic that supports the whole argument. These three quatrains are followed by a couplet which links the argument and the theme, and hence, presents a conclusion. The rhyme-scheme of Shakespearean sonnets is: a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g and it is written in iambic pentameter.

William Shakespeare's sonnets are stories about a handsome boy, or rival poet, and the mysterious and aloof "dark" lady they both love. The sonnets fall into three clear groupings: Sonnets 1 to 126 are addressed to, or concern, a young man; Sonnets 127-152 are addressed to, or concern, a dark lady (dark in the sense of

her hair, her facial features, and her character), and Sonnets 153-154 are fairly free adaptations of two classical Greek poems. The two groups taken together constitute, “Shakespeare’s early expression of his perceptions of friendship, of love and lust, of honour, of growth through experience, of sin and expiation, of mutability, platitude, and the knowledge of good and evil”. In many ways, Shakespeare’s use of the sonnet form is richer and more complex than this relatively simple division into parts might imply. Not only is his sequence largely occupied with subverting the traditional themes of love sonnets—the traditional love poems in praise of beauty and worth, for instance, are written to a man, while the love poems to a woman are almost all as bitter and negative as Sonnet 147—he also combines formal patterns with daring and innovation.

### **21.3. ABOUT THE SONNET**

#### **21.3.1 Background of the Sonnet**

The last twenty eight sonnets record the poet’s infatuation for a dark lady, an evil temptress, and consequent moral chaos and spiritual suffering of the poet. The tone throughout is satiric and bitter. Edward Dowden says in this connection, “Shakespeare at sometime of his life was snared by a woman, the reverse to beautiful, according to conventional Elizabethan standards. Dark haired, dark-eyed pale cheeked; skilled in touching the virginal, skilled also in playing upon the heart of man; who could attract and repel, irritate and soothe, join reproach with cares, a woman faithless to her vow in wedlock”.

#### **21.3.2 Introducing the Sonnet : Thou Blind Fool Love, What Dost Thou To Mine Eyes**

Shakespeare’s sonnets are very different from Shakespeare’s plays, but they do contain dramatic elements and an overall sense of story. Each of the poems deals with a highly personal theme, and each can be taken on its own or in relation to the poems around it. The sonnets have the feel of autobiographical poems, but we don’t know whether they deal with real events or not, because no one knows enough about Shakespeare’s life to say whether or not they deal with real events and feelings, so we tend to refer to the voice of the sonnets as “the speaker”—

as though he were a dramatic creation like Hamlet or King Lear.

This is one of the famous sonnets in Shakespearean sonnet sequence. Being placed at number 137, this sonnet finds a semblance with sonnet 113 and 114 in which poet, like in present case, talks about the corruption of eyes by love. Sonnets 46 & 47 describe a conflict between heart and eyes which is resolved by an alliance between the two. In this sonnet both heart and eyes are portrayed as being at fault in perverting what they perceive. But pride of place is given to the eyes, in that they are shown to lead the way and, being corrupt, they drag the heart along behind them. In this sonnet, the poet is addressing the god of love, Cupid, as a blind fool. He grumbles that Cupid has damaged his eyes and he is unable to recognise anything. The poet tells about his lost sense of discretion that has made him incapable to ascertain the real beauty. He knows that his mistress is available to everybody for sexual pleasures but even then his love-sick heart doesn't want to admit it. In this sonnet, the poet tells about the licentiousness of the Dark Lady. He says that she is "the bay where all men ride" and that she is "false plague".

#### **21.4 TEXT OF THE SONNET**

Thou blind fool Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,  
That they behold and see not what they see?  
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,  
Yet what the best is, take the worst to be.  
If eyes corrupt by over-partial looks,  
Be anchored in the bay where all men ride,  
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,  
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?  
Why should my heart think that a several plot,  
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?  
Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not  
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?

In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,  
And to this false plague are they now transferred.

#### 21.4.1 Summary of the Sonnet

In this sonnet, the poet addresses Cupid, the god of love, as a blind fool because he has done damage to the eyes of the poet. The poet can only see the things but cannot comprehend them. He has lost his rational judgement due to love. No doubt, his eyes know what real beauty is; nevertheless they think the most beautiful thing to be the ugliest thing. He asks Cupid if his eyes are somehow corrupted for erroneous reflection, or they have been sheltered in the ocean where all men are free to ride for their pleasure. He says that Cupid has taken possession of the deceptiveness of his eyes and for his own amorous objectives. He questions the god of love why the land which once belonged to him is now a public possession. The poet says that though his eyes know that the Dark Lady is foul, yet they see her to be wearing an honest look. Both his eyes and heart have erred due to love and he has become devoted to a self-deceiving disease.

#### 21.4.2 A Paraphrase of the Sonnet

*Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,*

Cupid was traditionally portrayed as blind. The description of him as a fool was less common, but lovers were often thought of as being temporarily seized by insanity and guilty of many acts of folly. It is Cupid who is being addressed in the sonnet. Being blind and fool, the god of love has corrupted the eyes of the poet and he sees things mistakenly.

*That they behold, and see not what they see?*

As a result of the influence of Cupid, the poet's eyes observe the world but pretend not to see the unpleasant things. In fact, his eyes are deceived by the look of the things.

*They know what beauty is, see where it lies,*

The poet's eyes know what beauty is and where it is situated.

*Yet what the best is take the worst to be.*

And yet it seems to his eyes they take the worst things, both morally and

physically, to be the best. Here the word order is inverted- 'take the worst to be the best'.

*If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,*

His eyes have lost their integrity because they are bribed and won over by flirtatious and seductive glances from the Dark Lady. However, *looks* probably refers to the glances from his own eyes which are already unable to make valid judgements of what they see (hence they are over-partial, biased, prejudiced in her favour).

*Be anchored in the bay where all men ride,*

This line conveys several interpretations. Literally, it means that being blinded by love, the poet adores his dark mistress who is like an ocean where all men ride. Symbolically, it is essentially a sexual metaphor intended to convey the poet's infatuation with his mistress' body and his brooding desires which visualise her nakedness. The imagery is of ships anchored in a sheltering bay or harbour, and puns on the meanings of 'to ride at anchor', as a ship does, and 'to ride', meaning to be astride a horse, or mounted on a woman and having sex with her. Poet's eyes and his mind are fixed upon her mistress' body.

*Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,*

The poet says that not only has Cupid corrupted the eyes, but out of this corruption he has made (forged) hooks which hold the heart firmly locked in its infatuate loving. Here the main culpability is attributed to the eyes, which see first of all, before the heart can apprehend anything.

*Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?*

The poet wonders why the judgement of his heart (mind) follows the lead given by the eyes because of which he cannot judge independently.

*Why should my heart think that a several plot,*

*Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?*

The poet says why should his heart believe that a piece of land which his heart

knows as being available to everybody in this world should be thought by it to be the sole possession of one man? In other words, he says why should he think that the dark lady is his exclusive property, and that she loves only him, when it is quite plain, that she offers her body to all comers?

*Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,*

Even after knowing the fact that his mistress is promiscuous, the poet's eyes nevertheless deny it.

*To put fair truth upon so foul a face?*

His eyes have become deceptive in order to make appear as truth and beauty that which is foul. There is a suggestion also of the distortion caused by cosmetics, which make a foul face seem fair. It is also a reference to 'putting a good face on things', i.e., making the best of a bad situation.

*In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,*

Both his heart and eyes have committed a blunder in their judgement of things. They should have correctly judged the beauty and the truth of beautiful women. Here the reference could be to former loves, even to the youth, whom the poet has deserted in favour of the dark lady. Or it could be to the dark lady herself, whom he has incorrectly judged to be fair and true.

*And to this false plague are they now transferred.*

The sickness of his eyes which is akin to plague has rendered him incapable of forming any right judgement. Critics suspect that the reference to 'plague', which was prevalent at the time, may have been hinting at infection with venereal disease.

### **21.4.3 Critical Appreciation of the Sonnet**

The poet reflects on his infatuation with the woman and is perplexed by what he finds. He is uncertain whether to blame his eyes or his heart, or both of them jointly. They both seem to be in error in supposing that so foul a person is in fact fair and worthy of love. The previous sonnets were far from flattering to the woman, having suggested that her sexual appetites were almost unlimited. This one



is no better, and implies that she is like a common prostitute, being ‘the bay where all men ride’ and ‘the common’ where all men have free access. This sonnet belongs to the category of those which have been written in a lucid and straightforward style.

### **21.5 THEME**

The most dominant theme of this sonnet is love that is shown in broader perspectives and with its divergent facets. Poet’s love with the dark lady is both mental and physical, though the later might not have been consummated. This sonnet has a deep strain of physical love which has defamed his mistress to the degree of a prostitute who is available to every other man for sexual pleasures. Though the poet knows about the character of dark lady, yet he cannot but love her. He is concerned with the sensuality and his love is of lower kind.

### **21.6 IMAGERY**

The imagery of this sonnet is gross and disgusting. Here the emphasis is on dark and repulsive side of the character. He uses images of bay, a common place, a plague to address the dark lady. In the line, ‘*Be anchored in the bay where all men ride*’, the imagery is of ships anchored in a sheltering bay or harbour, and puns on the meanings of ‘to ride at anchor’, as a ship does, and ‘to ride’, meaning to be astride a horse, or mounted on a woman and having sex with her.

### **21.7 LET US SUM UP**

This sonnet is addressed to Cupid who has corrupted the eyes of the poet. As a result of this, he cannot go through the real character of his dark mistress. His mistress has become a lady of loose character but he is incapable of judging the real beauty of her. Here, he tells about the immorality of the dark lady.

### **21.8 GLOSSARY**

*Thou blind fool, Love* – it is Cupid, the god of love. Love being blind, the god of love is believed to be blind.

*Behold* – observe

*Over-partial looks* – biased looks, prejudiced in her favour

*Be anchored in the bay* – ships anchored in a sheltering harbour

*A several land* – a private piece of land, a separated enclosure.

*Common place* – a piece of common land

*This false plague* – sickness, misery of making false judgements

## **21.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. What is the form of this sonnet?
2. To whom is the poet complaining in this sonnet?
3. List the images used in this sonnet.
4. Why love is called ‘blind fool’?

### **Answers:**

1. A sonnet has fourteen lines in iambic pentameter
2. Cupid, the god of love
3. A bay or harbour, a common land, plague
4. Love is blind because people fall in love blindly without thinking of any consequence.

## **21.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. The sonnets include a dedication to a mystery man. What are the initials of his name?

- A. Mr. W.H.
- B. Mr. A.R.
- C. Mr. P.S.
- D. Mr. W.S.

2. In what year were Shakespeare’s sonnets first published?

A. 1600

B. 1609

C. 1619

D. 1630

3. How many sonnets does Shakespeare's collection contain?

A. 154

B. 160

C. 164

D. 170

4. What is the structure of the majority of the sonnets in the collection?

A. Three quatrains and a final couplet in trochaic pentameter

B. Five quatrains and a final couplet in iambic hexameter

C. Two quatrains and a final couplet in iambic tetrameter

D. Three quatrains and a final couplet in iambic pentameter

5. Who is the addressee of sonnet 137?

A. A fair lady

B. A rival poet

C. A dark lady

D. A fair youth

6. Which two sonnets are the adaptations of classical Greek poems?

A. 126 and 127

B. 136 and 137

C. 112 and 113

D. 153 and 154

7. Sonnet 137 bears a resemblance with

A. Sonnet 96 and 97

B. Sonnet 113 and 114

C. Sonnet 125 and 126

D. Sonnet 135 and 136

8. To which disease has the poet referred in sonnet 137 ?

A. Cancer

B. Tuberculosis

C. Plague

D. Cataract

#### **21.11 FILL IN THE BLANKS**

1. The last two lines of Shakespearean sonnet are called.....
2. The .....foot is used in Shakespearean sonnet.
3. In sonnet 137 .....has damaged the eyes of the poet.
4. Poet's eyes and heart are mistaken due to.....
5. In sonnet 137, the poet's love is of.....kind.

#### **21.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Critically analyse the sonnet 'Thou Blind Fool Love, What Dost Thou To Mine Eyes'.
2. Discuss the thematic concerns of the sonnet.
3. Write a critical note on Shakespeare's imagery in the sonnet.
4. What is the nature of love as depicted by Shakespeare in the sonnets addressed to the Dark Lady?

5. What is a sonnet? How does Shakespearean sonnet differ from Italian form of sonnet?
6. Bring out the thematic concerns of Shakespearean sonnet addressed to the dark lady.
7. 'In things right true my heart and eyes have erred, / And to this false plague are they now transferred'. Explain.

### 21.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Brown, Ivor. *Shakespeare*. London: Collins, 1955
2. Kerrigan, John. *William Shakespeare: The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*. Penguin Books, 1986.
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3. Sarker, Sunil Kumar. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003.
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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 22**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT – IV**

### **LITERARY TRENDS**

#### **Unit Structure**

#### **22.1 Objectives**

#### **22.2 Introduction**

**22.2.1 Samuel Daniel (1562-1619)**

**22.2.2 Of the Spenserian Poets**

**22.2.3 Metaphysical poets**

**22.2.4 John Donne (1573-1631)**

**22.2.5 George Herbert (1593-1633)**

**22.2.6 The Cavalier Poets**

**22.2.7 Thomas Carew (1598-1639)**

**22.2.8 Robert Herrick (1591-1634)**

**22.2.9 Sir John Suckling (1609-1642)**

**22.2.10 Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-1658)**

**22.2.11 Abraham Cowley (1618-1667)**

#### **22.3 Prose Writing**

**22.3.1 John Hales**

**22.3.2 William Chillingworth**

**22.3.3 Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)**

**22.3.4 Jeremy Taylor (1613-67)**

**22.3.5 John Milton (1600 - 1674)**

**22.3.6 Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)**

**22.3.7 Thomas Fuller (1608-61)**

**22.3.8 Izzak Walton (1593-1683)**

**22.3.9 Drama**

**22.3.10 Philip Massinger (1583-1640)**

**22.3.11 John Ford (1586-1639)**

**22.3.12 James Shirley (1596-1666)**

**22.4 The Chief causes of the Decline of Drama**

**22.5 Self-Assessment Questions**

**22.6 Suggested Reading**

## **22.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the literary trends of the 17th century. These include the trends in all the three genres of literature i.e. poetry, prose and drama. The learners shall also be made familiar with the different schools of poetry i.e. Cavalier poets, Metaphysical poets, Spenserian poets. Before acquainting the learners with the life and works of John Milton, it is essential to know about the period, literary trends and his contemporaries.

## **22.2 INTRODUCTION**

Literary Features of 17th Century :The English literary scene at the turn of the 16th century and the early years of the 17th century displayed a curious complexity, confusion and diversity. The country was divided into two hostile camps and literature of that period clearly reflected it.

During this period, there was a decline from the high Elizabethan standard. This decline was mainly because of the strong impact of Puritanism. Spenser's tradition was fast perishing and new forms, such as Metaphysical poetry became popular. The exalted fervour of the previous age was fading away. Drama was totally eclipsed and in prose there was a matured melancholy, but with a marked increase. In poetry alone, excluding the solitary example of Milton, as a poet of the first order, we may say that this period produced a class of admirable writers in whom intellect and fancy were more powerful than sentiment or passion.

A host of writers belonging to the previous age lived and continued to produce their literary works well into the new age – Shakespeare, Bacon, Daniel. There were a number of poets who continued to follow the Spenserian and Arcadian traditions. But these trends were of the past. The seventeenth century literature witnessed new trends.

The metaphysical poetry, which had been started by John Donne in the later part of the Jacobean Age, blossomed during the Age of Milton. The writers who carried forward the tradition of John Donne were Crawshaw, George Herbert, Vaughan and Andrew Marvell. Their works are chiefly lyrical in nature, and show an amalgamation of passion and thought. Their poems are loaded with imagery and striking conceits. Most of the metaphysical poets were of a religious and mystical temperament. The excessive use of over-elaborated similes and metaphors were drawn from the remote and unfamiliar sources by the metaphysical poets. The relationships perceived by them are occult. The images are logical and intellectual rather than sensual or emotional.

There was an unprecedented rise of a spirit of satire in the last decade of the 16th and opening one of the seventeenth century. The clash between the old and the new philosophies contributed to the growing sense of disillusionment and defeat, self-introspection and self-criticism. Donne is the greatest satirist of this period, others being John Marston, Joseph Hall, Ben Jonson. The most important thing to notice in the poetry of the seventeenth century, is the predominance of



the lyric. Cavalier poets were followers of Ben Jonson and were called the ‘sons of Ben’. The important among them were Carew, Lovelace, Herrick, Suckling, Waller, Denham. They did not use ornamentation as used by Spenser or tortured wit and obscurity as used by John Donne. They were strong believers of hedonistic philosophy. The three traditions were generally followed—the Spenserian, the Arcadian, the Petrarchan. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, there was a revolt against the outdated and exhausted Elizabethan poetry. The leaders of this revolt were Ben Jonson and John Donne. Both of them were forceful personalities who attracted staunch followers and founded schools. Ben Jonson—the founder of the classical school which reached its full flowering in the poetry of Dryden and Pope – was primarily a dramatist. As a poet, he influenced the Caroline lyricists. Donne was the founder of so-called ‘Metaphysical school of poetry’. His poetry is remarkable for its concentrated passion, intellectual agility and dramatic power. His poetry is marked with a tone of cynicism and realism but it is always forceful and startling.

The true English epic appeared in this age, Cowley’s *Davideis* and Davenant’s *Gondibert* aspired to be great epics. Though they followed the rules governing the outward form of an epic, they lacked the inner spirit and proved failures. Milton, in the form of *Paradise Lost*, gave this new genre to English literature. The Puritan bias in his nature made him choose the rather unsuitable subject of the fall of man as it is weak in heroic action. He adhered to the epical unity of action and drew his characters with a wide sweep. In *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*, Spenser gave an irregular ode attaining a high degree of perfection. The appearance of the Pindaric ode was observed in this age, it appears to be irregular, but is bound by stringent rules. The language of the pindaric ode is embellished, artificial and unreal. Cowley’s *Pindarique Odes* were the first of their class in English. In the descriptive and narrative poetry, is included Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Penseroso* Herrick’s pastoral poem and Crawshaw’s religious and descriptive pieces, Sir John Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* and the romantic poem *Pharonnida* by William Chamberlayne. These poems avoid contact with actual wild nature.

The lyrical style lost the splendour of Elizabethan Age, but it revealed an increase in care, in polish and in actual metrical dexterity. In blank verse also conflicting movements were felt. In Milton's works, the style attained a zenith but in the drama of the minor playwrights, it deteriorated. The heroic couplet appeared in the works of Cowley, Denham and Waller.

While the poetry of this period showed a decline from the Elizabethan standards, the same cannot be said of prose. The prose continued to be highly poetic in manner but it was embellished with a wealth of learning and a grave melancholy musing that were so characteristic of this age. In prose, the character writers drew their inspiration from Greek writer Theophrastus. Prose touched new heights in the hands of writers like Browne, Taylor and Milton. But a new prose of the plainer kind arose with Restoration in the writings of Hobbes, Clarendon and Izaak Walton. With the dominance of religion during the age of Milton, prose expanded its horizon by gathering a greater variety of subjects. The violent religious strife of the time led to a great flow of sermon writing, which was marked with strong argument and learning. On the moral side, there is an immense work done by Sir Thomas Browne, on the political side by Hobbes, on the religious side, the books of John Hales. Clarendon's works were historical. Apart from them, there were minor writers whose prose writings were in the form of pamphlets, books, essays, letters and journals.

A significant feature of the seventeenth century was the collapse of the Drama. Many factors were responsible for the decline of Drama – chief among these were the civil disturbances and the strong revolt by the Puritans. The Puritans were offended by theatre. Even when the Miracle plays helped in revealing the sacred stories and acquainting the people with the Bible, there were zealots who denounced them. The Reformation as a whole, was not hostile to theatre. Some enlightened reformers solicited the return to classical norms in theatre, yet the general opinion was that, the theatre was corrupting the minds of the general public and was propagating immorality.

In September 1642, all the theatres were closed down under royal decree of Charles I. The theatres remained closed until 1660, when monarchy was restored. The actual dramatic work of the period was very small and unimportant.

To classify the literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, from 1603 (Queen Elizabeth) to 1660 (Restoration), it is important to classify poets by an accurate Standard. Shakespeare and Bacon wrote largely in the reign of James I, but their work is Elizabethan in spirit. Bunyan too, cannot be called a Puritan because he happened to write after the Restoration. A few writers who are generally known as Jacobean, are called Transition poets, because they show the changing standards of the age.

### **22.2.1 Samuel Daniel (1562-1619)**

Daniel, often classed with the first Metaphysical poets, is interesting for two reasons—for his use of the artificial sonnet, and for his literary desertion of Spenser as a model for poets. His *Delia*, a cycle of sonnets modelled after Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, helped to fix the custom of celebrating love or friendship by a series of sonnets, to which some pastoral pseudonym was affixed. His sonnets and his later poetry, especially the beautiful *Complaints of Rosamond* and his *Civils Wars* aimed solely at grace of expression, became influential in giving English poetry a greater individuality and independence than it had ever known. In matter, he set himself squarely against the medieval tendency. This fling at Spenser and his followers mark the beginning of the modern and realistic school. Daniel's poetry has received more homage than it deserves in the praises of Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb and Coleridge.

The close of the reign of Elizabeth was marked by an outburst of English songs, as remarkable in its sudden development as the rise of Drama. There were two causes that contributed to this —the increasing influence of French instead of Italian verse, and the rapid development of music as an art at the close of the sixteenth century. The two song writers worth studying are Thomas campion and Nicholas. They are an amalgamation of the Elizabethan and Puritan standards. They sing of sacred love and profane love with the

same zest, and a careless love song is often found on the same page with a plea for divine grace.

### **22.2.2 Of the Spenserian Poets**

Giles Fletcher and Wither are worth studying. Giles Fletcher (1500-1623) has a strong suggestion of Milton, in the simplicity and grandeur of his lines. His best known work *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610) was the greatest religious poem written in England since *Piers Plowman*. The life of George Wither (1588-1667) covers the entire period of English history from Elizabeth to the Restoration, and the enormous volume of his work covers every phase of the literature of two great ages. His life was a varied one, first as a Royalist leader against the Covenanters and then announcing his Puritan convictions, and suffering in prison for his faith. He can be considered a lyric poet of great originality, rising at times to positive genius but the bulk of his poetry is intolerably dull. In 1623, he published *Hymns and Songs of the Church*, the first hymn book that ever appeared in the English language.

### **22.2.3 Metaphysical poets**

The name "Metaphysical" given by Dr. Johnson in derision, because of the fanatic form of Donne's poetry, is often applied to all minor poets of the Puritan Age. But here it can be used in the narrower sense, excluding the Cavalier poets. It includes Donne, Herbert, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Vaughan, Davenant, Marvell and Crawshaw.

### **22.2.4 John Donne (1573-1631)**

Donne did not follow the literary standards and threw style and all literary standards to the wind. Donne played havoc with Elizabethan style, he nevertheless influenced English literature in the way of boldness and originality; and the present tendency is to give him a larger place, nearer to the few great poets, that he has occupied since Ben Jonson declared that he was "the first poet of the world in some things," but likely to perish "for not being understood."

### **22.2.5 George Herbert (1593-1633)**

He was strongly influenced by John Donne. His poetry is simpler than Donne's for certain reasons. The range of his experience was narrower. Donne's poems express hate, disgust, jealousy, love, lust, reverence, security and mistrust. Each poem represents a complex state of mind and a subtle adjustment of impulses. His narrow experience simplifies the texture of his poems. The structure of Herbert's poems is didactic. The substance of each poem of Herbert is emotional, but the emotion is rooted in thought. As one understands his poem, one becomes aware of the fusion between thought and feeling which are the main constituents of the poet's beliefs. He, like Donne, was capable of clear thought in conjunction with vehement feeling. He modifies Donne's style in other respects. His experiences were very simple, less varied, and he was able to convey them in a very simple way. He used words more widely current and more often selected his illustrations from everyday life and changed the metrical pattern into something less flexible.

He did not find emotional peace and satisfaction in the love of women. The theme of the first two poems of Herbert was the inadequacy of earthly love. His poems like "Dulnesse", "A Parodie", "Affliction", "The Collar", "Submission", express his over-mastering desire to be allowed to love God. His poetry is the expression of an ardent temperament with a single emotional outlet.

### **22.2.6 The Cavalier Poets**

In the literature of any age there are generally found two distinct tendencies. The first expresses the dominant spirit of the times; the second, a secret or an open rebellion. So, in this age, side by side with the serious and rational Puritan, lives the gallant and trivial Cavalier. The Cavalier was a small group of poets—Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling, Carew—who wrote songs generally in lighter vein, gay, trivial, often licentious, but who could not altogether escape the tremendous seriousness of Puritanism.

### **22.2.7 Thomas Carew (1598–1639)**

He may be called the inventor of Cavalier love poetry. He was a great favourite of Charles I, became one of the Court poets. He was a friend of Lovelace, Suckling, Davenant. His poetry is the Spenserian pastoral stripped of its refinement of feeling and made direct, coarse, vigorous. His poems are sensual. His work combines two of the main streams of poetic tendency in the first half of 17th century – the classical discipline of form from Ben Jonson, and the Metaphysical imagery of John Donne. One of his best poems is his elegy upon the death of John Donne. His *Great Rapture*, poem is a masterpiece of erotic vision strengthened, rather than kept in check by the action of wit.

### **22.2.8 Robert Herrick (1591–1674)**

Robert Herrick was a Royalist and a supporter of the Monarchy. He saw different vicissitudes of life between the Civil War of 1642 and the Restoration in 1660. He is regarded as the chief disciple of Ben Jonson and formed part of a Cambridge community of poets known as the “sons of Ben”. His work can be divided into three divisions—the amatory, the religious verse, and a number of epigrams; but remarkable among them are his love poems. His poetry is dedicated to several mistresses—Julia, Anthea, Corinna, Perilla. His main poems are contained in the volumes *Hesperides* and *Loit's Recreation*. His verse is charming and lyrical, but it lacks the complexity of Marvell's verse. His poems cover a wide range, from trivial love songs, pagan in spirit, to hymns of deep religious feeling.

### **22.2.9 Sir John Suckling (1609–1642)**

He was one of the most brilliant wits of the court of Charles I, who wrote poetry, as he exercised a horse or fought a duel, because it was considered a gentleman's accomplishment in those days. The romance of his life—his rich, brilliant, careless youth, and his poverty and attempted suicide in Paris, where he fled because of his devotion to the Stuarts—that keeps his name alive in our literature. He underwent persecution and was reduced

to poverty, he almost committed suicide. Many of his love songs are equal, if not superior to the most beautiful examples of that mixture of gay bandinage with tender, if not very deeply felt, devotion which characterises French courtly and erotic poetry of the seventeenth century; and his thoughts are expressed with neatness and refinement. His most celebrated production is the *Ballad upon a Wedding*, in which, assuming the character of a rustic, he describes the marriage of a fashionable couple, Roger Boyle, then Lord Broghill and afterwards Earl of Orrery and Lady Margaret Howard.

#### **22.2.10 Sir Richard Lovelace (1618–1658)**

In his life and poetry, Sir Richard Lovelace offers a remarkable parallel to Suckling, and they are often classed together as followers of King Charles. His volume of love lyrics, is generally on a higher plane than Suckling's work; and a few of the poems like "To Lucasta" and "To Althea", "From Prison" are remarkable.

#### **22.2.11 Abraham Cowley (1618–1667)**

Stands midway between the Metaphysicals and the Age of Dryden. His couplet pieces are ingenious and clever, foreshadowing the eighteenth century methods but are not inspiring reading. He is neither a song-writer in the lyric tradition, nor one with the clear and vigorous satirists of the eighteenth century.

### **22.3 PROSE WRITING**

The Civil War, which led to the temporary overthrow of the ancient English monarchy, was in many respects a religious as well as a political contest. The prose literature of this time, as well as of a period extending considerably beyond it, possesses a strong religious or theological character. The most notable outburst of theological eloquence which the Church of England has ever exhibited, in the writings of Jeremy Taylor, Barrow and the other great Anglican fathers, was answered by the appearance, in the ranks of the secretaries, of many remarkable men, some hardly inferior in learning and genius to the leaders whose doctrines they opposed; while

others, with a ruder yet more fervent enthusiasm, were the founders of dissenting communities. This, for example, was the case with the Quakers.

The age has been very aptly called “the Golden Age of English Pulpit”. In the field of moral, social and political philosophy, the age was enriched by the work of Sir Thomas Browne, John Hales and Hobbes. The “Gothic” style of most Elizabethans like Lyly and Sidney influenced the prose writers of this period. The lesson of simplicity and sententiousness set forth by Bacon was forgotten. Instead a kind of “baroque” style was cultivated.

### **22.3.1 John Hales**

The “ever memorable” John Hales, enjoyed among his contemporaries a vast reputation for his immense learning and the acuteness of his wit. He left behind him, the reputation of one of the best intellects which his country had produced. The greater part of his writings are controversial, treating the political and religious questions which then agitated men’s minds. His posthumous *Golden Remains* (1659) contains his valuable letters to Sir Dudley Carleton on the Synod of Dort (1618). While attending its sittings he was converted from the Calvinistic opinions which he had hitherto held, and took the standpoint of Episcopius and the Armenian divines. Both his sermons and his controversial writings are fine examples of that rich yet chastened eloquence which characterises the great English divines of the seventeenth century, and was carried to the highest pitch of rhetorical splendour by Taylor and of majestic grandeur by Barrow.

### **22.3.2 William Chillingworth**

He was an eminent controversialist and an able defender of Protestantism. He was converted to the Roman faith while a fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and went to the Jesuits’ College at Douai. But he returned to Oxford, where he renounced his new faith, and going to all the lengths the other way, published in 1637 his celebrated work against Roman Catholicism, entitled, *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation*. This was an answer to a treatise, *Charity Mistaken* (1630), by a Jesuit father named Edward



Knott, who had maintained in it that unrepenting heretics could not be saved. He became canon and Chancellor of Salisbury in 1638, five years later, he joined the Royalist army, and was then taken prisoner at the fall of Arundel Castle.

### **22.3.3 Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682)**

He was a physician who, after much study and travel, settled down to his profession in Norwich; but even then, he gave far more time to the investigation of natural phenomena than to the barbarous practices which largely constituted the ‘art’ of medicine in his day. His prose is remarkable for its quaintness, profound learning, grave meditation, quiet humour and a charming style which for its dreamy cadence has no parallel in English. He produced only five books. These books are small in size, and of great and uniform merit. His first work is *Religio Medici* i.e. The Religion of a Physician (1642). This book is a curious mixture of religious faith and scientific scepticism. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* or *Vulgar-Errors* is the longest work of Browne. *Urn Burial*, a treatise suggested by the discovery of Roman burial urns at Walsingham commonly considered to be his masterpiece, contains reflections on human morality. *The Garden of Cyrus* is a treatise on the quincunx. *Christian Morals* was published after Browne’s death.

### **22.3.4 Jeremy Taylor (1613–67)**

He is the prominent literary and eloquent of Anglican divines of the period. A learned, impressive preacher, Taylor carried the same qualities into his prose works, which consisted of tracts, sermons and theological books. His writings, with their exuberant fancy and their noble diction, belong rather to the Elizabethan than to the Puritan age. From the large number of his works, two stand out as representative of the man himself. *The Liberty of Prophesying* (1646) which Hallam calls “the first plea for tolerance in religion”, on a comprehensive basis and on deep-seated foundations; and *The Rules and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and on *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651), which mutually correspond to and complete each other, forming an institute of Christian life and

conduct adapted to every conceivable circumstance and relation of human existence. The least admirable of Taylor's numerous writings, and the only instance, in which he went astray from his usual tone of courtesy and fairness, is his *Doctor Dubitantium* (1660), a manual dealing with questions of casuistry. His sermons are very numerous and are among the most eloquent, learned, powerful in the whole range of Christian religious literature. His materials are drawn from the whole extent of profane, as well as sacred literature, and are fused together into a rich and gorgeous whole by the fire of matchless imagination. His style is highly rhetorical and rhythmical, rich in fancy and classical learning. In other words, he is fond of quotations and allusions and of florid, rhetorical figures, such as similes, exclamation, and apostrophe. Gentle and urbane, his style is enlivened with picturesque descriptions of Nature. The musical and pictorial beauties of his prose are however, offset to some extent by the enormous length of his sentences, their involved syntax and Latinisms—faults which he shares with Milton.

### **22.3.5 John Milton (1600–1674)**

The Puritans were very active in the 17th Century. Violence and coarseness had marked their pamphlets in the reign of Elizabeth and these characteristics occur in Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1632)— an immense denunciation of the stage, in many an attack on the episcopacy, and above all in Milton's tracts. There were moderates also, but the Puritan side of the contest was violent and fierce because it was dominated by the genius of Milton. Milton's prose works are discussed in the next chapter. As far as the style is concerned, one may say that to a great deal the matter of his numerous political and ecclesiastical pamphlets is merely journalistic and being controversial in character, is marred by peevishness, violence and partisan bias. The only interest of these controversial writings is the element of self-revelation and magnificent bursts of eloquence scattered through them. Milton was a poet and looked down upon prose, using it only to perform what he considered to be his duty. Yet he constrained it to be the instrument of his passion and

lyricism. Milton's style is, as might be expected, highly poetical. It is the style of an orator—lofty, impassioned and rhythmical. But Milton cannot organise his sentences, which apart from their Latin syntax, are monstrously long, but, from their troubled vehemence breaks forth at times, a scathing irony or a sudden splendour. They reveal the impetuous idealist, impractical and thorough-going.

### **22.3.6 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)**

Very striking is the contrast between the religious controversies and the contribution to rationalism of Thomas Hobbes. Bacon's secretary and Descartes' correspondent, Hobbes entered boldly into new ways with his *Relevants of Law, Natural and Politic*. He believes that Man is a being of appetites, the satisfaction of which would result in a state of incessant war between individuals, if a social pact were not reached under a sovereign protective power. Hobbes also derived freedom of will in his *Letter upon Liberty and Necessity*. Hobbes was a profound and original thinker and his political and ethical theories provoked a storm of protest. Hobbes was a master of English prose in plain style. His stern logic supported by increasing illustrations, his precise diction, and brevity, gave to his prose a force which others attained by rhetoric and profusion.

### **22.3.7 Thomas Fuller (1608–61)**

He has in some respects a kind of intellectual resemblance to Browne. Unlike Browne, however, he passed a very active life, and took a prominent part in the Civil War, in which he embraced the Royalist cause. He is known for his original and penetrating mind. His literary works are therefore of great interest and value. His well known works are *The Worthies of England and Wales* (1662), *Holy and Profane-State*. *The Worthies of England* is a collection of biographies of the illustrious sons of England and also a sort of gazette containing curious information about its antiquities. His serious historical books include, *The History of the Holy War* dealing with crusades and *The Church History of Britain*. Among his pamphlets are "Good thoughts in Bad Times". His style is simple, brief, direct, and is flavoured with pointed wit. His wit and conceits show that he belonged to

the ‘metaphysical’ school. He has been accused of levity in intermingling ludicrous images with serious matter, but these images are the reflection of his own cheerful, ingenious, and amiable nature; and, though their oddity may sometimes excite a smile, it is a smile which is never incompatible with serious feeling. In a word, Fuller was an essentially wise and learned humorist with no less singularity of genius than Sir Thomas Browne, and with less than Browne’s abstract indifference to ordinary human interests.

### **22.3.8 Izaak Walton (1593–1683)**

Walton was a small tradesman of London, who preferred trout brooks and good reading to the profits of business and the doubtful joys of a city life; so at fifty years, when he had saved a little money, he left the city and followed his heart out into the country. He began his literary work by writing his famous *Lives*, — kindly and readable appreciations of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert, Sanderson, which stand at the beginning of modern biographical writing. In 1653, appeared *The Compleat Angler*, which has grown steadily in appreciation, and which is probably more widely read than any other book on the subject of fishing. Ostensibly a fishing manual, it is a book of general recreation that appeals to all, anglers and non-anglers alike. It is at once a technical treatise and charming idyll, written on the morrow of the Civil War by one, whose friends were all in a camp of the vanquished, but whose serenity remained unruffled. The charm of the book consists in its delightful pictures of the country side and its revelation of the author’s personality—his sweet simplicity, his quaint and humorous fancies, his old-world wisdom, his unaffected piety and above all, his transparent purity of heart. The book is written in homely, garrulous, yet dignified style that matches well with the matter.

### **22.3.9 Drama**

Drama deteriorated after Shakespeare but continued uninterrupted until 1642, seventeen years after coronation of Charles I, when theatres were closed. Massinger, Ford and Shirley, the later successors of Shakespeare, mark the end of the Elizabethan drama. Their work is imitative and morally

repulsive. They showed some talent, but lacked originality. They continued the tradition of their predecessors, without adding anything new. Infact, they went further down in pandering to the vulgar tastes of the court and the upper classes. The drama had become debased and decadent, when the Puritan Parliament closed the theatres in 1642. When they reopened after Restoration, the drama took on the totally different spirit and form of the new age.

#### **22.3.10 Philip Massinger (1583-1640)**

He began his career as a collaborator with older, better-known dramatists and especially with Fletcher. Eighteen plays out of the thirty-seven, which have been attributed to him, show that Massinger combined in him the twin influences of Fletcher and Jonson. In his comedies, we find something of the romanticism of Fletcher. But Massinger has also individual qualities. His drama is the drama of ideas. He loves to stage oratorical debates, long pleadings before tribunals. He neither shares Fletcher's aristocratic leanings, nor does he always care to please the multitude. His most successful comedies are *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *The City Madam*. His characters with one or two notable exceptions, like Sir Giles in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and Luke Frugal in *The City Madam* are usually types rather than individuals and in situation, theatrical device, and characterization, he has a fondness for repetition which is a serious flaw. The shallow, boldly drawn characters look most unreal—the villains are villainous and his women shameless, to an incredible degree. Massinger shows his talent in his serious plays. His principal serious plays are, *The Unnatural Combat*, *The Fatal Dowry*, *The Duke of Millaine*, *The Roman Actor*, *The Maid of Honour* etc. Predominantly serious in temper, Massinger often deals with political issues of the day. He seems to lack real humour. His finest qualities are the fluency and vitality of his blank verse, the clarity and strength of his plot construction, and his fine theatre sense.

#### **22.3.11 John Ford (1586-1639)**

He was of the same age as Massonger and wrote at the same time. But his work was more individual than Massinger's. In his nature Ford had a morbid

twist which gave him a strange liking for the horrible and unnatural. He wrote with care and harmony. He collaborated with Webster, Rowley, Dekker and his own works are few. His plays are unequal in quality, but the most powerful of them are prevented from being revolting by their real tragic force and their high literary aims. In, *The Broken Hearts*, he harrows the reader's feeling beyond endurance. His, *Perkin Warbeck*, a historical tragedy, is acknowledged to be among the best historical drama outside Shakespeare. Others of the sixteen plays attributed to him are, *The Lover's Melancholy*, *Lover's Sacrifice*, and *The Fancies*, *Chaste and Noble*. With Ford, the drama reaches the lowest depths of degradation. His play, *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore* has incest for its theme. The passionate love between brother and sister is shown with complacency, even sympathy. Not content with this sickening perversity, he ends the play on a note of blood curdling horror. In this painful play, melodrama alternates with morbidity, but in the fatalism which dominates it, there is undeniable poetry. The impression produced by Ford is as deep as it is painful. The atmosphere of his plays is motionless and thundery. His persistence in depicting suffering is a sign of decadence, but as an artist, he ranks high.

### **22.3.12 James Shirley (1596-1666)**

He is called by Lamb 'the last of a great race.' He was more prolific and more varied in his works than Ford. He was still writing when the theatres were closed. He was not original and did not create anything new. His plays are skilful reproductions. He is an expert in tragedy and comedy as well. Among his tragedies the best known are, *The Traitor* and *The Cardinal* which show the influence of Cyril Tourneur and of Webster. His comedies are more realistic and portray the manners and fashions of the upper classes, forming a link between the Elizabethan and Restoration drama. Shirley also wrote tragic-comedies, in which he shows the influence of Fletcher. He found his models in Spanish literature, the wealth of whose drama was then beginning to show. Of the romantic comedies the best are: *The Young Admiral*, *The Opportunity*, *The Imposture*. Shirley continued a tradition, but proved incapable of infusing into it freshness or new life.

## **22.4 THE CHIEF CAUSES THE DECLINE OF DRAMA**

The Chief causes were the civil disturbances and the strong opposition of the Puritans. With the accession of James I, the great acting companies were placed under the direct patronage of the crown. The Puritans considered this alliance of the Crown and stage as an unholy alliance. This provoked the Puritans and a number of pamphlets, which were addressed to the Parliament were directed against the stage. On the 2nd of September, 1642, the Long Parliament, passed an ordinance abolishing all play houses. The theatres were closed and were reopened after eighteen years at the time of Restoration.

But the decline started after the death of Shakespeare for the simple reason that there was no genius to take his place. The dramatists started catering to the corrupt taste of the upper classes. The stage became insincere, frivolous and bad. Webster wrote tragedies of blood and thunder, Massinger and Ford produced evil and licentious scenes. After Shakespeare's death, the theatres were nothing but breeders of lies and immorality. Parliament did the best thing by voting to close the theatres in 1642.

## **22.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q.1. What are the main characteristics of the literature of the 17th century ?
- Q.2. What is meant by the terms Cavalier poets, Spenserian poets, Metaphysical poets ? Name the chief writers of each group.
- Q.3. What were the reasons for the decay in the quality of Drama during the seventeenth century ?

## **22.6 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Fifteen Poets - *Oxford University Gess*, New Delhi

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 23**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT – IV**

## **POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF MILTON’S AGE**

### **Unit Structure**

#### **23.1 Objective**

#### **23.2 Introduction : The Road To Democracy**

#### **23.3 The Civil War**

#### **23.4 Elizabeth And England**

#### **23.5 Counter-reformation**

#### **23.6 Elizabeth And Parliament**

#### **23.7 The Two Main Causes Of Dissension Were Money And Religion**

#### **23.8 Beginning Of Stuart Rule**

##### **23.8.1 King and The Parliament**

##### **23.8.2 The Financial Policy**

##### **23.8.3 His Foreign Policy**

#### **23.9 Charles I : Caroline Period (1624 - 49)**

##### **23.9.1 The Civil War (1642-49)**

##### **23.9.2 Financial Reasons**

##### **23.9.3 The Civil War**

##### **23.9.4 Second Civil War (1648)**



## **23.10 Cromwell : The Protectorate (1649-1659)**

### **23.10.1 Reforms**

### **23.10.2 Restoration of Charles I**

### **23.10.3 Charles II (1660) : The Restoration Period**

## **23.11 Examination Oriented Questions**

## **23.12 Let Us Sum Up**

## **23.13 Suggested Reading**

## **23.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the political and religious background of Milton's age. Milton championed political and religious freedom. These two factors are important aspects of all his works. Without an understanding of political and religious background to the poetry of Milton no study of this great British poet can be undertaken. The form, content and style of his poetry emanates from this background. The lesson will focus on the political and religious developments in England, tracing the origin of parliamentary principles and Puritanism to the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

## **23.2 INTRODUCTION : THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY**

The seventeenth century is considered as one of the most revolutionary periods in English history. It is said that during this century, the Middle Ages finally disappeared and the modern age was born. Drastic changes took place in politics, in religion, in literature and the organization of society. The century that began with Queen Elizabeth's glorious monarchical rule was to be followed by the melting down of the crown to increase the financial resources of the country; the beheading of Charles I; the rule of Oliver Cromwell and then the restoration of the throne to Charles II. The century ended with the establishment of the parliamentary principle.

### **23.3 THE CIVIL WAR**

That began in the reign of Charles I, was not only about the rights of the Parliament over the claims of the monarchy. Religious issues added fuel to fire. The King stood for theory of “Divine Right of Kings”; and the Church of England, its rituals and ceremonies performed by the Bishops; the Parliament stood for Puritanism, the kind that Calvin, the Genevan priest had established. The followers of Calvin believed in concepts of ‘Divine Providence’ and “Free Will”. The Church was not to be governed by the King and his appointed Bishops but by Elders or ‘Presbyters’. The Puritan sect of Christians was the force behind the religious fervour which drove the Civil War to its success against the monarch Charles I. Puritanism advanced in first half of the century. During the short rule of Cromwell, strictures were passed against art, literature, and all forms of entertainment. In 1642, all theatres were closed. After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, Puritanism declined in England but advanced across the Atlantic. The Pilgrim fathers established it in New England in North America.

Thus, the century into which Milton was born, political and religious upheavals were massive and finally the power devolved on to the people. The brief introduction will be elaborated in the sections that follow.

### **23.4 ELIZABETH AND ENGLAND**

In England, religious dissent began in the reign of King Henry VIII. He split from the Roman Catholic Church and established the Church of England. Queen Elizabeth was his daughter, who came to the throne of England in 1558. The first and foremost problem to be faced was that of religious settlement. As the daughter of Anne Boleyn, she could never be recognized as Queen by the Pope of Rome (the head of the Roman Catholic Church) or by the Roman Catholics in England. The Pope and the Catholic Church never declared Henry the VIII’s marriage to Katherine invalid. Hence the King’s marriage to Anne Boleyn was not considered legal. Queen Elizabeth’s accession to the throne too was called illegal. Thus, because of her birth she was bound to be Protestant.

Mary Tudor (1553-1558), daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, married a Spaniard Phillip and tried to restore Papal power in England. She did not show religious tolerance and persecuted 300 non-Catholics in a Three-year span. That is why she is known by the name of 'Bloody Mary' and the English nation could never forgive her.

Elizabeth, who came to the throne after Mary, wished to take advantage of Mary's persecution and so "she steered a middle course". In 1559, the Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy by which the Sovereign was declared "supreme in all causes". England would never again accept the Papal power. However, she was conspicuously wise. She spared the Catholics and framed the Church services and worked that the feelings of the Catholics in England were not wounded. All were expected to take the oath of supremacy. Those Bishops and priests who did not, resigned. Elizabeth was able to fill up the position with men of her own choice and so had the heads of the Church in sympathy with her. Mild penalties were levied on Catholics. They had to pay fine if they did not attend Sunday service in the parish church. It became an expensive matter to be a Catholic. Slowly, the country gentry found it easier and cheaper to attend the parish church. Queen Elizabeth discouraged active persecution of Catholics. Executions were for treason against the Queen, not for religion as such. She was able to give the Church of England a chance to take root.

### **23.5 COUNTER-REFORMATION**

There were many reasons why a split occurred in the Roman Catholic Church. It is agreed today that the predominant cause was the corruption that had seeped into religious life and matters. After the break up of Papal supremacy, measures were taken to counter the mushrooming of the new sects of Christianity. The abuses of the Papacy were dealt with by the Council of Trent and the society of Jesus (Jesuits). The Jesuit missionaries purified the Church, especially by imparting education to the young. Loyola in 1540, set out to fight for the church through teaching and preaching. The Counter Reformation was also dealt with by Rome itself. The Popes themselves were men of better standing

with ideals, who led the movement to purify the Church. In the meantime, Catholic sovereigns tried to stamp out heresy in their kingdom by persecution. Spain and France specially came down severely on non-Catholics. Queen Elizabeth's foreign policy was one long struggle against the Counter-Reformation and centered around her opposition to the great Catholic persecuting power – Spain.

### **23.6 ELIZABETH AND PARLIAMENT**

Queen Elizabeth's rule depended on support of the nation and Parliament represented the nation's backing of Elizabeth.

### **23.7 THE TWO MAIN CAUSES OF DISSENSION WERE MONEY AND RELIGION**

After the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588), peace came to England. The English believed that the wind that destroyed the Spanish fleet was sent by God. National pride rose. God was on the side of Protestant England. Yet the parliament began to oppose her, over the very two matters which were to lead to strife in the seventeenth century : Money and religion.

A large number of Queen's subjects had adopted the reforms made by the Puritans to alter the Church and make it more Protestant. They were not happy with Elizabeth's policy of leniency to Catholics. Elizabeth herself was no Puritan and objected to persecution. Puritans wished to abolish Bishops and establish Presbyterianism. Elizabeth forbade Parliament to discuss the matter, and arrested the leaders.

Another cause of dissension with Parliament was quarrels over finance. The Queen was always in need of money. Her revenue was spent on helping the Dutch and the French against the Spanish. Large sums were used to encourage revolts in Ireland and to fight the Armada. The Parliament did not raise her finances. In order to meet the rising prices and financial demands, she sold "monopolies" to rich individuals. They were given the sole right to trade in certain goods and earn whatever profit they desired, as long they had purchased the "monopoly" from the Queen. The Parliament

saw in this an “illegal” way for the Crown to raise money and objected. Elizabeth was forced to give way and promised not to make such grants. Whatever be the flaws of Elizabeth, but the English nation during her regime progressed and prospered, giving rise to strong feelings of nationalism. She had put her best efforts to bring about a reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants by the policy of ‘Ecclesiastical Compromise’. The country which had seen the glorious period during her domain, saw a sudden decline in the Stuart Period.

### **23.8 BEGINNING OF STUART RULE : JACOBAN PERIOD (1603-1624)**

With James I, the Stuart period began in England. The Stuarts were originally Scottish Kings and James I their first ruler, also enjoyed the title of James VI of Scotland as son of Mary, Queen of Scots, who drew her descent from Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII. His claim to the crown was very sound.

James I was consistently involved in conflicts with the Parliament, judges and religious parties. He believed in the “Divine Right” theory of kingship which resulted in his animosity with the parliament.

He upheld the Anglican faith, thus alienating Catholics and the Puritans. In 1620, Pilgrim fathers departed from Plymouth. A terrible religious war, Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had started, which further proved James I as an unworthy King. When James I had ascended the throne, Puritans had established their strong foothold as it was the most powerful religious party. In 1604, Puritans, put forward their demands in a document “Millenary Petition” which insisted that the office of the Bishop should be abolished and the church to be a little more democratized. A conference at Hampton court was summoned to discuss the religious points, but it proved to be a failure because the King did not give consent to a single demand of the Puritans. James I believed in the slogan: ‘No King No Bishop’ ; To destroy the King meant destroying the Bishop. He only revised the Prayer Book of Elizabeth in 1611 and the new revised liturgy,

since then, is known as “Authorized Version of 1611.”

### **23.8.1 King and The Parliament**

The Parliament and the King had dissensions from the very beginning of his ascendancy. Long before coming to the throne of England, James had written a treatise ‘“True law of the Free Monarchies”’ which upheld the Divine Right theory. This theory had incurred the wrath of the Parliament and under seldom’s leadership it had put down its rights and privileges. It didn’t budge the King an inch. Rather, he approached the Convocation of the Church to give sanction to his Divine Right belief. In the same year, James I proclaimed himself as the King of great Britain, Ireland and France.

### **23.8.2 The financial policy**

The Financial policy of the King was another cause which enraged the Parliament. From 1614 to 1621, he resorted to many arbitrary financial exactions. Besides, the impositions, he raised money by reviving the old custom of benevolences. In 1614, the Second Parliament called the “Addled Parliament”, was summoned and a lump sum of money was demanded by James in return for his feudal rights (popularly known as ‘great contract’). Parliament refused this proposal. Equally, unpopular was the policy of James to sell monopolies and the right of Baronetcies. Financial issues had further severed the relations of Parliament and the Monarchy.

### **23.8.3 His foreign policy**

His foreign policy of supporting Spain, an enemy of both people and Parliament, marred his reputation. The reason for support was personal as James wanted to marry his son, Charles I to the Spanish Princess. On the insistence of the Spanish King, he executed popular sailor, Raleigh, thus causing unrest in the Parliament. The first Stuart King had sown the seeds of Civil War (1642-49) which was fought between Parliament and King during the reign of Charles I..

### **23.9 CHARLES I : CAROLINE PERIOD (1624-49)**

Charles I, no better than his father, was a staunch believer in the “Divine Right Theory”. For this, he suspended the Parliament for eleven years—1629-1640. In religious matter, he was supporter of Anglican faith, therefore, with the help of his adviser Laud, he tried to enforce the Anglican religion. Laud made the court of High Commission an engine of Royal tyranny. Charles I urged the Scots to give up “Presbyterian faith” and adopt Anglican system. This ultimately led to the Bishops War in 1640. The memorable historical event in Caroline Period was the Civil War (1642-49) which proved fatal to the King as he was mercilessly beheaded in 1649.

#### **23.9.1 The Civil War (1642-49)**

Religion was the basic cause of clash between the King and the Parliament. Parliament stood for Puritanism which was hostile to all ceremony and followed the Genevan fanatic, Calvin, in believing in ‘predestination’. They believed that either one was chosen by God to be saved by grace or condemned to live in incurable sin. Consequently, the Church was to be governed by elders and deacons (‘presbyters’) who were “*the elect and would impose their divinely*” inspired will on the unsaved. Presbyterianism was passionately followed by Scotland, the English Parliament, for the sake of Scottish military help agreed to adopt but later the greatest Puritans and Parliamentarians including Cromwell and Milton, rejected it. Whatever the differences between Puritans, they were determined to overthrow the royally sponsored Anglican Church. The supporters of the King were called Royalists and Cavaliers, whereas the supporter of Parliament were called “Roundheads”. The King and the Parliament could not endure each other and Laud’s severe steps of persecuting Anti-Anglicans resulted in a serious conflict between the two parties, finally culminating in the Civil War.

#### **23.9.2 Financial Reasons**

Financial reasons aggravated the tussle between the Parliament and the King and this was another factor resulting in civil war. Tonnage and Pondage

was granted to the King only for one year, by the parliament, which otherwise was a life-long right of the king. The enraged king started raising money by arbitrary methods – asking people for benevolences by enforcing odious forest laws. Parliament was against this and claimed the exercise as illegal. In retaliation, Charles resorted to a new financial device, Ship-Money, a tax levied on the people living in ports in order to repair and strengthen Navy. This was repeated for three consecutive years, evoking utter resentment among people. John Hampton, a friend of Cromwell, refused. This is known as Hamden Case (1638), turning people against monarchy. Another case in 1640, when Charles I needed money for Bishop's War, parliament's refusal made him resort to the mean act of raising money by debasing the currency. Consequently, these financial measures led to the Civil War.

### **23.9.3 The Civil War**

The Civil War ensued between the King and the Parliament on 22 August, 1642 and lasted for seven years. It was fought in order to decide the sovereignty of either King or Parliament. The causes of the war, as studied above, were religious; eleven years of tyrannical rule of Charles I, financial issues of Tonnage and Bondage and the immediate cause was impeachment of land and execution of Strafford by the Parliament.

In the war, 'Roundheads' (supporters of Parliament) were led by the Earl of Essex. In the later stages of the war, Fairfax and Cromwell took the charge of Parliamentary force. The Royalists (supporters of the king) were led by Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I. From 1642 to 1644, Roundheads were victorious. In 1644, differences between Parliament and Cromwell arose owing to Parliament's strong inclination towards Presbyterianism. Still Cromwell continued fighting zealously and in 1646, the civil war ended with the victory of the parliament. Charles I was imprisoned by the Parliament.

### **23.9.4 Second Civil War (1648)**

Later on, differences crept in between Parliament and Cromwell. By



sending hundred soldiers under Colonel Joyce to raid Holmly House (Lincolnshire), where parliament had confined Charles I, Cromwell made Charles his own prisoner. Cromwell would not allow the establishment of extreme Presbyterianism in England. So, he drafted the “Heads of the Proposals” and asked the King to consider two demands :

1. Constitutional Monarchy
2. Religious tolerance.

Charles did not accept the demands. Rather, he had opened secret negotiations with the Scots and escaped from the prison. The Second Civil War broke out in 1648 when the Scots invaded England. This Civil War made Cromwell undisputed master of the situation by defeating the enemy at Preston. Charles I was again taken captive.

Cromwell decided to do away with the monarchy. Parliament’s consent was must for this purpose. But to Cromwell’s utter disappointment, the Parliament was reluctant. This made Cromwell send a large number of marketers under Col. Pride to arrest the Presbyterian of the Commons and allow the independents to enter the Houses of Parliament. This event is called Pride’s Purge and the Parliament of Cromwell—”Rump”. With the sanction of the Rump, in 1649, Charles I was brutally beheaded in public. After this, Cromwell became the master of United Kingdom and with him was established Puritanism in England – the greatest moral and political reform which swept over the nation for half a century.

### **23.10 CROMWELL : THE PROTECTORATE (1649-1659)**

Oliver Cromwell, born in 1599, was the only surviving son of Robert Cromwell of Huntington. His military genius made him triumphant in the Civil War. His triumph was the triumph of Puritanism in England. Puritanism firmly believed in God as the ruler of rulers and was intolerant of earthly tyranny. It prospered during the Commonwealth. The Puritans were upright, but they were fanatic as well. Under Cromwell severe laws were passed, outlawing simple pleasures and imposing austere standards of living on

unwilling people. Theatres were closed, dance and music were frowned upon. Puritanism was slowly destroying the social culture, suffocating the freedom-loving race of Saxons. People developed intense hatred for the Puritans, and consequently to get rid of their yoke, Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660.

**Cromwell and Parliament:** Cromwell and the Rump Parliament started having differences soon. “Rump” wanted to perpetuate its tenure of power. Cromwell persuaded it to nominate a provisional government and dissolve itself. But Rump didn’t yield. So in 1653, Cromwell turned them out with the help of his soldiers and in a way became dictator. Not willing to bear the whole responsibility, Cromwell summoned a new Parliament of 140 faithful and god-fearing Puritans called ‘Parliament of Saints’. It carried out several reforms. But eventually, it also came into conflict with Cromwell and was ultimately dissolved. Cromwell was proposed the crown but on his refusal the army officers drafted a constitution, popularly known as the “Instrument of Government” which made Cromwell Lord Protector for life.

A new Parliament of 460 members was established. This Parliament questioned the legality of the “Instrument” and was dissolved in 1655. Elections for the new Parliament were held, But this parliament included hostile elements and these were driven out. Rest of the members were of Cromwell’s choice. Again problems crept in when the “Other House” or “Second House” was summoned by Cromwell. His ardent supporters took seats in the Upper House. Lower House was captured by the Republicans and the Protector’s enemies.

This too was dissolved in 1658 and after this no other Parliament was formed.

**Foreign Policy :** In Cromwell’s period of governance, the Dutch War was fought (1652), for several reasons. The first reason was that Holland was a great commercial rival of England in the East Indies. Secondly, William Orange of Holland was married to the daughter of Charles I, a source of annoyance and insecurity to Cromwell. Thirdly, the English ambassador at

the Hague was murdered by the Dutch. Cromwell passed the Navigation Act of 1651, which did not bring the Dutch on the right path. This ultimately led to war in 1652 continuing till 1654. War was also waged against Spain in 1655, as Spain was reluctant to open the West Indian trade to the English traders.

The policy which Cromwell adopted with Ireland gained him much ignominy as Irish rebels who were Catholics, were badly suppressed. Some of them were assassinated. Their lands were taken away and many restrictions were imposed on them. Though compensations were made, but the Cromwellian regime had been tyrannical. Cromwell had won excessive notoriety and his rule was doomed.

#### **23.10.1 Reforms**

Cromwell's regime had positive aspects as well. Cromwell was a great reformer. During his short rule of less than ten years he carried out many reforms. The Treasury was reorganized. Highways were maintained. A system of civil marriages was established. Duelling, swearing, race meeting and cockfights were prohibited. He also tried to carry out some legal reforms; Court of Chancery was abolished and attempts were made to reform the Penal Code.

He also did his best to encourage education. A major portion of the confiscated church land was allotted to the maintenance of schools. He liberally patronized the old universities, Cambridge and Oxford. He founded the University of Durham.

He was also a great patron of learning. Milton and Marvell, the two renowned literary figures of his day were his secretaries. Cowley and Wallen, inspite of their being Royalists, were allowed perfect freedom of thought. It was Cromwell's austerity in the matters of religion which brought him infamy and inculcated hatred among the masses.

#### **23.10.2 Restoration of Charles I**

Cromwell died in 1659. His successor Richard Cromwell had no

aptitude nor capability to shoulder the responsibilities after his father's death. He also lacked military qualifications. He had no support of army or people, therefore, he quietly abdicated in 1660. Less than a year from his accession, Charles II ascended the throne with the consent of people and Parliament. After the "Restoration" Charles II in 1660, Puritanism was vigorously ousted from its controlling position but it had left an indelible mark on the English character, while across the Atlantic, the sons of the Pilgrim fathers were consolidating their way in New England.

### **23.10.3 Charles II (1660) : The Restoration Period**

In February 1660, Richard Cromwell, The Army and The Parliament were quarrelling among themselves in Scotland. General Monk, a true patriot, came to know that Army officers were thinking of establishing a military despotism. Monk came to London and summoned the surviving members of the Long Parliament. The people were demanding a new Parliament and restoration of monarchy. Thereupon, this parliament was dissolved and new Parliament came into being. In April 1660, the new Parliament called, "Convention Parliament" was summoned and negotiations with Charles II were started, who was then in Holland. Charles accepted all the Parliamentary terms and conditions in the famous "Declaration of Breda". He promised to (i) pay all the arrears of the soldiers of the Army (ii) to grant a general pardon to all those Roundheads who had participated in the Civil War. (iii) to settle the questions of ownership of lands which had changed hands during the Cromwellian regime (iv) to grant liberty of conscience, that is tolerance. After the declaration of Breda, Charles II entered London and was cheerfully greeted by the public. Finally, monarchy was restored after a lapse of more than eleven years.

With Charles II, the Anglican Church was also restored by means of the Clarendon Code, Test Code, the Restoration of the two Houses of Parliament – Commons and Lords and above all, the Restoration of the Reign of Law. Cromwell's policy of tolerance to all sects was abandoned. But on the other hand, with the restoration of monarchy, the Divine Right

theory was not restored nor were the Prerogative Courts. No arbitrary taxes were levied. Charles II had learnt a lesson from his father's death, so he did not resort to absolute measures.

### **23.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the literary, social and political background of John Milton.
2. Discuss development of Caroline and Restoration Period.

### **23.12 LET US SUM UP**

Milton's era, the 17th century, was marked by significant political and religious upheaval. The English Civil War (1642-1651) between Parliamentarians and Royalists led to the execution of King Charles I and the establishment of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. This tumultuous period reflected tensions between monarchic authority and parliamentary power. Additionally, religious divisions were profound, with the rise of Puritanism challenging the Church of England's authority. The Act of Uniformity (1662) imposed religious conformity, leading to dissent and the persecution of non-conformists. These events and tensions heavily influenced Milton's works, such as "Paradise Lost," as he grappled with themes of authority, freedom, and the divine amidst this dynamic backdrop.

### **24.13 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Hamilton Thompson - *A History of English Literature*

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 24**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT – IV**

### **LIFE OF JOHN MILTON**

#### **Unit Structure**

#### **24.1 Objective**

#### **24.2 Introduction**

#### **24.3 Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained**

#### **24.4 Literary Career of Milton**

#### **24.5 Hymn On Nativity**

#### **24.6 Examination Oriented Questions**

#### **24.7 Multiple Choice Questions**

#### **24.8 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **24.9 Suggested Readings**

#### **24.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the life of John Milton.

#### **24.2 INTRODUCTION : MILTON**

Every writer is a representative of the age that produces him and his works reflect the age in which he lives. The poet who lends his name to the literary age, however was John Milton (1608-1674), the intellectual giant who reflects, as an authentic mouthpiece in his literary works and intellectual ferment, all that characterized the times. It is not an easy task

to give even a cursory sketch of a life so crowded with literary as well as political activity. He was born in London on December 9th, 1608. His father's house was on the Spread Eagle in Bread Street, and his baptism took place at the neighbouring church of Allhallows. His father was a "scrivener" —a kind of combination of law stationer and solicitor—and a man who combined independent views and interest in the arts with the ability to make a success of his profession. Milton's father had a strong inclination towards music, he was a skilled musician, an ardent Republican with a strong leaning towards Puritanism. Milton evidently gave indications, from his early childhood, of the extraordinary intellectual powers which distinguished him from all other men; and his father aided his genius by giving him a generous opportunity to study. He was most carefully educated, first at home, under the supervision of Thomas Young, who afterwards, taught at Jesus College, Cambridge. From his private tutor, he went to St. Paul's School, where under a notable High Master, Alexander Gill, he spent nearly five years rapidly developing proficiency in the classics, as well as gaining a deep respect for the Renaissance tradition of learning.

The combined attention of Thomas Young and Alexander Gill met with an eager response from the young scholar and they were able to inculcate in him the passion for acquiring knowledge to gratify his aesthetic desire. In his own words :

My appetite for knowledge was so voracious that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight.

By the time he went up to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1625, he had acquired proficiency in Hebrew, French and Italian, as well as Latin and Greek; he had been introduced to the Elizabethan poet, Spenser; he had composed much in Latin and had rendered two psalms into English verse (Psalms, CXIV and CXXXVI). He inherited a natural aptitude and love for music from his father.

During the days of his youth, he could have easily yielded to the joys of wine and love, but he remained away from these pleasures and he spent

his youth chastely like a priest. However, he was by temperament adamant, and could fight the authorities on issues and still be a studious scholar. He was never submissive to arbitrary authority, expecting more from humanity than common humanity could ever give, yet he was ardent, emotional and impressionable as a man.

He had little or no inclination to interact with living scholars. He visited France, Switzerland, and the most celebrated of the Italian cities, and being furnished with the best of introductions, was received everywhere with marked respect and admiration. He struck the learned and fastidious Italians with unusual astonishment and wherever he went he was highly appreciated, as he was well-acquainted with Latin and Italian verse and he showed his profound skill, thus giving proof of his intellectual genius. Milton had an interview with Galileo, “grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition.” Among his other friends was Giovanni Diodati, a theological professor and a member of a noble house which sprung originally from Lucca. During his stay abroad, he gave proof, not only of his religious and political ardour, so hostile to Episcopacy and the monarchical system that he had received the wise recommendation of the wise diplomat to keep “his thoughts close and his face open”. In Italian, he wrote at least as well as the majority of contemporary poets—for after Tasso’s death, there arose no first-rate Italian poet – but in Latin verse his compositions have never been surpassed by any modern writer and still bear close and critical reading.

He spent about fifteen months abroad, then was recalled abruptly to England by the first ominous signs of war between the King and the Parliament. A person of fervent temperament was not likely to remain a passive spectator of the momentous conflict. He threw himself into the struggle with all the ardour of his natural temperament and convictions. From this point, the second phase of his career starts. He can be seen as a most eloquent, but vehement and furious controversialist – one of the most prolific writers of that epoch of agitation, producing works on all the burning questions of the day. He strongly advocated the establishment



of Republican principles in the state and waged an uncompromising war against the Church party in the Kingdom.

Milton sought to open a school in Aldersgate Street; but among those who had the honour of his instructions, the only two celebrated persons were his nephews, Edward and John Phillips. These, the sons of his sister Anne, left several details respecting Milton's life.

Milton's actual career as a prose writer began in the year 1641, with his treatise, *Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England*, and his defence of the five ministers whose counter blast in the same year to Bishop Hall's Humble Remonstrance was known as "*Smectymnuus*". His controversial work, so successfully inaugurated, continued without interruption until the Restoration defeated all his hopes and left him in blindness, poverty and danger, with nothing but the consciousness of the sincerity of his convictions, and the leisure to devote the closing years of his life to the composition of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

### **24.3 PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAINED**

His writings in defence of *Smectymnuus* were directed against the Anglican Church. His violence led him to attack not only the large and influential party represented by Laud, but the moderate and almost Puritan views of men like Hall, whose theological position, apart from the episcopal question, was identical with Milton's own austere creed. But, in the midst of these struggles, he turned aside to take an active part in agitating a very important question which concerned the law of divorce. Some of the pamphlets of 1644 and 1645, including the famous *Tetrachordon*, were doubtlessly suggested by his own private affairs. He had been married in 1643, to Mary Powell, the daughter of an Oxfordshire squire of Royal sympathies. It is said that Mary Powell's father had borrowed a huge money from Milton's father and being unable to repay the money, had probably sought an easy way out of his difficulties by allowing his daughter to make an unsuitable and an unpromising match. Their marriage did not prove to be of compatible and their married life was not very

happy. In 1644, he wrote *Areopagatica*, an oration after the unique model, in which he addressed Parliament in defence of the liberty of the press. This and his treatise, *Of Education*, remain the best known and most widely read of his prose writings. His *History of England* was published in 1670, it comprised six short books and covered a period from the earliest times down to the Norman Conquest.

In 1647, his father died and his own movements were very slow and restless. He moved from house to house, carrying his small and not very flourishing school with him. But, in 1649, he was appointed as Latin secretary to the Council of State. In this post, his skill as a writer of Latin was employed in strengthening the diplomatic ties between the Republican Government and the European Powers – at this time such correspondence was always carried out in Latin.

In after years, when he lost his eye sight, he was joined in these duties, first by a man named Weckherlin, then by Philip Meadows, and afterwards by an excellent and accomplished Marvell. He completely lost his vision in 1652, but the weakness which caused it had been gradually coming on for ten years.

In his intense devotion to study, he had greatly strained his eyes. In one of his sonnets, *On His Blindness*, he alludes, with lofty self-consciousness and pious resignation, to his blindness, which he proudly attributes to his exertions on behalf of truth and liberty.

Milton showed sympathy with Cromwell and with the administration but, he was not a sycophant at all. He disapproved of the despotic and military character of the Protector's rule and pardoned some of the unavoidable severities of a revolutionary government, considering the benefits it brought and the patriotism which it fostered. He must have been pleased at Cromwell's efforts to raise the nation to the head of European affairs and his strict and strong Protestant policy. His views on the execution of king are clearly visible in *Iconoclasts* (1649) and his three *Defensiones contra Salmasium*. Milton, in 1651, wrote in retaliation to Salmasius's *Defensio Regis*, which was a pamphlet written

in Latin, invoking the wrath of Heaven upon the Parliament of England. *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano* was followed in 1654 by the *Defensio Secunda*, and in 1655, by the *Pro Se Defensio*. In these works, Milton justifies the English people in making war upon the monarchy.

Milton's prose style is a hybrid, borrowing its forms and styles from Greek and Latin sources. Milton amazes and convinces the reader, even in poetry he can be compared with Virgil and Dante, rather than Spenser.

With the Restoration, in 1660, begins the last, the most gloomy and yet the most glorious period of the great poet's career. Milton was imprisoned for having written against the monarchy, but he was liberated after a confinement of some months. It is said that Sir William D'Avenant successfully used his influence to spare him any further persecution. From this period till his death, he lived in close retirement for a short time in Holborn and then in Jewin Street, busily occupied in the composition of his great epic. *Paradise Lost*, after having been his principal employment for seven years, was finished in 1665, and published in 1667. *Paradise Regained*, a much shorter work, was published alongwith the noble tragedy of *Samson Agonistes*, in 1671. On November 8th, 1674, Milton died, at the age of 66. He was buried besides his father's grave in Cripplegate. He had been married three times. His daughters by Mary Powell survived him and are said to have treated him badly. Although his domestic relations were fragmented, but he still fought against all the odds and was able to give posterity a great epic in the form of *Paradise Lost*. He has been vilified and abused from time to time, his reputation has been mangled and torn by partisans. But his writing proved him a real genius – his loyalty, his love for God, nobility and his pity for fallen poets are all reflected in the works produced by him. Of all the English prose writers, Milton is placed on the highest pedestal, and he has attained the sublimity which others crave.

#### **24.4 LITERARY CAREER OF MILTON**

Milton's literary career can be divided into three great periods – his youth, his manhood, his old age. The Youthful phase can be extended from

1623 to 1640. The second extends from 1640-1660 ; and the third, from the Restoration to the poet's death in 1674. During his "youth" days, he produced a larger number of miscellaneous poems, including verse of very tender and graceful character; the second phase was chiefly occupied with his prose writings, whose invigorating effect and serious, exalted style lead on to the occupation of the third period, the slow and elaborate composition of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Finally, the characteristic of the early epoch is grace ; the middle epoch constitutes of force and vehemence, and last one almost an unapproachable sublimity.

In the early, almost boyish poems—the *Verses at a Solemn Musick*, the poetical exercises written at school and college, and the *Hymn on Nativity*—there are certain qualities which distinguish Milton from all other poets. The main among them is the grandeur of conception, which in Dante, was not free from harshness and ruggedness, but, in Milton, is combined with consummate harmony and grace. The austerity, however, remains in a modified but still remarkable form, the result of his Puritan cast of thought, whose stamp nothing could efface in his works. In addition, these poems which may sometimes appear occasional and sometimes trivial, display a scholarship so vast and complete that it would have overwhelmed and crushed a power of original conception less mightily than Milton's. In the least elaborate of his poems, there is always present solemn, full melody which made a later poet address him as the "God-gifted organ-voice of England." There is no poet whose imagery is so vast and profuse, and yet so admirably designed to work in harmony towards the general meaning and effect.

#### 24.5 HYMN ON NATIVITY

*Hymn on Nativity* is well-conceived. Image crowds into the mind after image, fact after fact. There are the prefatory stanzas, describing the peace of the world at Christ's birth. Then having thus engendered a "solemn stillness", in which the pealing notes of his triumphant music sink to a whisper, he transfers it to the night of the Nativity—to the silent winds,

the noiseless lapping of the waves, the “steadfast gaze” of the stars—whispering gently and more gently until the shepherd’s voices, “simply chatting in a rustic row”, break in upon the hushed air. Immediately, angelic voices are followed by them rising in a great crescendo, until with one united crash of the “crystal spheres”, the vast perspective of Heaven is disclosed, and cherubims and seraphims burst into the harmony of the Redeemer’s cradle-song. Amid their joyful strain, the mind is filled with dreams and visions of the Golden Age, rising and falling with the heavenly melody, embracing aeons in their grasp and heralding, in this first day of man’s happiness, the last day and the destruction of earth and sin.

#### **24.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Write a note on the biography of John Milton.
2. Enlist the important works of John Milton and their themes.

#### **24.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Where was John Milton born?
- A) Stratford-upon-Avon
  - B) London
  - C) Edinburgh
  - D) Oxford
- Q.2 During which historical period did John Milton live?
- A) Renaissance
  - B) Victorian
  - C) Enlightenment
  - D) Restoration
- Q. 3 Which significant event deeply influenced Milton’s political and religious views?

- A) The Magna Carta
  - B) The Glorious Revolution
  - C) The English Civil War
  - D) The Norman Conquest
- Q.4 Which of Milton's works reimagines the biblical story of the Fall of Man and explores themes of free will and divine justice?
- A) "Paradise Lost"
  - B) "Paradise Regained"
  - C) "Samson Agonistes"
  - D) "Areopagitica"
- Q.5 What did Milton advocate for in his essay "Areopagitica"?
- A) Religious conformity
  - B) Censorship and licensing of books
  - C) Freedom of the press and speech
  - D) The divine right of kings
- Q.6 In "Paradise Regained," what does the poem focus on?
- A) The fall of Lucifer
  - B) The creation of the world
  - C) Christ's temptation and triumph
  - D) The battle between good and evil
- Q.7 What historical event led to the execution of King Charles I and the establishment of the Commonwealth?
- A) The American Revolution
  - B) The French Revolution

- C) The Industrial Revolution
  - D) The English Civil War
- Q.8 Which work by Milton portrays the story of Samson from the Book of Judges?
- A) “Paradise Lost”
  - B) “Paradise Regained”
  - C) “Samson Agonistes”
  - D) “Lycidas”
- Q.9 What role did Milton serve under during the Commonwealth period?
- A) Prime Minister
  - B) Lord Protector
  - C) Chancellor
  - D) Secretary for Foreign Affairs
- Q.10 Which aspect of Milton’s writing had a lasting impact on political philosophy?
- A) His romantic poetry
  - B) His religious sermons
  - C) His comedic plays
  - D) His defense of individual liberty

Answers : 1B, 2D, 3C, 4A, 5C, 6C, 7D, 8C, 9D, 10D

## 24.8 LET US SUM UP

John Milton (1608–1674) was an influential English poet and intellectual of the 17th century. Born in London, he lived through the English Civil War and Commonwealth era, advocating radical political and religious views. His most famous work, *Paradise Lost* (1667), is an epic poem that reimagines the Fall of Man and explores themes of free will and divine justice. His other significant works include

*Paradise Regained* (1671), a sequel to *Paradise Lost*, and *Samson Agonistes* (1671), a dramatic poem. Milton's legacy lies in his profound impact on political philosophy and literature, as he championed individual liberty and his writings reflected the complex ideological currents of his time.

#### **24.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. John Milton : *Introduction* - John Broad Bont
2. *A Preface to Milton* - Potter Lois

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**LITERARY WORKS OF JOHN MILTON****Unit Structure**

- 25.1 Objective**
- 25.2 Introduction**
- 25.3 His Poetry**
- 25.4 II Pensoroso**
- 25.5 The masque of comus**
- 25.6 Lycidas**
- 25.7 His later poetry**
- 25.8 Samson Agonistes**
- 25.9 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 25.10 Suggested Readings**

**25.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the literary works of John Milton and the influences on him which had a deep impact on his writings. This chapter covers all these aspects.

**25.2 INTRODUCTION****Milton's Works**

His Prose : Most of Milton's prose was written during the middle period of his life (1640-1660), when he was busy with public affairs. In all he wrote twenty-five pamphlets, of which twenty-one are in English and

the remaining four in Latin. Of Milton's prose works, there are many divergent opinions, ranging from Macaulay's unbounded praise to the condemnation of some of our modern critics. From a literary point of view, Milton's prose would be stronger if less violent. In his fiery zeal against injustice the poet is suddenly dominated by the soldier's spirit. His several tracts and treatises emphasise freedom of the spirit of man. In this, he was once again unlike the Puritans of his age, believing strictly, like the Cambridge Platonists, that the spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than scriptures. His own troubles with his first wife led to his consideration of the question of domestic freedom. His opinions created constraints of scandal. In his, *The Doctrines and Discipline of Divorce*, he wrote that the unnecessary constraints of law should be done away with. He wrote against the restraint of some lawful liberty which ought to be given to men and is denied to them. In his ecclesiastical pamphlets, he led to the suppression of the individual clergyman's freedom of preaching. In the pamphlet *Of Holy Spirit written in the Hearts of believers*, Milton's belief really reveals his non-adherence to the Puritan ideals and doctrines. In addition, he did not believe in the Puritan idea of predestination and refused the Son an equal status with the Father. In other words, he quarrelled with the basics of Puritanic doctrines. His greatest contribution lies in advocating the freedom of expression and Press in the Pamphlet, *Areopagatica* (1664). In Milton's time there was a law forbidding the publication of books, until they were endorsed by the official censor. Needless to say, the censor holding his office and salary by favour, was naturally more concerned with the Divine Right of Kings and Bishops than with the delights of literature, and many books were suppressed for no better reason than they were annoying the authorities. Milton protested against this, as against every other form of tyranny, and his *Areopagatica*—so called from the Aeropagus or Forum of Athens, the place of public appeal, and the Mars Hill of St. Paul's address—is the most famous plea in English for the freedom of press. Throughout his prose, we find, in abundance, passages of lofty eloquence, grim irony and persistent passion for freedom. Milton's prose is not for everyday purpose ; it is too rarely pedestrian.

It is ironical that Milton did not become famous for the works that he considered important all his life. Posterity remembers him instead for his poetic works while his prose pieces are regarded as of casual and accidental profit.

### **25.3 HIS POETRY**

Milton's poetical works are divided into three periods. The first covers his poetry upto 1640. This is the period when, still an undergraduate, Milton began to compose poems of remarkable maturity and promise. They include short poems like, "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity", poems "On Shakespeare" and "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty Three". These poems show Milton's command of impressive diction and his high ideals, both literary and religious. He composed *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in 1639. These are twin poems containing many lines and short descriptive passages which linger in the mind like strains of music, and which are known and loved wherever English is spoken. *L'Allegro*, (the joyous or happy man), is like an excursion into the English fields at sunrise. The air is sweet; birds are singing, multitude of sights, sounds, fragrances, fill all the senses; and to this appeal of nature the soul of man responds by being happy, seeing in every flower and hearing in every harmony some exquisite symbol of human life.

### **25.4 II PENSOROSO**

*Il Penseroso* takes us over the same ground at twilight and at moonrise. The air is still fresh and fragrant. The symbolism is, if possible, more tenderly beautiful than before; but the gay mood is gone, though its memory lingers in the afterglow of the sunset. A quiet thoughtfulness takes the place of the pure, joyous sensation of the morning, a thoughtfulness which is not sad, though like all quiet moods it is akin to sadness, and which sounds the depths of human emotion in the presence of nature. To quote scattered lines of either poem is to do injustice to both. They should be read in their entirety the same day, one at morning, the other at even tide, if one is to

appreciate their beauty and suggestiveness.

## 25.5 THE MASQUE OF COMUS

*The Masque of Comus*, is in many respects, the most perfect of Milton's poems. It was written in 1634. There is a tradition that the Earl's three children had been lost in the woods and, whether true or not, Milton takes the simple theme of a person lost, calls in an Attendant Spirit to protect the wanderer, and out of this, with its natural action and melodious songs, makes the most exquisite pastoral drama that we possess. In form, it is a masque, like the gorgeous products of the Elizabethan age of which Ben Jonson was the master. England had borrowed the idea of masque from Italy and had used it as the chief entertainment at all festivals, until it had become to the nobles of England, what the miracle play had been to the common people of a previous generation. Milton, with his Puritan spirit, could not be content with the mere entertainment of an idle hour. *Comus* has gorgeous scenic effects, the music and dancing of other masques; but its moral purpose and its idle teachings are unmistakable.

"The Triumph of Virtue" would be a better name for his perfect little masque, for its theme is that virtue and innocence can walk through any peril of this world without permanent harm. This eternal triumph of good over evil is proclaimed by the Attendant Spirit who has protected the innocent in this life and who now disappears from mortal sight to resume its life of joy :

*Mortals, that would follow me;*

*Love Virtue; she, alone is free.*

*She can teach ye how to climb*

*Higher than the sphery chime ;*

*Or if Virtue feeble were,*

*Heaven itself would stoop to her.*

While there are undoubted traces of Jonson and John Fletcher in

Milton's *Comus*, the poem far surpasses its predecessors in the airy beauty and melody of its verses.

### 25.6 LYCIDAS (1637)

*Lycidas* (1637), is a pastoral elegy written on the death of a college friend Edward King. He had been drowned in the Irish Sea, Milton follows the poetic custom of his age by representing both his friend and himself in the guise of shepherds leading the pastoral life. Milton uses all the symbolism of his predecessors, introducing fauns, satyrs, and sea nymphs ; but again he is not content with heathen symbolism, and introduces a new symbol of Christian shepherd responsible for the souls of men, whom he likens to hungry sheep that look up and are not fed. The Puritans and Royalists at this time were drifting rapidly apart and Milton uses his new symbolism to denounce the abuses that had crept into the Church. In any other poet, this moral teaching would hinder the free use of the imagination; but Milton seems equal to the task of combining high moral purpose with the noblest poetry. In its exquisite finish and exhaustless imagery *Lycidas* surpasses most of the poetry of what is often called the Pagan Renaissance.

Besides these well-known poems, Milton wrote in this early period a fragmentary masque called *Arcades*; several Latin poems which, like his English, are exquisitely finished; and his famous sonnets which brought this Italian form of verse nearly to the point of perfection. In them, he seldom wrote of love, the usual subject with his predecessors, but of patriotism, duty, music and subjects with his political interest suggested by the struggle into which England was drifting. The best known sonnets are, "On His Deceased Wife", "To the Nightingale", "On Reaching the Age of Twenty-three", "The Massacre in Piedmont" and the two "On His Blindness"

### 25.7 HIS LATER POETRY

Undoubtedly, the noblest of Milton's works, written when he was blind and suffering are, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The first is the greatest, indeed the only generally acknowledged epic in

English literature since *Beowulf*, the last is the most perfect specimen of a drama after the Greek method in our language. King Arthur attracted him at first; but his choice finally settled upon the Fall of Man, and he selected it as the subject of *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam, the central character, is something of a prig; while Satan looms up a magnificent figure, entirely different from the devil of the miracle plays and completely overshadowing the hero both in interest and in manliness. The other characters, the Almighty, the Son, Raphael, Michael, the angels and fallen spirits are merely mouthpieces for Milton's declamations, without any personal or human interest. Regarded as a drama, therefore, *Paradise Lost* could never have been a success, but as poetry, with its sublime imagery, its harmonious verse, its titanic background of Heaven, Hell, and the illimitable void that lies between, it is unsurpassed in any literature. It is a colossal epic, not of a man or a hero, but of the whole race of men; and that Milton's characters are such as no human hand could adequately portray. But the scenes, the splendours of Heaven, the horrors of Hell, the serene beauty of Paradise, the sun and planets suspended between celestial light and gross darkness, are pictured with an imagination that is almost superhuman. The poem is in blank verse and not until Milton used it, did we learn the infinite variety and harmony of which, it is capable. He played with it, changing its melody and movement on every page. Lamartine has described *Paradise Lost*, as a dream of a Puritan fallen asleep over his Bible and this suggestive description leads us to the curious fact that it is the dream, not the theology or the description of Bible scenes, that interests us. Milton describes the separation of earth and water, and there is little or nothing added to the simplicity and strength of Genesis; but the sunset which follows is Milton's own dream and instantly we are transported to a land of beauty and poetry. In this magnificent heroism, Milton has unconsciously immortalized the Puritan spirit, the same unconquerable spirit that set men to writing poems and allegories, when in prison, for the faith, and that sent them over the stormy sea in a cockle-shell to find a free commonwealth in the wilds of America.

The understanding of *Paradise Lost*, presupposes two things—a knowledge of the first chapters of the scriptures and of the general principles of Calvinistic theology; of the theology of *Paradise Lost*, the least said the better; but to the splendour of the Puritan dream and the glorious melody of its expression no words can do justice. Even a slight acquaintance will make the readers understand why it ranks with the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.

Soon after the completion of *Paradise Lost*, Thomas Ellwood, a friend of Milton, asked one day after reading the manuscript, "But what has thou to say of Paradise Found?" It was in response to this suggestion that Milton wrote the second part of the great epic, known as *Paradise Regained*. The first tells how mankind, in the person of Adam, fell at the first temptation by Satan and became an outcast from Paradise and from divine grace; and the second shows how mankind, in the person of Christ, withstands the temptation and is established once more in the divine favour. Christ's temptation in the wilderness is the theme, and Milton follows the account in the fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel. Though *Paradise Regained* has many passages of noble thought and splendid imagery equal to the best of *Paradise Lost*, the poem as a whole falls below the level of the first, and is less interesting to read.

## 25.8 SAMSON AGONISTES

In, *Samson Agonistes*, Milton turns to a more vital and personal theme, and his genius transfigures the story of Samson, the mighty champion of Israel, now blind and scorned, working as a slave among the Philistines. It is based on Greek tragedy. Milton has followed all the three unities and the action is reported by chorus instead of being presented on the stage. There is no mixture of comic with the tragic. Samson, like Milton is old and blind, married to an unworthy woman, surrounded by triumphant enemies whom he despises and faces with undaunted courage.

As a poet, Milton is not a great innovator but he imparts grace, dignity and perfection to every form he touches. His achievements in the epic, the ode, the classical drama, the sonnet, the masque and the elegy have remained

unparalleled. We observe an ease, sureness and success in all his metres. He is sublime, both in thought and in style. He is acknowledged as a master of the grand style. In English literature, he occupies an important transitional position. With a firm temper and hand he was able to gather into one system, the wavering tendencies of poetry, and to impart to them sureness, accuracy and variety.

### **25.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Analyse critically the chief characteristics of *Paradise Lost*.
2. What are the three periods of Milton's literary work ?
3. Discuss Milton's grand style with reference to *Paradise Lost*.
4. Give a character sketch of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
5. What quality strikes you most in the poetry of John Milton?

### **25.10 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Broad bent. John. *John Milton : Introduction*. London, Cambridge University Press, 1973.
2. Potter Lois. *A Preface to Milton*. London : Longman Group Limited, 1971.
3. Thompson, Hamilton. *A History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1997.

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**INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON JOHN MILTON****Unit Structure****26.1 Objective****26.2 Introduction****26.3 Influence of Religion on Milton****26.4 Conclusion****26.5 Examination Oriented Questions****26.6 Let Us Sum Up****26.7 Suggested Readings****26.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to show the influence of religion on Milton's works. Milton shows a deep impact of Hebrew literature and *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, deal with the fall of Adam and Eve and the redemption of mankind by the suffering of Christ. Milton's other works also show his use of Christian myths.

**26.2 INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of his literary career, Milton was a fairly orthodox Anglican. By the end of his life, he did not attend church at all and did not hold family prayers in his home. This movement from centre to extreme left was paralleled by his political development and is typical of what happened

to the people during the 1640s and 50s. There were those who called themselves seekers, they went in search of the true religion from church to church and found no one who could convey the real meaning of religion to them. Milton did not make this kind of search. Milton did not waste time in exploring the claims of rival sects, but he advocated tolerance for all except Roman Catholics.

The particular type of Anglicanism in which Milton grew up, had a strongly Calvinist flavour, and Calvinism formed the basis of his later religious belief. It was a less harsh belief than Calvin's original doctrine of predestination, and was in fact the object of attack by strict Presbyterians. A Dutch theologian Arminius was of the view that men were predestined only in a conditional sense : that is, God predestined the good to salvation and the bad to damnation, but he did ordain that the one group should be good and the other bad. Hence, man had free will after all. It is the Arminian view that is seen in Book III of *Paradise Lost*.

If I foreknew,

Fore knowledge had no influence on their fault,

Which had no less proved certain unforeknown. (III. 117-19)

### **26.3 INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON MILTON**

Milton was never, then, a strict Calvinist. But Calvinism was a way of life as well as a religious doctrine and Milton was one of many Puritans, who although distrusting the Presbyterian form of Church government, nevertheless retained many of its basic attitudes. His Christian Doctrine, which is a representation of the point his religious thought had reached by the end of the Commonwealth period, is both Puritan and Calvinist in its insistence on the superiority of Scripture over tradition, and of the individual conscience over Scripture. He recommended the domestic virtues of frugality and industry, found nothing wrong in the desire to get on in the world, and distinguishes between virtue and fanaticism. He cited an example that we are forbidden to lie to our neighbour, but are under no obligation to speak

truth to our enemy, especially, when we have not been asked for it and when it would be suicidal to do so. This practical approach to religion is also shown in Milton's frequent statement that it is pointless to speculate about theological mysteries which are of no help to us in leading our lives. Milton disliked the mystical concept of the doctrine of the Trinity, though *The Christian Doctrine*, is the only place where he superficially denies it. He believed that the Son was created by the Father, rather than co-eternal with him, and is a separate being. He believed that Christ cannot be an intercessor between man and God, if Christ was identical with God. Milton considered the Holy Spirit of a somewhat lower order than Father and Son, but that in any case its precise nature cannot be a vital article of faith, since so little is said about it in the Scriptures. In *Paradise Lost*, Son and the Spirit are represented as agents of the Father, who is the essence and source of all their actions. But son's volunteering to sacrifice himself for mankind is more dramatic if seen in this light. The son is omnipotent only by virtue of his faith in his Father and he has to prove, by his actions, that he alone is worthy to be the Son of God. In *Paradise Regained*, Christ is shown to be human rather than divine. Milton does not believe that he could have been both at once, and consequently unsure of his identity. The temptation in the wilderness would have no interest if Christ were not human enough to be tempted.

The denial of the Trinity is the chief of Milton's famous 'heresies'; the technical name for it is Arianism or Subordinationism. But the theological speculation in the seventeenth century had touched doctrines far more exotic than Milton's—for instance, reincarnation, the denial that hell was eternal, belief that the end of the world was at hand. Religious writers dabbled in Oriental religions, Jewish mysticism, pagan philosophy, and the study of those Church fathers who had been called heretics by a later age. Milton's mild eccentricities, such as his defence of polygamy in some circumstances and his antisabbatarianism are hardly noticeable. They can be seen like his Arianism and his exposition of the Puritan ethic generally as a result of that ostentatiously logical, practical attitude to life which is frequently found in

the most idealistic and impractical of men.

To advise the readers on how they should approach the Scriptures, Milton takes a practical, almost Fundamentalist, point of view. The allegorical tradition of scriptural interpretation, applied to the Old Testament since before the time of Christ was known to Milton; in *The Paradise Lost*, The Garden of Eden represented the Soul of Man, with Adam as Reason and Eve as Passion. Near the beginning of *The Christian Doctrine*, he advises his readers to take Scripture literally, since, though we cannot know God as he really is, the Bible at least shows us how he wishes us to conceive of him. Similarly, in *Paradise Lost* he has described divine personages in human terms. Though he frequently reminds us, as Raphael also reminds Adam, that the reality is far beyond anything we can imagine, he also wants us to identify ourselves with the heroes of these stories, which is not likely to happen if we think of them only as symbolic figures.

Milton had read the Church Fathers and many other Biblical commentaries by the commentators, and his epics were bound to take some of their views into account. St. Augustine in, *City of God*, fixed the orthodox Christian interpretation of the Biblical events with which Milton deals in his epics. He identified the serpent in the Garden of Eden with the devil and, because all God's creations must originally have been created good, he concluded that Satan and his followers were angels who had fallen from their original perfection. Accepting to some extent the allegorical reading of the fall, he took the forbidden fruit as a symbol of obedience and following St. Paul, distinguished between Adam's sin and Eve's (the result of ignorance). He maintained that sexual relations between man and woman had existed before the fall and were not, as others had argued, a consequence of it; thus, sex was inherently good.

St. Augustine's distinction between fallen and unfallen sexuality is the basis of Milton's book. The Bible gives no definite explanation of the fall of the angels, several hypotheses had been offered to account for it. In one version, Satan was cast out from heaven after he tempted Eve and Adam,

another version, makes him Eve's seducer. Following this tradition, Milton gave Satan, the style of a courtly lover in his speeches to Eve. But the main cause of Satan's downfall was usually taken to be pride, which was thus, regarded as the chief of the deadly sins. The chief of the damned spirits was believed to have been a bright angel, who dazzled by his own splendour, tried to usurp the place of God and was punished by being cast down into hell. Such was the traditional portrayal of the devil in, for instance, medieval drama, though after his fall he tends to become a grotesque and even comic character, swearing, letting off fireworks, and generally behaving like a monster in a horror film. Genesis does not say when the angels fell and Milton's decision to make the war in heaven precedes the creation of the world is to some extent a departure from tradition. St. Augustine had suggested that perhaps the fall of the angels was meant to be implied in the phrase about God's dividing the light from the darkness on the first day of Creation. He noted that, although the Bible declares that God saw the light was good, night and darkness are not so described. The separation of good from evil, like that of light from darkness, seemed to him proof that God intended the beauty of the world to arise from the constant opposition of contrary principles. The implication that the angels fell virtually as soon as they were created, smacked too much of predestination to satisfy Milton. By making the creation of the world an answer to Satan's destructive action in warring on God, he was able to emphasize instead the rhythm of divine providence, whereby each Satanic attempt at destruction is followed by a still more wonderful display of God's creative energy. But St. Augustine's appreciation of the poetic effect produced by the light-dark contrast is very much in the spirit of Milton's work. Even before his blindness, the poet saw the world, both physically and morally, as black and white. His political extremism, his impatience of all attempts of Church and state to impose compromise and moderation on the free spirit, have their literary counterparts in the imagery of contrast which he uses : the snow-covered world and 'bright-harnessed angels' of *The Nativity Ode*, are set against the 'twilight shade' and 'temples dim' of the defeated pagan Gods; the dark wood of *Comus*, is brightened

by the 'sun-clad power of chastity'. Yet, like Augustine again, Milton avoids the heresy of making the evil, dark principle as powerful as the good one. The darkness contains some reflection of the sun and is never altogether able to black out the light.

The influence of religion on the works of Milton can be seen from the beginning. The two psalms which Milton chose to translate at the age of fifteen sing the praises of the Lord who freed the Israelites from the tyrant Pharaoh. The infant Christ of *The Nativity Ode*, is seen as the overthrower of the usurper Satan and his followers. The fall of Satan in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, is the result of the same divine power that also works through Samson when he brings down the pillars of the Philistine temple and sets his people free. The life of a Christian was traditionally pictured as a battle, but it was within the human soul that Christ and Satan were at war. Even in *Comus*, although the brothers make a daring raid on the enchanter's den, they are not able to free their sister until helped by Sabrina, the martyr of chastity. And the Lady defeats CAMUS in words before he is defeated in action. Yet the zest with which the brothers undertake to fight for virtue's cause is part of the essential optimism of Milton's work.

Milton, who had once thought the Englishmen the chosen people of God, later blamed the failure on the national character. It is not surprising then, that Milton's post-Restoration epics reject the false glamour of 'fabled knights in battles feigned' (PL IX. 30-I) Michael tells Adam not to expect the defeat of Satan by Christ to take the form of a duel, and *Paradise Regained* treats the temptation as a battle of words only Christ specifically rejects any thought of establishing his kingdom by force. Milton had earned the right to praise 'the better fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom' (PLIX.31-2). Milton was a strong advocate of freedom. Milton believed that Man had to be wise as well as good because his virtue depended on his ability to make the right choices. Reason, as Milton said in, *Aeropagitica*, 'is but choosing'. From this it followed that everything which denied the man the right to choose for himself must be evil. The good angels voluntarily choose to obey God, just as Eve chose to obey Adam. There is no element

of constraint in this situation, because reason and emotion go together. 'Freely we serve, Because we freely love,' Raphael tells Adam, and Eve's love for her husband is also an act of choice. She is obeying 'God in him' and should cease to obey him if his advice went against what she knew to be God's command. Thus, no one is really subservient to another person's will, but only to God's will as manifested in him. In most situations though, Milton felt that men ought to find their freedom in a decision to serve those whom they recognize as their natural superiors. Milton's greatest work tells how freedom may be regained, but what it actually shows us is how it was lost. In particular, the career of Satan is a poignant study of how loss of virtue leads to the perversion of reason and thus, to loss of freedom.

Milton has been called a materialist, but he was a spiritualist, who believed that the body was a spirit, a 'living soul'. He believed that everything in the universe ultimately leads towards its Creator. Milton's view was that all matter was created by God and was therefore good. The difference between earth and heaven, like the difference between man and angels, was one of degree, not of kind. He seems even to have half accepted the Platonic belief in 'middle spirits', 'Betwixt the angelical and human kind' (PL III.462), who like the Attendant Spirit in *Comus*, might inhabit the moon, the intersection between the mortal and immortal worlds. Human beings became more angel-like as their souls and bodies became more refined, but the soul did not leave the body, from which it was inseparable. Milton was in fact a 'mortalist'—that is, he believed that the soul died with the body and revived only at the resurrection. To believe that the soul was created immortal, he thought to deny the need for the resurrection and to open the way for such superstitions as Purgatory, prayers for the dead and ghosts.

## 26.4 CONCLUSION

All the works of Milton clearly reflect his strong belief in religion. His epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, show Milton's strong inclination towards Christianity and these epics show the victory of good

over the evil. Milton was a 'heretic', he was rational in his thinking but all the scientific theory for Milton, came back in the end to religion.

### **26.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Paradise lost purposes to Justify the ways of God to men Comment.
2. What religious lessons the epic-poem seek to convey.

### **26.6 LET US SUM UP**

Religion profoundly shaped John Milton's life and works. He was raised in a devoutly religious family, which provided a strong foundation in Protestant beliefs. Milton's deeply held religious convictions informed his political and intellectual engagement, driving his advocacy for personal liberty and his opposition to oppressive regimes. His theological perspectives are evident in his writings, especially in *Paradise Lost*, where he explored themes of sin, redemption, and divine justice. Milton's unwavering faith influenced his steadfast commitment to moral and intellectual integrity, establishing him as a significant figure in the history of religious and literary thought.

### **26.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *A Preface to Milton* - Potter Lois
2. *A History of English Literature* - R. D. Trivedi

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**INFLUENCE OF SCIENCE ON MILTON AND HIS LITERARY WORK****Unit Structure****27.1 Objective****27.2 Milton and Science****27.3 Conclusion****27.4 Let Us Sum Up****27.5 Suggested Readings****27.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this chapter is to acquaint the learner with the influence of science on Milton and his literary works. It is also important for the learner to know explore the different writers whose ideologies matched with Milton's ideologies and whose ideologies clashed with him.

**27.2 MILTON AND SCIENCE**

This century was the age when science first came into existence. Milton's lifetime, which spans the first three quarters of the 17th century, is seen as a period of transition between the medieval and the modern. During this period, there occurred a change from a view of the world as an animate organism existing in its own right, to one in which the earth is part of a complex universal mechanism. This change took place primarily because of the astronomical discoveries that were made : astronomy was the most significant science for Milton's generation. It is true that other fundamental discoveries

were made, like the circulation of the blood by William Harvey, William Gilbert's proof that the earth was a magnet, invention of an early form of calculating machine by John Napier; but it is the astronomers, Copernicus and Galileo who made the greatest impact on the lives and imaginations of men.

Milton used the word science to mean all knowledge, as well as in its modern sense. Natural science to Milton was not a number of distinct disciplines but simply a branch of philosophy. The 'Scientific Revolution' which brought about this rapid change of attitude was in fact part of the same spirit, which made itself felt in political and religious matters, and was eventually to have its effect on literature as well. The emphasis was to be on practice rather than theory, on the nature of the object being looked at, rather than the ingenuity of the person looking at it. At the beginning of the century, Sir Francis Bacon, in his *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620), laid down a programme for research, based on observation and cooperation between researchers. Early in the Restoration, the Royal Society set about the implementation of these principles. The Society was chartered by Charles II, but its special emphasis on practical work and intellectual democracy was essentially Puritan in spirit and many seventeenth century scientists had Puritan sympathies.

The ideal, for Bacon and the founder members of the Royal Society, was that truth would be found by compiling the labours of many men. It was not so simple. The scientific ideal of cooperation was to some extent an anti-individualistic one, particularly in its effect on English prose. Scientists needed a common language, clear and unambiguous; highly personal, emotional or poetic style was a liability when the main aim was rapid communication of knowledge. Thomas Sprat, optimistically declared that the new science would be a fresh source of poetic material. Milton's *Paradise Lost* does not make use of science in a highly imaginative way, suspends judgement on doubtful points with a detachment worthy of the Society, but his style, with its deliberate ambiguities, serious puns and the sliding syntax, is as far removed as anything could be from the precision which was soon to be a characteristic of poetry as well as prose.

Milton was a supporter of Baconian science. Both Bacon and Milton shared a common goal. Both advocated the study of the natural sciences in order to regain that command over all created things which Adam forfeited at the fall. Both agreed that science cannot tell us anything directly about the nature of God, but it must lead ultimately to Him. Bacon insisted that theological explanations must not be confused with the actual examination of objects; while Milton subordinated scientific fact to the truths of spiritual enlightenment. Milton in *Against Scholastic Philosophy*, attacked the logical methods of Aristotle as a barren discipline; Bacon made a similar accusation. The Middle Ages had developed Aristotle's thought into a rigid metaphysical system and in the 17th century scholars still tended only to ask the question 'why?' about events and never the question 'how?' To both Bacon and Milton, medieval natural philosophy had outlived its usefulness; it had degenerated into mere speculation. Milton dismissed scholastic logic on the grounds that it could not reveal anything of importance. Milton's major interest in the 17th century developments in natural sciences was the increased awareness they afforded of the Creator's handiwork. He approved of much in the Baconian scientific philosophy but, for Bacon, since God was so remote in the natural world as to be present only in theoretical terms, he could for all practical purposes be ignored. The logical heir to Baconianism is material atheism; to Milton atheism was a philosophical absurdity.

Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) expounded the first purely totalitarian materio-mechanistic philosophy. Hobbes's basis for all knowledge is the material world, perceived through the senses. Material world is the only thing that exists, experiments with material objects are the source of 'truth'. Any concepts which assume that non-material things can exist, like 'soul', 'spirit', 'angel', 'God', are nonsense. With this atheism, Hobbes wholeheartedly committed himself to an extreme mechanical theory. This is an exhaustive explanation not merely of material objects, but of all facets of human experience. Knowledge is the product of the active pressure of

external material objects upon the sense organs; these set up vibrations in the brain and nerves, which are 'ideas'. According to the Hobbes, man's basic and innate instinct is to preserve his own life, and he seeks to ensure this by gaining power over his environment and his fellow men. Man is a cautious, scheming, egotistical creature; as his entire existence is a form of motion, happiness cannot be a passive state but rather a continual progress of the desire from one object to another. So, he lives in a perpetual and restless desire for power, that ceases only in death. The philosophy of Hobbes is a direct contradiction of the theological and philosophical convictions of Milton. It was, in some measure, as a protest against Hobbes' materialistic atheism that Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. In this poem, it is fallen man who exists in a pit of darkness, subject to the agitation of nervous irritability and selfish preoccupation; and it is Satan who is accredited with the desire for power, the restless desire to assert what he believes to be his rightful inheritance. The Hobbesian natural man exists in a state of perpetual war, competing with his fellow egoists for the power to ensure the preservation of his own life at the expense of theirs; Milton identifies war with disobedience, and war-monger with Satan. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes offers man a totalitarian form of government as a means of escape from his natural state of perpetual war; in *Paradise Lost*, Milton offers fallen man the doctrine of the Fortune Fall – since man fell, it was necessary for Christ to offer himself as the Saviour, but through Christ man may rise to a place higher and more blessed than that from which Adam fell. It is not totalitarianism which man must accept to escape from his natural fallen condition—"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" as Hobbes describes it—but the offer of redemption in Christ through obedience to God.

Before the publication of *Leviathan*, there had been others who had attempted to reassert the cause of religion in an age rapidly being dominated by scientific and material concerns. Sir Thomas Browne, a Norwich doctor, antiquary and amateur archaeologist, defended religion from the attacks of science and yet remained a practising scientist. For him the natural world was a manifestation of God's permanently pervading presence

and also of his absolute apartness from the limitations of material things. The world of nature is the art of God and our understanding of it is an aspect of our adoration of Him and His divine handiwork. For Browne, as for Milton there is no conflict between the worlds of science and religion, they are different manifestations of the same thing. None of the observable facts of the world can conflict with scripture, for God is the author of both and he is without contradiction. Like Bacon and Milton, Browne is not a pantheist, he doesnot worship nature; and he is fearless in correcting what he can demonstrate to be inaccurately observed phenomena. In his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* or *Vulgar Errors* (1646), a scientific treatise addressed to the learned world, he exposed a series of common misconceptions. Browne was responsible for formulating the pattern which scientific treatises still adopt – statement of proposition and the authority upon which it is based, description of experiment, results of this experiment, and the deductions to be made as a modification or confirmation of the original proposition. Browne’s methodology is modern, but he believed in astrology, alchemy, magic, the Ptolemaic astronomy and in 1664, when Milton was composing *Paradise Lost*, he gave evidence against two women accused of witchcraft : they were hanged a week later.

For Browne, as for Milton, it is man alone in whom the spiritual and material aspects of existence united : man is unique, he shares a rational soul with the angels, and a body with the lower forms of animal life. The human body is composed of four primary elements. In the chaos which separates earth from heaven and hell, Milton describes matter still scattered into its elemental particles :

*For Hot, Cold, Moist and Dry, four champions fierce*  
*Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring*  
*Their embryon atoms.*

This reflects a simple form of atomic theory as expounded by Greek philosophers, and by Bacon; but the men of Milton’s generation believed

that all things were composed of earth, water, air and fire, which possessed the four primary qualities of dryness, moisture, cold and heat. Man represented within himself a world in miniature, he was the microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of the universe. The human body contained four corresponding humours : blood, like air (hot and moist); phlegm, like water (cold and moist); choler, like fire (hot and dry); and melancholy, like earth (cold and dry). In a perfectly balanced personality these four humours would be distributed in exact amounts according to this sequence, but in descending order of abundance. Any man fortunate enough to possess a perfect distribution of elements would enjoy perfect health of body and mind. In consequence there were four major categories into which human temperaments were divided; sanguine (blood), phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic. Sanguine was considered the most desirable as blood was the most important material constituent of the body. The fundamental principle of 17th century medicine was, therefore, to account for diseases by the over-abundance of one or other of the humours, and the treatment must aim to restore the correct balance. This assumption tends to ignore the fact that the idea of the mechanical universe is a working hypothesis and not a proved conclusion. Dominating our consciousness of the material world, the idea of mechanism is so all-embracing that it either eliminates God altogether or removes Him to so distant a function that no personal contact with Him is feasible. Milton stands in conflict with this point of view : God is immediate and is present in human existence and it is through Him alone that life has meaning. Man must learn from the experiences of Adam in Paradise that 'to obey is best'. The great Christian virtues of humility, temperance, fortitude, forgiveness and the hope of resurrection must always be the ultimate goal of human endeavour.

For Milton, the natural sciences of the material world have inescapable moral connotations : a basic scientific fact is that it tended to believe that the more scourging the medicine, the more effective the treatment. Milton, speaking of the ultimate weapon of the Church, excommunication, described it in medical terms. In the description, he said that the doctors did not know

how to cure specific diseases so they prescribed complex compounds of all kinds of drugs in the hope that something might work.

In *Areopagatica*, Milton recorded a visit he had made to Galileo in Florence, but spoke of the astronomer not as a scientist but as a symbol of the suffering created by bigotry. And later, in *Paradise Lost*, he speaks of the moon.

*Whose orb*

*Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views*

*At evening from the top of fesele.*

Milton speaks of both the Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy, but makes no explicit reference to the Tychonic compromise. To Milton the poet, the old geocentric astronomy with its attendant hierarchy of spheres and spirits was a more suitable vehicle for conveying his message about God's purposes; to Milton the rationalist, the Copernican heliocentric pattern was a more plausible explanation – the Tychonic Compromise was simply Unnecessary. Milton always speaks of the universe as primarily a theocentric organism; and in practical terms within limited mortal vision, it is physically geocentric. He emphasizes the immensity of the created cosmos and the consequent comparative minuteness of the earth.

Milton's concern with astronomy is not that of the practising scientist but that of the moral teacher, who draws analogies from the observable rather than the theoretical nature of the heavens in order to illustrate his philosophical and theological statements. Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, reveals his familiarity with discoveries made about the lunar surfaces with some form of 'optic glass'. Milton ascribes to Satan in *Paradise Regained*, the clever manipulation of the laws of optics, using the principles of telescope and microscope, to create a panoramic X-ray mirage.

Milton's universe is based upon the hierarchial principle with God as its centre and focus, Christ and the Holy Spirit as his agents, the angels in their degrees, men in their stations, and all created things in due order and proportion

attendant upon him. In Book VIII of *Paradise Lost*, Adam enquires about the basis of the heavenly economy, realizing that it is strange. Milton's universe is providential and his God benevolent—there is nothing in life which cannot be accounted for. Milton makes the scientific assumption that an ultimate consistency is part of the nature of things. For Milton, it is reason which distinguishes man from the animals, and Christ embodied divine reason which man may share. Milton was bound, therefore, to challenge any assumption like astrology, which seemed to conflict with reasonableness and the idea of free will. Michael warns Adam, just before the expulsion from Paradise. Milton uses astrological assumptions in his poem, when he describes the tarnished image of the fallen Lucifer. Meteors, comets, eclipses, earthquakes were all popularly believed to presage disasters, just as the epidemics of bubonic plague were explained as the visitations of the wrath of God upon wicked people. Milton uses imagery derived from these sources as a poetic resource to convey other concepts, not to expound them as credible in themselves. Milton employs astrology, to add resonance to an abstract idea. As a rationalist, he rejected astrology, as a poet he knew that it was emotionally credible.

In his prose works, Milton speaks with contempt of the alchemists by identifying them with Roman Catholicism. Speaking of bishops, he declares that they extract heaps of gold and silver from people who go to them for confession. William Camden, the most distinguished Elizabethan antiquary and historian, in *Remains of a Greater Work Concerning Britain* (1605) describes, at one point, certain frightening developments in the science of war. He sees in the siege-engine, the most appalling prospects for civilization. Milton ascribes to Satan the invention of the cannon and the first making of gun powder :

*Sulphurous and nitrous foam*  
*They found, they mingled, and with subtle art,*  
*Concocted and adjusted they reduced*  
*To blackest grain, and into store conveyed :*  
*Part hidden veins digged up (nor hath this earth*



*Entrails unlike) of mineral and stone*

*whereof to found their engines and their balls of missive ruin.*

Milton pictures the rebel angels as miners who digout the entrails of living animal Earth. They torture this great creature in the production of raw materials of war. By identifying the martial virtues with Satan, Milton effectively condemns them and the science of war. Satan is himself compared to a 'devilish engine' and, in the war in heaven, he uses the stratagem of concealing his newly invented weapons behind a phalanx of troops, who suddenly move aside for the cannon to be discharged. The hideous effects of gunfire are magnified when it is realized that this collapse of the opposing force is effected upon the army of Christ. The light of heaven is eclipsed by power smoke, the very atmosphere is disembowelled by cannon shot—Milton's imagery is drawn from that most ghastly of 17th century punishments, the 'drawing' of the entrails of the convicted traitor and the burning of them on a brazier at his side while he is still conscious. The massacre of the angelic host is equivalent to the slaughter of the common soldier in any war in any kingdom. The only science which Milton condemns without reservation is that of war, for Satan is its originator and his only creative act is to invent more efficient ways of destruction.

In his treatise *Of Education*, Milton gives a prominent place to practical scientific skills in his outline of those studies necessary for the education of the fully-trained individual. He advocated that students should first study the principles of 'arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and geography, with a general compact of physics. He wanted that apart from law and music, students should be instructed in physiology, anatomy, astronomy, optics, navigation, cosmography, arithmetic, geometry, algebra, fortification, architecture and the professors were expected to conduct research in their own fields.

Modern science and technology operate upon the assumption that the universe is subject to mechanical laws which can be perceived and analysed— this applies both to natural and human phenomena. Both, ourselves and our environment are subject to exact measurement, whether this be a process of objective analysis, The earth's climate is subject to

seasonal variations, but this is a consequence of the fall of man. Science opened up new horizons to the poet.

### **27.3 CONCLUSION**

Milton was accused of being ostentatious and the scientific references in *Paradise Lost*, gave the impression that Milton was parading esoteric theories instead of common knowledge, Milton believed that science cannot tell us anything directly about the nature of God, but it leads ultimately to Him. Milton believed that a prominent place should be given to practical scientific skills for the education of the fully trained individual. He advocated that students should be well-acquainted with scientific studies and his literary work clearly reflect it.

### **27.4 LET US SUM UP**

The influence of science on John Milton's works is notable in his engagement with emerging scientific ideas of his time. While his primary focus was on theology and literature, he was aware of scientific advancements and integrated some concepts into his writings. His use of cosmological imagery and descriptions in *Paradise Lost* reflects an understanding of the scientific theories of his era. Although not a scientist himself, Milton's intellectual curiosity led him to engage with contemporary scientific discourse, infusing his poetry with allusions that demonstrate an awareness of the changing worldview brought about by scientific discoveries.

### **27.5 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Broadbent, John. *John Milton, Introductions* London : Cambridge University Press, 1973.
2. Patter, Lois *A Preface to Milton*. London : Longman Group Limited, 1971
3. Svendsen, K. *Milton and Science*. London : Cambridge Mass, 1956.

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-I**

**LESSON No. 28**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT – IV**

**PARADISE LOST : A SYNOPTIC VIEW**

**Unit Structure**

**28.1 Objective**

**28.2 Introduction**

**28.3 Paradise Lost**

**28.3.1 Book I**

**28.3.2 Book II**

**28.3.3 Book III**

**28.3.4 Book IV**

**28.3.5 Book V**

**28.3.6 Book VI**

**28.3.7 Book VII**

**28.3.8 Book VIII**

**28.3.9 Book IX**

**28.3.10 Book X**

**28.3.11 Book XI**

**28.4 Paradise Lost Book I**

**28.5 The Purpose and Meaning of Paradise**

**28.6 Conclusion**

## **28.7 Self-Assessment Questions**

## **28.8 Multiple Choice Questions**

## **28.9 Suggested Readings**

### **28.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with the theme of '*Paradise Lost*' Book I.

### **28.2 INTRODUCTION**

In this lesson gist of all the twelve books of this great epic is given so as to introduce the learner to the basic purpose or the message which John Milton conveys in the poem, as a whole. A critical survey of Milton's life and works has been made in previous lessons. This would make easier for the learner to grasp the theme of the poem. The poem has a religious epicentre and for this, it is important to know the influence of religion on Milton.

### **28.3 PARADISE LOST**

*Paradise Lost* : *Paradise Lost*, is one of Milton's most ambitious works and one of the most complex works owing to its *grand style and epic qualities*. The poem comprising of 10,665 lines, consisting of XII Books, was written and published in 1667, during the period of Milton's blindness. The poem is a result of prolonged meditations on Biblical, Hebrew and Classical learning. The understanding of religious background, in order to grasp the essence of the poem, is very important. This has been discussed in the earlier chapters.

The whole poem consists of four main parts :

- (a) The war in Heaven leading to the expulsion of the defeated rebels.
- (b) The rebels in Hell and the devising of the plan for revenge—the destruction of God's newly created human race.

- (c) The execution of the plan—the temptation and the fall.
- (d) The immediate consequences of the fall.

**28.3.1 Book I :** The fallen Angels abashed and writhing in the burning lake of Hell, are depicted. Satan, their leader, first rouses himself and makes his way to the smouldering shore, accompanied by his “next Mate” Beelzebub. After expressing his undaunted spirit and being answered by Beelzebub, he rallies thousands of his abject followers who follow him out of the lake. They form up on parade to listen to Satan’s exhortation to them to resume the war, by guile or with new creation. Under the leadership of Mammon, a council palace—Pandemonium— is built. The innumerable masses of the lesser devils (their forms converted to pigmy size), remain in the outer Hall of the infernal palace while the ‘great seraphic lords’ sit in solemn conclave within.

**28.3.2 Book II :** It opens with the great debate. After an opening speech by Satan, the leader and chairman, first Moloch, then Belial and Mammon express their views. Realizing that the general feeling is with Belial and Mammon, who in their different ways argue that all thought of war should be dismissed, Beelzebub rekindles enthusiasm for continuing the war and describe a practicable plan—the corruption of Man; for this, the arduous task of journeying to Earth has to be undertaken. Satan wants to execute the plan by going to the Earth. Satan’s dangerous journey is described. He persuades sin to open the gates and ventures into Chaos. The rulers of Abyss—Chaos and Night meet him giving him travelling directions and he soon comes within sight of Earth's Universe hanging from Heaven by a golden chain.

**28.3.3 Book III :** It begins with the famous invocation to light. The scene shifts to heaven. God describes his plan for man, his coming, fall and the condition of his redemption if someone from Heaven will atone for his sin. Christ offers himself. The angels sing a hymn in praise of the Father and Son.

Satan passes through Limbo (Paradise of fools) and goes to the Orb of the Sun, but finding the archangel Uriel, disguises himself into a smaller

angel and learns from him the location of the Garden of Eden. Uriel in ignorance, praises Satan's spirit of quest.

**28.3.4 Book IV :** After some misgivings, Satan confirms his malevolent purpose and reaches Paradise, which he surveys from the Tree of Life, in the shape of cormorant. He sees Adam and Eve, in all their perfection, but overhears that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is forbidden to them. Uriel sees the evil in Satan's face and warns the Archangel Gabriel, the guardian of Paradise. Night approaches and Adam and Eve retire to rest. Gabriel and helpers search the garden and find Satan tempting Eve in a dream in the guise of a serpent. He offers resistance to Gabriel, but a sign from Heaven causes him to fly out of the garden.

**28.3.5 Book V :** This begins with Eve's report of her bad dream to Adam. They begin their day's work with a hymn of praise. God sends Raphael to warn them of the penalties of disobedience and of their danger. They suitably entertain Raphael, who, at Adam's request, tells them of the nature of their enemy and why he became one. This leads to an account by Raphael of Satan's rebellion which began when Satan fled to the North with his followers whom he there incited to revolt. Only the faithful seraph Abdiel refused to be seduced from his allegiance to God. Raphael reports the argument between Abdiel and Satan.

**28.3.6 Book VI :** Raphael continues his account. Abdiel is congratulated by God. War begins. Michael and Gabriel lead God's forces. Abdiel confronts Satan is again worsted, this time by Michael. But on the second day, Satan's forces use artillery, which disconcerts the loyal army. They, however, successfully counter the attack by hurling uprooted mountains at the enemy. On the third day, as Satan's forces are not fully defeated, God sends his son against them. He irresistibly pursues them to the edge of Heaven, whence, routed, they fall into the place of punishment made ready for them.

**28.3.7 Book VII :** It begins with another invocation to the Muse, containing personal references. The book itself relates Raphael's further answers to Adam's questions—he satisfies Adam's desire for information about the

creation of the world by telling how the Son, at God's request, created the world in six days, and the angelic celebration thereof.

**28.3.8 Book VIII :** Adam asks Raphael to explain the laws of motion governing heavenly bodies. Raphael, replying, shows foreknowledge of later astronomical notions, but he warns Adam that he must not inquire too closely into such mysteries. Adam recounts what he has remembered since his own creation and Raphael leaves with repeated warnings.

**28.3.9 Book IX :** News of the fall is received in Heaven. The son is sent to pronounce judgement on the delinquents. He finds them ashamed and guilt ridden. Adam (inaccurately) reports what had happened, putting all the blame on Eve for his sin. The son sentences Eve to pain and submission, and Adam to working for his sustenance. Sin and Death, from their position at Hell gate, sense Satan's success and resolve to share in the spoils. They build a bridge over Chaos linking Hell to the Earth. They meet the returning Satan and celebrate their success. Satan arrives at Pandemonium and relates his triumph to his assembled followers. Their applause turns to hissing for they are all changed to serpents, like him. They see an orchard of the forbidden fruit, but when they eat, they find they are chewing bitter ashes. Sin and Death meanwhile invade the Earth. God permits them to scavenge but tells the Son that He will one day conquer them and cleanse the Earth. God also announces changes in the mechanics of the universe which will introduce seasons and climatic variations and so make man's life more difficult. Adam and Eve continue to quarrel but she appeases him. She urges suicide to save their offspring; he dissuades her by reminding her of the promise that her seed will in the end be revenged upon the Serpent and by advising, enduring repentance and confiding themselves to God's mercy.

**28.3.10 Book X :** The Son intercedes with God for Adam and Eve. God accepts their repentance but sends Michael to expel them from Paradise. Adam warns Eve of some imminent doom. He meets Michael, who announces their expulsion, which Adam's humbly accepts after some pleading. Michael

then shows him a panorama of human history until the Flood.

**28.3.11 Book XI :** Michael continues mankind's history from the flood to Abraham. He reveals the meaning of the promise that the woman's seed would defeat the Serpent. He describes the coming of that Seed, man's Redeemer, with details of his Incarnation, Adam is comforted by these revelations. He awakens Eve and together they go, with the fiery sword and the guardian cherubim guarding the gate behind them.

Thus, this is the Synoptic view of XII books of the poem. The next Section will deal with the central theme of *Paradise Lost, Book I*.

#### **28.4 PARADISE LOST BOOK-I : CENTRAL THEME**

Milton conceived his unique vocation to be the writer of a work of literature so sublime that it would surpass all the great works of the past and so bring everlasting glory to his country. The greatest works of the past were epics; his work must therefore be an epic too, but the theme must be even greater than the themes of his mighty predecessors—Homer, Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso. He pursues “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime” for which only the highest themes will suffice. The highest theme, therefore, is :

*I may, assert Eternal Providence,*

*And justify the wayes of God to men*

The first five lines of “the great Argument” state the theme — Man's first Disobedience against the background of the inexorable World Order, the Dispensation, Disobedience in the fall of Man and the beginning of Sin in Man. Disobedience is moral corruption and fall from Divine Grace. It also is corruption of the body politic and disorder and chaos in cosmos. The opening lines are highly suggestive and evocative :

*Of Man's first Disobedience and the fruit*

*Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste*

*Brought death into the world, and all our woe,*



*With loss of Eden till one greater Man*

*Restore us and regain the blissful seat,*

The subject matter of *Paradise Lost*, is taken from the first chapter of the Genesis : the disobedience of Man in eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and his fall as a consequence, bringing death into the world and all the woes from which man has continued to suffer. All “our woe” is human woe that is still with us. But on the same hand the “Greater Man”, Jesus, the Redeemer will bring about the redemption of mankind. The sin, therefore, can be understood with reference to the Christian scheme of providence, repentance and salvation. Through sin of primal perversity—transgression of the divine benevolent dispensation — we have fallen and through Christ we are purged of our sin. Disobedience of Adam and Eve stem from Satan’s monomania of taking revenge upon God, which ultimately led to chaos but Christ would cleanse the sin by making the innocent creatures (Adam and Eve) repent. Therefore, from perdition to repentance and ultimately salvation. *Paradise Lost* deals with the Christian theme of good conquering the evil. The first twenty-six lines of Book I indicate the central theme of “Man’s first Disobedience” — the material is chiefly drawn from Genesis and with the aid of “Heavenly Muse”, Milton fuses three great civilizations : Classical, Hebrew and Christian.

Though the Prologue of Book I introduces us to the purpose behind writing the great epic of 10,665 lines, consisting of XII Books, but in Book I, the fall of Satan from heaven with his rebel angels is of utmost importance. The expulsion of Satan is the result of the “impious war” he had waged against God. The source behind this war is the Greek myth, where also wars were waged in heaven. The Greeks thought of Olympian history as a series of rebellions by sons against their father. First Uranus cast the Cyclops out of heaven into Tartarus, then his other sons, the Titans, dethroned him, who in turn were dethroned by Olympian Gods in alliance with Cyclops. The story of Prometheus, a Titan who sided with Zeus in his war on the Titans was punished with eternal tortures, is compared with Satan, whom God

tormented with his expulsion :

*Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl'd headlong flaming from the Ethered sky  
With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
To bottomless perdition there to dwell  
In adamant chains and penal fire,  
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.*

Also, the Titans fell for nine long days, so did Satan who faced God's wrath :

*Nine times the space that measures day and night  
To mortal man, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,  
Confounded, though immortal. But his doom  
Reserved him to more wrath; for now thought  
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
Torments him*

(P. L. Book I 50-57)

The message which Milton conveys through Satan's defeat is that infidelity towards God leads to downfall. Satan is that "infernal serpent", who, after his expulsion from Heaven still looks forward to further heroism. Heroic war had shown the rebel angels matchless except against Almighty. But now they will wage a war in which they would not use force but trickery :

*We may with more successful hope resolve  
To wage by force or guile eternal war.*

Satan's feelings of "revenge" and "immortal hate" constitute an integral part of Book I. These feelings only bring back to him his lost will-power which inspires his angels and eventually leads to the building of the castle

Pandemonium. Satan is full of indomitable courage :

*All is not lost : the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield.*

In spite of all this, Satan meets his miserable fate at the hands of God. (as we see that his angels are converted into snakes in Book X). The cause of Satan's plight is his "obdurate pride" which eclipses his heroic qualities. Of all the Seven Deadly Sins, Pride is the deadliest. Milton conveys a message that man's best virtues are overshadowed by pride—the highest sin. Satan pays the price of the sin he has committed. Satan was eminently well-equipped with intellect and will-power to exercise his enlightened self-interest. But he chose to be "farthest from Him"—a statement that signifies his moral alienation.

The thematic scheme of *Paradise Lost* is modelled on the Calvinistic doctrine of Divine Providence. God has given every individual a rational and logical mind and the power to reason between good and evil. The one who leads the path of goodness is the "elect" and is graced by God. But the evil-doers are punished and ultimately damned. Man is the sum total of his deeds and he is given a free-will to exercise either to follow virtue or vice and then the fruits begotten are also a result of his deeds. It is implied from this that Milton's aim in *Paradise Lost* is to "justify the ways of God to man". Satan, Adam and Eve are true representatives of free-will and the wrath of God faced by them as a consequence of their actions.

Hence, Milton successfully justifies the ways of God to men by the doctrine of free will and the theology of the fall i.e. Disobedience. Satan wilfully refuses to act with moral responsibility and intellectual honesty that goes with free will.

## **28.5 THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF PARADISE**

*Lost* is to assist man to act rightly and responsibly and to do this

he must know not only himself but the entire, cosmic order, the Eternal Providence, of which man in Milton's age was the pivot and the nexus. The progressively negative transformation that Satan and his fallen angels undergo in the subtly ironic similes as also the sprawling empire of evil as mapped out by the poet, amply affirm the above view, for instance, Satan's astonishment when he sees Belzeebub :

*If thou beest he—but Oh how fallen/how  
Changed  
From him, who in happy realms of light,  
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst  
Outshine  
Myriads, though bright; if he whom,  
Mutual league,  
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope  
And hazard in glorious enterprise,  
Joined with me once now misery hath joined  
In equal ruin*

The ruin is a result of Beelzeebub own inclination to join hands with evil. Infidelity towards God and lack of faith and hope in Him led to downfall of other comrades of Belzeebub. Wallock points out :

When faith is lacking, the whole moral atmosphere breaks down. Faith and love are to be placed above pleasure, wealth, power, reason and knowledge. By persevering effort, by intelligence and discipline, prudence and temperance, fortitude and justice, by faith, hope and charity, we may achieve the individual and communal happiness that is the regard of virtue in men and in nations.

Thematic purpose of *Paradise Lost*, Book I is to represent the distinction between good and evil. Satan in Greek sense is Alazon—compulsive rebel

who revolts and does not conform to any dictates. He defied God and is punished. In this sense he is a “rebel victim” and suffers his ironic tragic fate. Eiron, opposite of Alazon, is Christ who symbolized submissiveness, meekness and even obsequious behaviour. In light of this, the life of a Christian is pictured as a battle, but it is within the human that Christ and Satan are at war. Christ and Satan, therefore, are two extreme aspects of human nature and it is entirely left to them to choose either of the two. Hence, good and evil have to be distinguished as they determine the fate of man. Evil breeds evil. Satan’s evil motto :

*To do aught good never will be our task,  
But even to do ill our sole delight.*

But the end which he meets, clearly demarcates between good and evil, from this point of view—the conceptualization of good and evil, the theme is universal. It does not pertain to one individual but the whole cosmos. Satan’s lot is the lot of every individual who follows and professes evil. This element of universalization makes the theme crucial.

In *Paradise Lost* Book I, the theme of “creation” and “uncreation” coincide. Theme of uncreation in Book I is conveyed through the apocalyptic imagery of Hell, where Satan meets his doom :

*A dungeon horrible, on all sides around  
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible.*

Further, the Apocalyptic imagery of “red lightning and impetuous rage.” explains the process of uncreation of Satan and his fallen angels. From a state of bliss, they have suddenly entered into a dismal state. Satan himself declares the change :

*Farewell, happy fields,  
Where joy ever dwells/Hail, horrors/hail.  
Infernal world!*

Thus, the “Glory” ultimately had withered. Those who once tried to usurp Heaven—God’s Empire and Creation put – have been now themselves uncreated or deconstructed. Milton successfully describes these uncreated beings (fallen angels) as autumn leaves :

*His legions, Angel forms, who lay entranced  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallombrosa, whole the Etrurian shades  
High over-arched embower;*

The act of creation is the building of Pandemonium under the leadership of Mammon. The coming together of the fallen angels and diligent endeavor to make a castle for their new Empire, is a bold attempt. Eventually, Pandemonium rises like an exhalation of breath, at once a parody of the inspired awakening to life that recurs throughout the poem and of the music that accompanies authentic creation. It is definitely a creation, but a devilish one ;

*As in an organ, from one blast of wind,  
To many a row of pipes the sound-board breathes.  
Anon out of the earth a fabric huge  
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a temple, where pilasters round  
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid  
With golden architrave.’*

It resembles a temple as a caricature resembles a type. This Limbo of fools is eventually filled by the “locusts” with Satan as their peer :

*A solemn council forthwith to be held  
At Pandemonium, the high capital  
Of Satan and his peers*

Though the martial intensity of Pandemonium's rising has the impact of genuine feeling of courage and will-power but the sinister plan of avenging God, has marred all the heroic deeds. Thus, the act of creation here (i.e. Pandemonium) paves the way for "uncreation" once more, (as in Book X). Creation of Pandemonium and "uncreation" of all the demons is a vicious process in this very sense. Again this vicious circle "justifies the ways of God to man."

## **28.6 CONCLUSION**

To conclude, *Paradise Lost* has a purely didactic aim of inculcating virtue in man by showing God's truth, virtue, justice and mercy leading to peace; and Satan's deceit, injustice and hate, leading to war. Fundamentally, the poem is concerned with the opposition of Eros and Thanatos i.e. the opposition of love and hate, life and death, creation and uncreation. Though Book I is totally built around Satan and his "inconquerable will" but this "will" is ultimately conquered by God. So, the poem is an apostrophe to God's greatness and love for man, to the need and the wisdom of obeying Him. Milton's admonishment is to join in the force of life (Eros) and renounce the forces of death (Thanatos). Thus, Milton in his "divine inspiration" becomes the voice of the multitude singing "Alleluia".

## **28.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Theme of *Paradise Lost* Book I is didactic. Explain with proper references from the text.
2. The ultimate punishment of sin is damnation. Discuss the statement with reference to the central theme of *Paradise Lost* Book I.
3. Discuss the theory of free-will or Calvinistic doctrine with special reference to *Paradise Lost* Book I
4. Thematic purpose of *Paradise Lost* Book I is to represent the distinction between good and evil. Discuss.

## 28.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Who is the speaker addressing in the opening lines of Book I of “Paradise Lost”?
- A) Satan
  - B) Adam
  - C) Eve
  - D) Heavenly Muse
- Q.2 Which angel is appointed by Satan to lead the fallen angels after their expulsion from Heaven?
- A) Beelzebub
  - B) Uriel
  - C) Raphael
  - D) Abdiel
- Q.3 In Book I, what event does Satan recall that led to his rebellion against God?
- A) His envy of Adam’s position
  - B) His desire for more power
  - C) His disagreement with other angels
  - D) God’s declaration of His Son as His heir
- Q.4 What is the fallen angels’ new home after their expulsion from Heaven?
- A) Earth
  - B) Hell
  - C) Purgatory
  - D) Limbo



- Q.5 In Book I, which fallen angel proposes that the angels engage in open warfare against God?
- A) Mammon
  - B) Moloch
  - C) Abdiel
  - D) Beelzebub
- Q.6 What does Satan transform himself into when he enters Eden to corrupt Adam and Eve?
- A) A serpent
  - B) A lion
  - C) A dragon
  - D) An eagle
- Q.7 What is the ultimate goal of Satan's journey to Eden in Book I?
- A) To overthrow Adam as ruler
  - B) To seize control of the Garden
  - C) To challenge God's authority
  - D) To tempt Adam and Eve into sin
- Q.8 In Book I, how does Satan enter Eden?
- A) Through a secret passage
  - B) Through the main gates
  - C) By disguising himself as an angel
  - D) By scaling the Garden walls
- Q.9 What reason does Satan give for choosing to corrupt humans rather than animals?

- A) Humans are more gullible
- B) Humans are made in God's image
- C) Animals are already corrupted
- D) Animals are too intelligent

Q.10 At the end of Book I, what is Satan's state of mind as he gazes upon Eden and contemplates his next move?

- A) Fearful and remorseful
- B) Hopeful and determined
- C) Confused and indecisive
- D) Proud and triumphant

Answers : 1D, 2A, 3D, 4B, 5B, 6A, 7D, 8B, 9B, 10B

## 28.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Nicolson, Marjorie Hope. *John Milton : A Reader's guide to his Poetry*. Great Britain : Lowe and Brydone, 1964.
2. Pedley, R.R.(ed.) *Paradise Lost Book I and II*, London : Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1956
3. Potter, Lois. *A Preface to Milton*. London : Longman Group Ltd., 1971.

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 29**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT – IV**

### **CHARACTER OF SATAN**

#### **Unit Structure**

##### **29.1 Objective**

##### **29.2 Introduction**

##### **29.3 Character of Satan in Paradise Lost Book-I**

##### **29.4 Satan's Heroic Qualities**

##### **29.5 Satan As A Tragic Hero And An Anti-Hero**

##### **29.6 Self Assessment Questions**

##### **29.7 Multiple Choice Questions**

##### **29.8 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **29.9 Suggested Readings**

#### **29.1 OBJECTIVE**

The lesson contains the material related to the Character of Satan as a hero or an anti-hero this is to provoke the thinking of the learner to decide whether Satan is a renaissance hero or an anti-hero.

#### **29.2 INTRODUCTION**

The character of Satan is one of the greatest creations in any language. The

greatness lies not only—indeed, not primarily—in the depiction of the majestic character of Book I, but in the slow and steady degeneration of an angel, who once stood next to God Himself in Heaven. *Paradise Lost* Book I totally revolves around Satan. He exhibits many heroic qualities but they are eclipsed by his “steadfast hatred” towards God. Milton, introduces Satan as :

*The infernal Serpent ; he it was, whose guile,*

*Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived*

*The Mother of Mankind*

He is throughout called names like “Arch-fiend” “Arch Enemy”, “the Adversary of God and Man,” “the Author of all ill”. Milton, throughout Book I, presents the craftiness of Satan as well as his plans to corrupt mankind. He is an embodiment of disobedience to God. The plans of Satan, his fall from Heaven with other rebel angels are the incidents which “justify the ways of God to man”. His “dark designs” ultimately lead to his damnation :

*Left him at large to his own dark designs,*

*That with reiterated crimes he-might*

*Heap on himself damnation, while he sought*

*Evil to others, and enraged might see*

*How all his malice served but to bring forth*

*Infinite goodness, grace and mercy.*

Satan’s fall can be compared to the fall of Titans who also fell for nine long days, after their defeat by the gods of Olympus :

*Nine times the space that measures day and night*

*To mortal men, he with his horrid crew*

*Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,*

*Confounded though immortal.*

### 29.3 CHARACTER OF SATAN IN PARADISE LOST BOOK-I

Satan, as portrayed by Milton, is a new kind of character in epic poetry. In Medieval and Renaissance literature, the devil is usually presented in a monstrous form. Taboo for example, depicted Satan with blood-shot eyes, blood-dripping jaws etc. Such a devil could only produce a melodramatic effect rather than conveying the theme of sin or temptation. In *Paradise Lost* Satan is representative of evil in human beings. So, sin and temptation are parts of human nature. Contrary to Taboo's devil, Milton's devil shows full range of human characteristics —on one side of "obdurate pride" and "steadfast hate" whereas on the other side of "unconquerable will". Satan is arrogant and stubborn. But beneath this arrogance and adamance lies a tormenting sense of despair. This overwhelms him until at last only the desire for revenge reigns supreme in his nature. Satan is full of malignity but Milton humanizes him. Satan's character has depth. It shows changes of mood – the fluctuations of revengefulness, pride and despair :

*Cruel, his eye, but cast*

*Signs of remorse and passion.*

Further :

*Thrice he assayed, and thrice in spite of scorn*

*Tears, such as Angels weep, burst forth.*

Beginning with Satan's physical attributes, we see that Satan, as he emerges from the burning lake towards the shore has a tremendous size. As he moves towards shore, we are still more conscious of physical size. Milton implies Homeric similes to describe Satan's gigantic physique :

*Prone on the flood, extended long and large,*

*Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge*

*As whom the fables name of monstrous size,*

*Titanian, or Earth-born, what warred on love,*

*Briaress of Typhoon, whom the den  
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works  
Created huge that swim the ocean-stream.*

In comparing Satan to the sea-beast Leviathan , Milton remembers the quaint old story of sailors mistaking a whale for an island. Apart from the huge dimensions, whale is enigmatic. Satan's deed of tempting Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit equates him to the whale which also led to the destruction of sailors (mistakenly) and here Satan's guile led to destruction of mankind.

By these lofty comparisons of Satan, Milton wants to present before us a picture of Satan's magnificence. To prove this point, he emphasizes two objects he carries. His shield which is compared to the largest round object human eyes had ever seen, the moon seen through Galileo's telescope :

*The broad circumference  
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb  
Through Tuscian artist views  
At evening from the top of fesele.*

His spear is so gigantic that the tallest pine tree, used for the mast of a flagship, seems only a wand in comparison :

*His spear, to equal which the tallest Pine  
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the Mast  
Of some great Admiral.*

Satan, in his physical attributes, had still not lost all his glory and original brightness of an angel in heaven for he still may be compared to

the sun and the moon. But some of the glory was lost for he was like the sun seen through morning mist, or like the moon in eclipse. The sun through mist, the moon in eclipse, but still the sun and moon. So Satan continues for some time, majestic grand, yet always a little more flawed :

*His form had yet not lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured : as when the sun new risen  
Look through the horizontal misty air  
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon,  
In dim eclipse.*

In the meantime, we watch degeneration in Satan's moral character parallel to the changes in his physical appearance. The moral degeneration of Satan is suggested by subtle changes in figures of light and darkness.

A predominant aspect of Satan's character, which Milton depicts, is his "obdurate pride and steadfast hate." This is the sole reason for Satan's rebellion against God. This is the most dangerous quality of Satan emphasized by Milton. In classical mythology the belief that "Hubris" (the Greek word for pride) was the sin most frequently punished by the God. According to Christian belief, pride is the most deadly of the Seven Deadly Sins. His desire to continue the war only because of the "sense of injured merit." causes his downfall :

*What time his pride  
Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host  
Of rebel Angels.*

Satan's pride is quite evident in one of his speeches when he equates his faculty of reason to God's :

*Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme  
Above his equal.*

Satan basically suffers from megalomania. He admits ambition as the real cause of his initial revolt against God. He is caught in the trap of leadership which later on leads to his damnation and endless pain in the horrible dungeon hell :

*A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,  
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Served only to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades.*

Thus, Satan is a villain who himself is responsible for his doom.

#### **29.4 SATAN'S HEROIC QUALITIES**

Satan, though a personification of evil, is still dealt by the poet in an exalted manner. But after his tormenting fall, still his intrepidity and firm resolution raise him to the status of hero. Satan is a blend of noble and ignoble, exalted and the mean, the great and low. Satan's firm determination, his courage "never to submit or yield" has been admired by critics. William Blake expressed his view most emphatically by saying that Milton was of the Devil's party. In 'Defence of Poetry', Shelley says :

Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost*.

Hazlitt is of the opinion :

"Satan is the most heroic subject that was ever chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest and to divide the empire of Heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to Hell. His aim was no



less than the throne of the universe. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He still stood like a tower. The loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting misery on others. If Satan represents malignity, abstract love of evil, then he also stands for abstract love of power or pride of self-will personified. His love of power and contempt for suffering is never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—he found a new empire in Hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight”.

Although Milton’s apparent purpose was to make Satan the villain, this intention appears to be frequently betrayed. Milton has put his heart and soul into projection of Satan in spite of consciously different purpose. The glowing descriptions of Satan in Book I stand for Satan’s magnificence. His huge bulk is compared to Briareos who fought against Uranus and to Typhons who fought against Jove. He is compared to Leviathan. He raises himself above the fiery lake and looks around with “blazing” eyes. His heavy shield is compared to Galileo’s telescope which he is still carrying on his back. His spear too is as large as the tallest pine tree. The heat of the Hell with the rising flames of fire forms a vault overhead and causes him pain. But he has immense power of tolerance as he still walks on the “marle” and surveys it :

*He walked with, to support uneasy steps  
Over the burning marle, not like those steps  
On Heaven’s azure; and the torrid clime  
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire.*

*Nathless he so endured, till on the beach*

*Of that inflamed sea he stood,* (P.L. Book I, 295-300)

Satan's powers of endurance and his resolution are unquenched by the burning "marle". Satan's firmness is symbolized by his comparison with a Hell :

*In shape and gesture proudly eminent*

*Stood like a Tower* (P.L. Book I, 590-591)

Further Satan has still not lost the lustre of his bodily form though his brightness is discussed :

*His form had yet not lost*

*All her original brightness; nor appeared*

*Less than Arch-Angel ruined, and th' excess*

*Of glory obscured* (P.L. Book I, 591-594)

All such descriptions raise Satan to the status of an epic hero, to some extent.

Satan's speeches not only assert his invincible resolution but also inculcate enthusiasm as well as maintain the morale of his uplifted followers. In his first speech, he defies his conqueror and "though in pain" he still does not lose his indomitable courage. He is tormented by the thought of the lost happiness :

*Farewell, happy fields,*

*Where joy for ever dwells ! Hail, horrors, hail.*

But this depression is predominated by his "unconquerable will". To Beelzebub, he says :

*What though the field be lost ?*

*All is not lost the unconquerable will,*

*And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield.*

The lines are also an expression of Milton's own defiant spirit and indomitable courage in defeat. Although ostensibly, Milton is concerned to show Satan as a personification of evil but such lines are reflective of Milton's own character. Milton defied the kingship of Charles I. Satan did not admit God as Supreme ruler. So in both the cases, there was a rebellion against the supreme authority—Charles I in Milton's case and God in case of Satan. But God's flawlessness could not be compared to the tyranny of Charles. The forging of "War" by Satan can be compared to the Civil War (1642-1649), between the King and the Parliament. The "unconquerable will", "study of revenge", "courage never to submit or yield"—all reflect the spirit of Puritan armies, whom Milton favoured.

Satan is undaunted by God's victory. He retains his "fixed mind" and "high disdain". For this, he finds consolation in Hell. His strong will-power as well as easy adaptability is well reflected in the following lines :

*Here at least .....  
We shall be free .....  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell :  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.*

Despite of all the oddities he has faced, Satan is still optimistic about his success. His horrifying fall has not doomed his spirits :

*..... for the mind and spirit remains  
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,  
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state  
Here swallowed up in endless misery. [i] 139-142]*

Satan is the true representative of “free-will” of the Calvinistic doctrine which holds that man himself is responsible for his damnations or grace.

Satan revives the lost energy of his fallen angels who are stupefied and are compared to autumn leaves which lie in large numbers in Vallombrosa :

*His legions, Angel forms, who lay entranced,  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks  
In Vallambrosa* [(i) - 302-304]

This vast multitude is regulated as well as controlled by one great martial hero i.e. Satan, who strongly believes :

*A mind not to be changed by place or time,  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.* [(i) - 253-255]

Such a strong leader’s army could only be beaten by the strongest i.e. Almighty. But Satan is determined to avenge Him, so he reassembles his forces. He executes such a tremendous power on the fallen angels that his command, which is mingled with compassion, makes them forget about their sorry plight and they quickly respond to him. After he says, “Awake, arise or be for ever fallen”, it has the sudden effect that :

*They heard, and were abashed, and up they sprung  
Upon the wing, as when men wont to watch  
On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,  
Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake.*

In spite of the agonizing pains the angels obey their commander’s voice. Thus, Satan is full of authority and his leadership qualities portrayed by Milton raise him to the status of a military commander whose “voice

they soon obeyed/Innumerable.”

It is the power of Satan’s speeches that Pandemonium is constructed under the leadership of Mammon. The Doric style of architecture, the pillars overladen with a golden beam, gold carved roof, all were constructed with assiduousness. When Satan holds his first meeting in the Pandemonium, the palace is swarmed by the fallen angels who listen to him attentively :

*Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air,  
Brushed with the hiss of rushing wings, As bees  
In spring-time, when the sun with Taurus rides,  
Pour forth their populous youth above the hive  
So thick the aery crowd  
Swarmed and were straitened, till the signal given,  
Behold a wonder* [(i)–768-778]

The lines are quite evident of rebel angels’ unshakable faith in Satan which could never be thwarted as their Emperor’s word is absolute for them. Though Satan possessed immense leadership qualities but the root of Satan’s enterprise was against God and his determination to persist, is the fundamental perversion of his will. This in turn, implies perversion of the intellect.

### **29.5 SATAN AS A TRAGIC HERO AND AN ANTI-HERO**

According to Aristotle “A tragic hero should be a man, neither perfect nor utterly bad; his misfortune should arise from an error or frailty, which however, falls short of moral taint; and he must fall from the height of prosperity and glory”. He emphasized on Hamartia i.e. tragic flaw or human error. Also, he said that fall should be of a person who was at the height of glory because it would arouse “pity and fear”.

Satan definitely possesses all the heroic qualities but they are marred by his over-ambition, which is to rule—Hamartia or tragic flaw which leads

to his downfall. In Heaven, he was loved the most by God, but it is the ambitious desire which tempts him to commit sin. Like Macbeth, who was also loved by Duncan but later on it is his ambition which prompts him to kill Duncan and finally, Macbeth is ruined. Satan, too, becomes a maniac in pursuing his ambition and deceives his Emperor i.e. God and then faces his doom :

*..... with ambitious aim*

*Against the throne and monarchy of God*

*Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud,*

*With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power*

*Hurled headlong, flaming from the ethereal sky,*

*With hideous ruin and combustion down to bottomless perdition*

Satan's fall sometimes arouses pity, as when he makes a resolve to assemble his forces but before addressing them, he cries thrice. But relating Satan to a pathetic figure would be wrong as his extreme ego transcends the feeling of pity and inculcates hatred for him. His incapability for repentance and inclination towards evil drives away from him all the virtues. His following speech to Beelzebub justifies the point". Satan says :

*The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,*

*Nor what the potent victor in his rage*

*Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,*

*Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind,*

*And high disdain from sense of injured merit.*

Milton, like Shakespeare (in his tragedies) portrays Satan as a real tragic figure. Satan thus, is an anti-hero with a unique combination of epic grandeur and falseness. Satan is shown as possessing the virtues and the powers which are necessary for him to play his part as the Arch-fiend. He

is shown possessing a towering genius but this genius is devilish. All his virtues are in fact corrupted by his situation and by the uses to which he puts his powers. He can be compared to the Nazi leader, Hitler, who urged the Germans to fight in order to conquer the world. Both are megalomaniacs as well as destroyers of mankind.

To sum up, Satan who is the central character of *Paradise Lost* Book I, is brave, strong, generous, prudent, temperate and self-sacrificing. But there are “dark designs” knitting up in his mind which eclipse all his illustrious qualities. If *Paradise Lost* narrates the fall of man, it narrates too – and no less clearly – the fall of man’s tempter. The self-degradation of Satan is complete outward and inward of the form and of the spirit – a change – ever for the worse – of shape and mind and emotion.

#### **29.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. The central character of *Paradise Lost* Book I is Satan, not Adam and Eve. Discuss this statement.
2. The speeches of Satan prove him to be a heroic figure. Explain with reference to *Paradise Lost* Book I.
3. Discuss Satan’s anti-heroic qualities.

#### **29.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

Q.1 How is Satan portrayed physically in “Paradise Lost”?

- A) As a beautiful angel with radiant wings
- B) As a monstrous creature with multiple heads
- C) As a serpent with cunning eyes
- D) As a fiery figure with a flaming sword

Q.2 What is Satan’s initial motivation for rebelling against God in “Paradise Lost”?

- A) Jealousy of God's power
  - B) Desire to rule Heaven
  - C) Love for humankind
  - D) Fear of punishment
- Q.3 In "Paradise Lost," Satan is often described as possessing which trait?
- A) Humility
  - B) Courage
  - C) Selflessness
  - D) Obedience
- Q.4 Satan's journey from Heaven to Hell represents his descent from:
- A) Power to powerlessness
  - B) Goodness to evil
  - C) Heaven to Earth
  - D) Ignorance to knowledge
- Q.5 What motivates Satan's decision to corrupt Adam and Eve in "Paradise Lost"?
- A) A desire for revenge against God
  - B) A wish to save humanity from damnation
  - C) The temptation of forbidden knowledge
  - D) Jealousy of their happiness
- Q.6 How does Satan use rhetoric to persuade his fellow fallen angels in Hell?
- A) He uses logical arguments to prove his point.
  - B) He employs flattery and manipulation.



- C) He threatens them with violence.
  - D) He remains silent and lets his actions speak.
- Q.7 What emotion does Satan experience upon seeing Adam and Eve's happiness in Eden?
- A) Compassion
  - B) Remorse
  - C) Anger
  - D) Envy
- Q.8 Satan's character in "Paradise Lost" is marked by his:
- A) Unwavering loyalty to God
  - B) Empathy for humankind
  - C) Reluctance to sin
  - D) Defiance and pride
- Q.9 What is Satan's view on free will in "Paradise Lost"?
- A) He believes that God's will is absolute and inescapable.
  - B) He believes that free will is an illusion.
  - C) He advocates for the preservation of free will.
  - D) He believes that free will should be eliminated.
- Q.10 Satan's character development in "Paradise Lost" can be described as a journey from:
- A) Humility to arrogance
  - B) Despair to hope
  - C) Goodness to virtue

D) Light to darkness

Answers: 1B, 2A, 3B, 4B, 5D, 6A, 7D, 8D, 9B, 10D

## **29.8 LET US SUM UP**

In John Milton's "Paradise Lost," Satan is portrayed as a complex and multifaceted character. He begins as a proud and powerful angel who rebels against God due to his jealousy and desire for power. His defiance and charismatic rhetoric rally his fellow fallen angels, leading them to Hell. Throughout the epic, Satan's character evolves from a heroic figure to a tragic antihero, driven by his relentless ambition, determination, and a deep-seated resentment towards both God and humanity. His cunning and manipulative nature make him a central figure in the epic's exploration of sin, temptation, and the complexities of moral choice.

## **29.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *Paradise Lost Book I and II* - R. R. Pedley
2. John Milton : *A Reader's guide to his Poetry* - Majorie Hope Nicolson

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 30**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN MILTON**

**UNIT - IV**

**PARADISE LOST- SATAN'S SPEECHES**

**Unit Structure**

**30.1 Objective**

**30.2 Introduction**

**30.3 Speech 1**

**30.4 Speech 2**

**30.4.1 Critical comments**

**30.5 Speech 3**

**30.5.1 Critical comments**

**30.6 Speech 4**

**30.7 Speech 5**

**30.7.1 Critical comments**

**30.8 Critical comments**

**30.9 Glossary**

**30.10 Multiple Choice / One Word Questions**

**30.11 Short Answer Questions**

**30.12 Examination Oriented Questions**

**30.13 Suggested Readings**

### 30.1 OBJECTIVE

In this lesson the learner will be familiarized with Satan's Speeches.

### 30.2 INTRODUCTION

“The first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, Man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of paradise wherein he was placed. Then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent; who revolting against God, and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his crew into the great Deep. Which action past over the poem hastens into the midst of things, presenting Satan and his angels now fallen into Hell, described here as not in the Centre but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos. Here Satan with his fellow angels lying on the burning Lake, 'thunder-stuck and astonisht', after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his Legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded. They rise, their numbers,, array of battle, their chief leaders named according to the Idols known afterwards in Canaan (Palestine) and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of Creature to be created, according to the ancient prophecy or report in Heaven; for that angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this Prophecy, and what to determine thereon he refers to a full Council. What his associates thence attempt, Pandemonium the Palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the Deep; The Infernal Peers there sit in council.”(Paradise Lost- ed. by VrindaNabar and Nissim Ezekiel).

As is characteristic of the classical epic tradition Milton invokes the aid of his patron Muse, Urania. Book I of Paradise Lost begins with a prologue in which Milton performs the traditional task of invoking the classical Muse Urania but also refers to her as the 'Heavenly Muse' implying the Christian nature of his work. He explains that the poem would deal with Man's first

disobedience when he ate the fruit of the Forbidden Tree which resulted in sin, suffering and Death in the world and the loss of Paradise, till Christ was born to redeem mankind and regain for him his 'Blissful seat'.

Milton supplicates the Muse who had inspired the shepherd Moses on mount Horeb and Mount Sinai to help him in his epic work. It was Moses who, inspired by the Muse (the Trinity in Christian Mythology) first gave the words of God to the 'Chosen People' of Israel. He told them how Heaven and Earth rose out of 'Chaos' (The Heavens refer to the sky of the Universe with its stars and planets not the Empyrean Heaven where God dwells). Milton appeals to the Muse to help him in his enterprise on which he has so boldly embarked with a spirit of adventure and with her aid his poem would attempt to reach the zenith of poetic inspiration. Milton presupposes that his poem will be greater than the poems of the classical poets because the Muse he has invoked is superior to the classical Muses. He asks her to remove the darkness of his ignorance and illumine him and to raise to sublimity what is base in him so with divine assistance he could establish 'Eternal Providence' and 'Justify the ways of God to men'. (Alexander Pope- Essay on Man- has similar lines-15-16

'Laugh where we must, be candid where we can,

But vindicate the ways of God to man'.)

Milton says that nothing in heaven or hell is hidden from the knowledge of 'The Holy spirit'. He then questions as to who instigated the parents of mankind who lived happily in a state of innocence in Paradise, to violate the command of God and eat the 'Forbidden Fruit'. It was the wicked Devil who filled with jealousy and revenge beguiled Eve to violate the canon of God which was not to eat the fruit of the 'Forbidden Tree.'

Lucifer with a host of rebel angels had waged war against the Almighty hoping to rise above him in glory and trusting that if he rebelled he would become equal to the highest power in Heaven –God. But the attempt was in vain for God vanquished him and threw him headlong from Heaven onto Hell

full of fire and ruin to live in adamant chains in the conflagration of purgatory.

The fall of the angels from Heaven to hell lasted for nine days and Satan and his rebellious crew lay defeated on the lake of fire, immortal but eternally damned. The thought of the celestial happiness which he had lost and eternal pain now as his punishment, tortured him and he threw his eyes, full of hatred and sorrow, and all he could see was suffering and misery all around. It was a horrible dungeon- a great burning furnace whose flames only served to highlight the darkness of hell. It was a region of despair and desolation because of 'doleful shades' because the rebel angels would find no rest and peace now and the gift of hope and salvation granted to all creatures was now denied to the fallen angels. This place, fed with a constant deluge of sulphurous fire which remained unconsumed and to such a place had the Almighty banished them- a place of utter darkness truly called 'chaos'-far removed from God who is light. Here Satan soon saw his fellow rebel angels overwhelmed by the storms of the 'Tempestuous Fire', rolling to and fro helplessly and by his side he espied Beelzebub (Lord of the flies –the Sun God of the Philistines) who was next to him in power,(Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* accepts him as a Prince of the first rank of bad spirits who were those false gods of the Gentiles and he is given the same importance in demonology as in *Dr. Faustus*.)

### **30.3 SPEECH 1**

And to him the Arch Enemy 'Satan' (Satan's name being given for the first time, Milton explains that it means in Hebrew, 'Enemy'. It is mentioned in Book v. 658-9 that his former name is heard no more in Heaven, for Satan's other name is Lucifer) in bold words said how utterly his confederate had been changed for the worse; he who had outshone innumerable other heavenly beings bright though they had been. And just as they were once united by mutual association in all sorts of glorious hopes and ambitions they were now together in their sufferings and ruin. God with his omnipotence and thunder had hurled them onto this bottomless 'pit' from Heaven and till then

he said, he was not aware of God's dangerous and powerful strength but pointed out that he did not know the extent of God's power, previously unknown because it had not been challenged. But Satan is not to be cowed down nor would he repent. (So had Prometheus, though defeated had, declared that his spirit would never yield to the thunder and lightning of Zeus\_ Aeschylus- Prometheus Bound). Despite the change they had outwardly undergone Satan stressed the unchanged nature of his attitude to God. His disdain and contempt for god which he said had sprung from a feeling of 'Injured merit' because he had not been accorded the treatment that he merited and this compelled him to rebel against God wherein he was joined by other numerous angels who disliked God's rule and preferred Satan and then he challenged 'His utmost power' and fought a battle whose outcome had been doubtful from the beginning. But Satan said that it was only the battlefield that they had lost . 'All is not lost' because his indomitable will would never submit freely to god's authority. From now on his thoughts would dwell only on revenge and with immortal hate burning in him he would have the temerity never to surrender to God. That glory of the unconquerable will could never be taken away from him either by God's wrath or might. It would indeed be stooping down low if he submitted to God with bent knees asking for his grace and mercy; no he would not 'deifie' God's power, who Satan claimed had been so frightened of the rebellion that he fell into doubting the security of his own kingdom. Genuflecting and supplicating to such a God would be an ignominy worse than their fall from Heaven. Satan asserted that Fate has given the angels the same unchanging strength as to God and made them of the same spiritual (Empyreal) substance that could never die. Thus they did not owe their existence to God and the fiery element of which they were made could not perish and now because they had experience of battle, the fallen angels could optimistically continue their war against God in which force or cunning would be used and it would be eternal and 'irreconcilable' because the angels would never reconcile themselves to their 'Supreme Enemy's' will. Satan believes that god reigns through force and not by right. Thus Satan 'the apostate angel' who had abandoned his religious faith

and vows, boasted loudly inspite of being racked with pain and profound despair.

**Critical comments:**

Satan's speech reveals pure Miltonic lyricism the opening speech is a magnificent set piece. It reveals the character of Satan- a defiant rebel and a great leader. Satan first takes pity on his friend. He then refers to their friendship of the perilous enterprise in Heaven and their present misery. He is ashamed to admit the might of God but he will not allow it to cow him down. He has nothing but contempt for God who never gauged his worth. it is a sense of injured merit that makes him rebel against god. As for losing the war it is not for want of merit on their part but God's new and secret weapon the "Thunder".

A single victory does not permanently ensure God's victory. They may have lost the field, but that does not mean that they have lost everything.

"What though the field be lost?

All is not lost- the unconquerable will....."

God has not conquered their heavenly qualities in them. Defeat is complete only when the spirit and the will too are subjugated. To bow down before God is worse than defeat. So he determines to wage eternal war through guile or force.

Beelzebub addressed Satan as 'Prince' and an angel who was the 'Chief' of angels and in the hierarchy was one who led the seraphs, under his dreadful courage and command to challenge God. But Beelzebub, while he acknowledged Satan's trial of God's might, bewailed the loss of heaven; their 'foul defeat' and the punishment the fallen angels were suffering. Though this calamitous suffering would never be alleviated by 'Death' because their heavenly essence would never perish. (Beelzebub differs significantly from Satan about his opinion of God's might – defeat has persuaded him that God is omnipotent and immovable and he questions



Satan's faith in their recovered powers and spirit, since they may have been left to them only to serve God's purpose. Beelzebub is thus made clearly subordinate to Satan in hauteur and ill-will, though he is constantly Satan's lieutenant.)

#### **30.4 SPEECH 2**

Immediately Satan rebuked Beelzebub. Addressing him as 'fallen Cherube' he said that to be weak was pathetic indeed and in itself would be a source of misery. What was of import was whether they were doing something about it or just suffering it passively. Their task from now on would be never to do anything good but always try to pervert to evil whatever good God did. If they were to act it certainly would not be to good ends, even if God wished it were so. They must devote themselves to producing evil however much would God seek to provide good. So their pleasure henceforth would be in doing evil since that would be opposed to God's will. He hoped that they would be successful in their endeavours and would bring grief to God and disconcert his closest advisors.

He then saw that God had called back his good angels who had fought on god's side to drive away the rebellious ones. The storm of sulphurous fire directed at the fallen angels had put to rest the ocean of fire that had received the angels when they fell from the precipice of Heaven and the raging 'Thunder' accompanied by fiery lightning had now subsided to rage through the 'boundless Deep'. Satan suggested that they should not let that opportunity slip through their fingers. Pointing to the desolate plain Satan told Beelzebub that it was a 'seat of desolation' devoid of any light except for the faint light arising from the burning flames. Satan then told him that they should leave the lake of fire and remove themselves to those plains far off to rest, if they could seek any rest now and reassemble their defeated forces and have a council about how they could offend their enemy and compensate for their loss; how they could overcome their disastrous situation; what could they achieve from hope and if they despaired what would their further action be.

### 30.4.1 Critical comments

With his second speech Satan tries to sweep off all doubts from Beelzebub's mind. "To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering....' If God attempts to turn evil into good it would be the sacred duty of the fallen angels to turn all good to evil. God has now withdrawn his forces and this would be an opportunity for them to assemble their forces again and discuss the strategy to offend God and best repair their loss.

Satan's audacity and superb self-confidence are highlighted in these words. He seizes the moment to mobilize his forces once again and infuse fresh courage in them so they could realize their purpose of humiliating God.

Thus Satan tried to convince Beelzebub and ally his fears, and with his head raised above the flames and his eyes blazing with anger and hatred he saw all the other rebel angels of his army who lay floating on the sulphurous lake. Amongst them were angels of such colossal size as to resemble the Titans, Formidable gods in Greek mythology- Children of Uranus and Gaia i.e.( Heaven and Earth) or the Earth born Giants who had waged wars with Zeus or Jove (Jupiter). They were gigantic and monstrous like Briareos or Typhoon (Greek god of whirlwinds, born of the union of Earth and Tartarus) who inhabited the Cilician den. Satan like the Leviathan, the monster whale, the hugest creature created by God, lay chained on the burning lake. (Leviathan is often mistaken as an island by boats men ,who anchor their boats on his scaly hide and imagine themselves secure, only to be deceived; Eve is similarly deceived by Satan's flattery and puts her trust in him only to commit the first sin). He and the other angels are free now only because of God's will who has left Satan to his own cunning and evil designs so with repeated crimes he may bring damnation onto himself through evil to other ; but God has other designs- this malice of Satan will serve to bring forth only goodness' mercy and grace in the world. This theme is dramatically developed by Milton in Books ix and x of the poem; "God eventually converts every evil deed into an instrument of good contrary to the expectations of sinners, and overcomes evil with good". Satan would seduce man and tempt

him to evil but in the process would bring upon himself unfathomable confusion though anger and a feeling of revenge.

Thus Satan rose, giant –like from the lake of fire whose soil was like the scorched and smoking floor of the volcano Etna after the eruption. (This eruption is preceded by an earthquake which, in accordance with the science of Milton's time, was caused by pent up winds underground, seeking an outlet. The heat sublimed the solid matter of Etna into vapour and it is enveloped with an unpleasant smell; such is also hell). From here Satan flew followed by Beelzebub, both relieved at having escaped that Stygian flood, the fiery gulf that had received them when they fell from Heaven. (Styx is the main river of Hades, the underworld). Satan then wonders that was it for that hell, that scorching soil and clime that they had got in exchange for Heaven; that sorrowful darkness in place of 'Celestial light'. He then accepts it since God had determined it that way, that God whose supremacy according to Satan, rested on sheer force and not natural right. That God who according to reason is their equal but whom force has made superior. He then bids farewell to the "happy fields ' of Heaven where joy forever dwells and welcomes the horrors of the "Infernal world", whose king is now Satan himself. (It is for lordship and possession that he had rebelled; now he is the lord of Hell).

### **30.5 SPEECH 3**

But he is not to be swayed by his changed circumstances because the mind, says he, is not affected by any change in circumstances and it is the mind (the thought) that can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven. The assertion is that the mind is so powerful that it can triumph over adversity and prove itself above the misfortunes, however wretched and it is therefore in the power of every individual to be happy or sad as he chooses. It did not matter where he was so long as he did not change and as far as what Satan knew of himself, he was not less than God in any way. God had become stronger because he had power but at least in hell they would not be slaves to God and the envious God would not be able to drive them away

from what was now their domain. Satan maintains that God had driven them out of Heaven for sheer envy. He further asserts that the ambition they showed in heaven has proved worthwhile for they are rulers now even if of Hell. He asserts that it is better to rule in Hell than serve as slaves in Heaven. (Satan founded his rebellion on envy of God's sovereignty and interprets all desire for power as an outcome of similar envy). He then looks for and spies his fellow rebel angels, the associates and co- partners of his loss who had lain for nineteen days 'confounded' and entranced on that lake of sulphur, oblivious to everything, and decides to ask them not to continue being his associates in that unhappy 'abode' and if they would still be with him then once more with 'rallied arms' they should try to defeat the Omnipotent and regain their lost power in Heaven. Even if they lost the battle they had nothing more to lose now.

### **30.5.1 Critical comments**

After winning over Beelzebub and putting new courage in him, Satan asks him whether they are forced to exchange 'this mournful gloom for celestial light. Now that they have become avowed enemies of God, the farther they are from him the better. So he welcomes the dismal horrors of the infernal world. For him Hell is as good a place as Heaven, for his mind remains unchanged.

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

At least in Hell they are free from bondage and servitude. 'farthest from him is best' is a statement of heroic defiance and of moral alienation. Once again the appeal is to the law of nature and God's supremacy is attributed to force and not reason.

The line 'Receive thy new Possessor' is characteristic of the Satanic mind and its desire for over lordship.

Satan's speech is full of ringing phrases expressed with a deliberate

sonority. The brief elegiac note gives way to rhetorical assertions of self-confidence.

Beelzebub repeats Satan's suggestion advising him to call to the other angels, who would be revived by the sound of their leader's voice, that voice which had given them hope in the worst of perils, although they now lay 'grovelling' and 'prostrate' in misery on the lake of fire. While he spoke the 'Superior Fiend' moved to the edge of the lake, his heavy shield tempered out of heavenly metal hung on his shoulders, like the orb of the Moon as Galileo had witnessed through a telescope from the elevation of 'Fesole' in Florence. His spear was like a colossal pine hewn out of the forests of Norway.

#### **30.6 SPEECH 4**

Even when the hot clime of Hell smote Satan and he walked on feet that had once tread light and painless he comes to the edge of the burning lake and calls to his legions who were lying inert on the surface of the lake like autumn leaves on a brook. Satan calls out to them loudly addressing them as "Princes, Potentate, Warriors, the Flowers of Heaven, Heaven is lost to us but it would be so if only if you let this state of dazed astonishment persist in you; you are spirits and therefore, eternal." A note of sarcasm creeps in his voice when he asks them if they had chosen that place to rest and repose after the battle where they had shown their courage and enterprise and if they were finding it good to slumber there as they had done in Heaven. He further asks them if they had chosen to lie prostrate on that lake in abject misery as a way of adoring their 'Conqueror' by submitting themselves to his will thus. He addresses the 'Cherubs' and 'Seraphs' wallowing in the flood with their arms and banners scattered here and there and tells them that their pursuers, the good angels, will see them in that pathetic state and will come down to trample upon them or with their thunderbolts would chain them to the bottom of the lake.

Satan's call to his defeated army mingles promise, mockery and menace. Heaven may not be yet lost if they will only rise from their prostration. But

they are perhaps deliberately wallowing there, either to enjoy a rest, or to show their utter surrender. In any case the enemy may take further advantage of them if they do not rally. The resounding last line sums up the attempt to move them by a mixture of hope, shame and fear. “(F.T. Prince)

### **30.7 SPEECH 5**

Listening to their ‘General’s ‘ resounding voice the devils ,ashamed now, spring upon their wings and assemble around Satan like a swarm of locusts. (In order to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, Moses called down the seven plagues one of which was the plague of locusts). The chief devils are:

Moloch- the Sun –god in his destructive aspect, usually worshipped with human sacrifices.

Chamos – in reality the same as Moloch, but worshipped by the Moabites and associated with orgiastic demon worship and idolatory.

Astarte or Astoreth – she was represented in the Phoenician religion by the planet Venus and was a female equivalent of Chamos.

Thammuz –a Phoenician fertility God, killed by a boar but revives every year; associated with rebirth of vegetation.

Dagon –worshipped by the Philistines; he was the God of agriculture.

Rimmon –a Syrian deity; his chief temple was in Damascus.

Osiris- the chief God of the Egyptians whose symbol was the sacred bull.

Belial – not the name of any God but associated with evil and worthlessness; the Puritans used the word to suggest a type of dissolute, deceitful and lustful god.

All these and the other angels came with depressed and dispirited looks but when they saw their chief not in despair, they were happy because they still believed that in their defeat they had not actually lost everything. Satan’s

face did have a shadow of doubt but he recovered his usual pride and with haughty words full of bravado but no substance raised their courage and dispelled their fears. At his command they sounded the trumpets of war while Azazel, a tall cherub, now a fallen angel, raised high the flag that bore the 'Imperial Ensign' which blazed like a brilliant meteor while the other rebel angels trumpeted the call of war which so resounded from the vaulted dome of Hell that it frightened Chaos, ruler of night, herself. Then the rebel angels fell into formation and raised their spears and shields, waiting for their 'Mighty' chief to give his word of command. Satan's eyes traversed across his legions and looking at their God-like stature his pride swelled up for never since Man was created had he witnessed such an assemblage. Compared to them any other force would be as ineffectual as an army of pygmies. He towered above them, formidable and proud, one who had not lost his original lustre but appeared like the sun, formerly dazzling, but now dimmed a little because of eclipse i.e. the fall. His face had been scarred by God's weapon – the thunderbolt, his wan cheek had a worried look but beneath his fortitude and haughtier lay a burning hunger for revenge. His cruel eyes had traces of remorse for the misery he had brought upon other angels thrown from Heaven's 'Eternal Splendour' and condemned now to eternal pain. As he was about to speak the angels all folded their wings and gathered around him, all attentive to what he would say. Thrice Satan tried to speak and thrice in spite of his efforts to mock 'Tears such as angels weep' burst forth from him and he spoke haltingly his words interspersed with sighs. Addressing them as myriads of immortal spirits whose might was unparalleled, he claimed that none save The Almighty could have matched their strength. Even with all his knowledge of past and present how could he have foreseen that God would defeat such powerful forces as were under his command. He claimed that it was hard to believe that the fallen angels whose exile had emptied Heaven would not re-ascend Heaven and regain their rightful position. They would through their own efforts rise and repossess Heaven. He told them that they were well aware that their defeat was not due to failure on his part to face danger or to the advice of his fellow angels. Satan then accused God for their defeat

because god who securely sat on the throne of Heaven, whether by consent or custom and held his position by the ready submission of the angels, had cunningly hidden his full power and this had led the angels to be deceived and to rebel. Now that they knew the full extent of God's strength as well as their own, they would neither provoke war nor fear God if he provoked war. Now he would use his intelligence to achieve his designs either by deception or cunning what he could not achieve through his forces. And God too might discover by their example that his victory had been only a partial victory. And he asserted that they had suffered a physical defeat not a spiritual one.

Satan then mentioned a rumour heard in Heaven, of a creation of a new world by god wherein he would plant humanity –as favoured of god as the angels. Towards that new world would be targeted their first action, even if it were just prying around. Either there or else- where because Hell would not be able to hold the 'Celestial Spirits' in bondage for long nor would the adumbrated chaos be able to hold them. But these thoughts must first be deliberated upon. They can have no hopes of truce now since submission to God was impossible. Satan finished by insisting that war of some kind, overt or covert and nothing but war must be 'resolved'.

As he concluded his speech, the rebel angels affirmed their loyalty by brandishing their millions of flaming swords whose sudden blaze illuminated hell far and wide. They railed and ranted against the Almighty and smiting their shields with their swords sounded the bugle-'noise' of war 'hurling defiance ' at Heaven.

### **30.7.1 Critical comments**

Satan choked with emotions and tears addresses his fellow angels and is proud to have so many comrades in arms whose sheer number would be difficult to vanquish. They are all puissant and still there is every hope of regaining heaven. God has conquered them by use of hidden force but hell cannot contain so many valiant spirits for long. Peace is despaired and therefore the only course open to them is war. Satan invites them all to the



great council.

Following the invocation, Milton continues in the epic style by beginning in 'medias res', in the middle of things. Satan has been thrown from Heaven and is lying in the pit of Hell. But he has not lost his angelic aura that was his in Heaven. In the first two books Satan comes across as a defiant hero but as the epic progresses his character, actions and appearance deteriorate. Probably the most famous quote about *Paradise Lost* is William Blake's statement that Milton was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it'. However, the progression, or more precisely, the regression, of Satan's character from Book I to Book X gives a much different and much clearer picture of Milton's attitude towards Satan.

Writers and critics of the Romantic era advanced the notion that Satan was a Promethean hero, pitting himself against an unjust God. Most of these writers based their ideas on the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. Throughout his speeches in these books Satan appears heroic and defiant. Satan also appears heroic because the first two books focus on Hell and the fallen angels and Milton makes the character of Satan understandable and unforgettable. He is magnificent, even admirable, in Books I and II but by Book IV he is changed. Away from his followers and allowed some introspection, Satan reveals a more conflicted character. In the end Satan calls to mind Macbeth of Shakespeare. Both characters are magnificent creations of ambition and evil. Both are heroic after a fashion but both are doomed.

### **30.8 CRITICAL COMMENTS**

The first two Books of *Paradise Lost* are among the greatest things in English poetry. The practice of setting them for study, detached from the rest of the poem, can be defended against the obvious objections it must rouse. Their concentrated magnificence is as good an introduction to Milton's genius as it is to his epic. Considered only as an arresting opening to a long and massive work, this burst of fiery energy is unsurpassed: Satan and Hell are launched like a meteor, whose flaming speed will draw after it the wider and more varied visions of Heaven, Earth, and Paradise. The richness of poetic

texture is also immediately striking; Milton seeks to 'load every rift with ore' more openly than in later Books. Thus he establishes once for all the epic grandeur he will be able to sustain less ostentatiously, once established.

The intellectual statement of *Paradise Lost* as a whole is quite clear: that true happiness lies in salvation through Christ. And the application of this scheme of judgment to Satan is equally clear, particularly as the poem progresses: he is seen sinking lower in the moral scale, until his final success coincides with his final degradation, and he is transformed into a serpent.

The Fall is an act of disobedience, and the action of the poem is therefore about who is to obey or disobey. Milton makes obedience a symbol of faith, of the state of inward truth from which the epic sets out, and toward which it soars and marches. Eve disobeys God in order to obey the Serpent and her own appetites. Adam disobeys God for his own reason, when he obeys Eve and "the Link of Nature". It is therefore a magnificent arrangement to open the poem with the character who originated all disobedience, who first invented the great revolt, *il gran rifiuto*. Satan is disobedience personified, conscious and active. He appears first at the lowest point of his fortunes, as at the lowest point of Milton's Cosmos. From this point he rallies and begins to rise. As he reveals his greatness and the full splendour of his evil will, we see pass before us the forces of destruction and decay which are to assail mankind, and try to drag him down into their realm of living death.

Hell is 'a Universe of death'. The fallen angels in their torments, their passion and resolutions, their policies and pastimes, represent a life cut off from the source of life, that is, God; they can neither possess nor understand the other life, which is true life, and their only purpose is to destroy it as far as they can, to extent the universe of death. The monstrous spectres of Sin and Death, guarding the gates of Hell, are other embodiments of the life-in-death which will be let loose on Earth when Man has fallen. But Hell is also ultimately, a state of mind, represented, in historical terms, by a great pageant of false religions and false civilizations. Some of these false ideals

may allure or impress, as indeed they have held sway over mankind through his history. So we see pass before us the military discipline of Satan's legions, with all the moving associations of Greek and Roman warfare (but also with the darker suggestions of Oriental empires): their delight in epic games; their search for consolation in heroic poetry, or in the hollow pride of rational philosophy. All this is the concentrated picture of a pagan heritage, half noble, half corrupt, like the gorgeous architecture of Pandemonium, the pomp of Satan's kingship, and the solemn statecraft of the Infernal Council. And it is all a projection of Satan's defiant assertion:

“The mind is its own place, and in it self

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.’

Where else than in Hell and the character of Satan could Milton find a place for the delight in evil, the intoxication of spirit, the exultation in cruelty and crime, which is profoundly written into human experience? It is chiefly in Book I and II that Milton makes us live through the experience of active evil, evil in its tragic splendour. The mingling of beauty and horror, and the glorying in evil are concentrated in the figure of Satan where Milton presents an entirely new conception of the Evil One in the Bible, the Devil of medieval belief and classical matter for Christian ends. Satan is conceived as one of Homer's warriors, an epic hero (we must not forget that Homer's heroes could be cruel and vindictive, wrong-headed and wantonly selfish, as well as, in some cases patterns of generosity and simply valour). Nobody, even in the renaissance had thought of treating the character of Satan with such bold imaginative sympathy. The rebel angel now becomes capable of evoking those ancient heroes, or Titans who fought hopelessly against the Gods or the decrees of Fate. He can recall their greatness of spirit, their resolution in despair, as well as the wicked ambitions of Greek and Roman tyrants. Milton created a more splendid image of revolt than any other poet. Satanism is the creed and cult of the rebel, the denier, the wilful sinner. Satan is the eternal enemy of God and man. Far from being a flaw in Milton's vision of a divinely ordained universe, Satan owes his greatness to that

setting, within which the poet has been able to raise him to an all-but-divine stature. He testifies, not to the weakness of Milton's convictions, but to their strength; the framework had to be stout, that could contain such a disruptive power. *Paradise Lost- Books I and II* edited by F. T. Prince

### **30.9 GLOSSARY**

1. Legions of Angels : - a large number who joined Lucifer's revolt.
2. Of Man's First Disobedience: i.e. the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in Eden.
3. whose mortal...World: The fruit was fatal because Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden for tasting it, and were subject to mortality as well as the evils of the human condition.
4. till one greater...seat: the Christian theme of the soul's Redemption.
5. That Shepherd: Moses was a shepherd when he first went to Mount Horeb.
6. What in me is dark...support: The appeal to the Muse, now identified with the Holy Spirit, links the process of poetic creation with the original Creation.
7. baleful: full of sorrow
8. obdurate : obstinate
9. didst outshine...bright : Before the fall, Beelzebub outshone innumerable other heavenly creatures, bright though they were.
10. into what pit....Thunder : a remark qualifying "ruin". Satan refers to Hell as the "pit" into which they fell from Heaven as a result of God's superior strength.
11. luster : shining
12. disdain : great contempt from : springing from : arising out of sense of injur'd merit : the feeling that one has not been treated according

to one's merit.

13. study : pursuit of
14. That Glory : the glory of the unconquerable will, the courage never to submit
15. since by Fate ...Tyranny of Heav'n : Satan's argument is that, being both imperishable and more experienced because of the earlier battle, the fallen angles can optimistically continue their struggle against God.
16. Empyrean : heavenly
17. this great event: the battle in Heaven
18. guile: cunning
19. th' Apostate Angel: the Angel who had abandoned his religious faith and vows.
20. Doing or Suffering : whether one is doing something about it, or merely suffering it passively
21. As being...resist: Satan says that their pleasure henceforth should lie in doing evil, since that would be opposed to God's will.
22. if I fail not: if I am not wrong (not mistaken)
23. inmost counsels: closest advisers
24. His Ministers of vengeance and pursuit : the good angles who had fought on God's side and driven away the rebellious ones.
25. fiery Surge : the ocean of fire
26. shafts : arrows
27. repair : make up for
28. Clime : climate

29. Whom....equals: the old Satanic argument that God's supremacy rests on force, not on natural right.
30. Possessor: owner, Satan's greed for lordship and possession had made him revolt in Heaven.
31. The mind...Heav'n: Satan's mind, in effect, has made his own Hell since it contains the envy and hate with which he has to live.
32. What matter where: What does it matter where I am?
33. th' Almighty ...hence: Satan maintains that God has driven them out through envy.
34. To reign....Hell: Satan says that the ambition they showed in Heaven has proved worthwhile for they may reign now, even though it be in Hell. Satan's use of the word "ambition" suggests that the word may imply some sacrifice.
35. Mansion: abode
36. pernicious highth: a height great enough to threaten damage or destruction
37. now lost... Spirits : Heaven is lost to us only if this state of astonishment persists in you, who are spirits and, therefore, eternal.
38. virtue: courage and enterprise
39. Cherube and Seraph: heavenly orders of the angels
40. Ensigns : banners
41. puissant : powerful
42. But he...fall: Satan accuses God of cunningly hiding His full power and later using it to defeat them.
43. Henceforth ...provok'tie. Now we know God's strength, as well as ours and will neither provoke war nor fear Him if it is provoked.
44. our better part: our intelligence

45. To work: to achieve.
46. What force effected not: what our force could not achieve
47. A generation : species, i.e. humanity
48. Sons of Heaven: the angles
49. Thither: towards that new world
50. eruption : action

### 30.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE / ONE WORD QUESTIONS

1. The Muse that Milton invokes is\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who is next in power to Satan?
  - a) Moloch        b) Mulciber
  - c) Beelezebub   d) Azazel
3. The term 'Glorious enterprise' in Satan I speech means\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Complete the lines:  
 'What though the field be lost?  
 All is not lost,\_\_\_\_\_
5. The term 'Empyreal' in the line 'And this Empyreal' substance cannot fail means\_\_\_\_\_.
6. The 'Sulfurous hail' in Satan's II speech refers to\_\_\_\_\_.
7. What have Satan and the rebel angels changed for 'that celestial light' in Satan's III speech?
8. By what names does Satan refer to the rebel angels in speech IV?
9. In the words of Satan god uses\_\_\_\_\_ 'To transfix us to the bottom of this Gulfe.(Speech IV).

### **30.11 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

1. Highlight the resolution in the last lines of Satan's V speech.
2. What is Milton's appeal to the Muse?
3. Why did god hurl Satan and his legions onto Hell?
4. Explain the lines with reference to the context:  
"What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost.....".
5. Why is Satan hopeful of success in the next war with God?
6. How does Satan rebuke Beelzebub?
7. How does Satan reprimand the rebel angels when he sees them wallowing on the burning Lake?
8. What does Satan mean when he says 'The mind is its own place'?
9. What is the rumour that Satan refers to in his Vth speech?

### **30.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. How does Satan encourage the other angels and give them hope?
2. Does Satan come across as a heroic character in Book I and II? If yes, how?

### **30.13 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *Fifteen Poets*- Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013.
2. *The Faber Book of English Verse*- ed. By John Hayward, Faber and Faber, London, 1972
3. *A History of English Literature*- From earliest Times to 1916- Arthur Compton Rickett, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi, 1988



4. *History of English Literature*- Volume I – David Daiches, Supernova publishers, New Delhi, 1994
5. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*- George Sampson, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, 1972
6. *Milton - Paradise Lost Book I and II*- ed. By F. T. Prince, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982
7. *Annotated texts* - John Milton - Paradise Lost Book I and II - ed. by Nrinda Nabar and Nissim Wzekiel, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1978.

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 31**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN DONNE**

**UNIT - V**

## **EARLY LIFE OF JOHN DONNE AND METAPHYSICAL POETRY**

### **Unit Structure**

#### **31.1 Objective**

#### **31.2 John Donne's Early Life**

#### **31.3 Donne's Poems**

#### **31.4 Metaphysical Poetry**

#### **31.5 Metaphysical Conceit**

#### **31.6 Poetic Style**

#### **31.7 Conclusion**

#### **31.8 Examination Oriented Questions**

#### **31.9 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **31.10 Suggested Reading**

### **31.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with the early life of John Donne. To introduce the concepts of Metaphysical Poetry and the use of metaphysical concepts. The style of Donne's writing is the main focus of the lesson.

### 31.2 JOHN DONNE'S EARLY LIFE

John Donne was born at London in 1572 and died there in 1631. His father was a prosperous London merchant. On his mother's side, he was connected with Sir Thomas More and John Heywood. He was brought up as a Roman Catholic for which religion his family suffered heavily. As a Catholic, Donne could not take a degree though he spent three years at Oxford (1584-87) and three at Cambridge (1587-90). To get a University degree, students in those days had to take an oath of allegiance to the Anglican Church. In the early 1590's he was a student at the Inns of Court in London, which was more a University than a law school. He studied law, languages and theology. In his spare time, he was, as we are told, a "great visitor of ladies and a frequent theatre goer." In these years he wrote most of the Elegies and Satires, and the Songs and Sonnets. In 1596 and 1597, he took part in the expeditions led by the Earl of Essex against Cadiz and the Azores. In 1598, he was appointed secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, a minister of Queen Elizabeth from 1598 to 1602, but lost his favour by secretly marrying his niece, Anne Moore, in 1601. He was briefly imprisoned, lived a life of poverty and deprivation and sought different patrons. Donne summed up these years as "John Donne, Ann Donne, undone."

After several years of material troubles and fruitless attempts to obtain a position through court favour, his *Pseudo Martyr* (1610) won him the notice of King James I. James, however, refused to promote him except in the Anglican Church. At last in 1615, at the age of 44, Donne became an Anglican. He was appointed successively Royal Chaplain, reader in divinity at Lincoln's Inn, and finally, in 1621, Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London.

Three years after becoming an Anglican, in 1618, his wife, who had borne him twelve children and whom he had never ceased to love, died. It is believed that her death brought about his final sanctification and illumination, and it was certainly from the agony of his heart that he preached his first sermon after her death beginning: "Lo! I am the man that

have seen affliction."

Most of Donne's poems circulated in manuscript during his lifetime through the hands of a select coterie of intellectuals at the universities. His audience was deliberately restricted to the happy few whose education, background and position equipped them to appreciate the most difficult poets of the day. His collected poems were not published until 1633, that is, two years after his death. His prose works include over 150 sermons, a satirical attack on the Jesuits and a small book of Devotions written during a serious illness in 1623.

Though Donne was a leader of the *avant garde* in late Elizabethan and Jacobean London, Eighteenth Century, which believed in smoothness and clarity, did not care for his poetry. Pope "translated" Donne's satires so thoroughly, that they were unrecognizable and Dryden mistakenly declared that he wrote "nice speculations of Philosophy" and not love poetry at all. Low estimate of Donne continued in the nineteenth century. It was possibly because he suffered in comparison with Milton. The poets of this century show, with the exception of Gerald Manley Hopkins, the influence of Milton rather than of the metaphysical poets. The poets of the twentieth century admired Donne's poetry. His modern reputation owes much to the edition of the Poems by H.J.C. Grierson (1912) and to the influence of the criticism of T.S. Eliot. It is not for nothing that Eliot's criticism has been mainly directed upon the seventeenth century. He has restored the seventeenth century to its proper place in the English tradition. In his "Homage to John Dryden," he says :

A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of the cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are

always forming new wholes.

This passage suggests synthesis of emotion, passion and thought as the corner-stone of Donne's poetry. Donne could be lyrical and intellectual, serious and cynical, intense and witty at the same time. Modern poets also exhibit the same kind of a complex sensibility in their poetry. Since both Donne and a modern poet do not find any coherence or certainty in the outside world, they fall back on the truth of their own experience.

### **31.3 DONNE'S POEMS**

The best way to appreciate Donne's poetry is to make an effort to understand his poems. Following five poems are in your course :

1. "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning"
2. "The Relic"
3. "Love's Infiniteness"
4. "Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness"
5. Sonnet XIV : "Better my Heart Three Person'd God"

The first three are love poems and the last two are religious poems. The love poems which you have to read do not express the variety of Donne's love poetry. All the three poems express sincere, fulfilled, or spiritual love. It must not be forgotten that Donne, also wrote poems which are cynical, bitter or express sensual love. In "The Apparition", the poet is extremely bitter and mocking; in "Song: Go, and catch a falling star" he insists that there is no true and faithful woman anywhere in the world; in "The Flea" he convinces his mistress to yield to him; and in "The Indifferent", he presents his cynical doctrine of sensuality. In addition to the three poems of sincere love which you will read, there are several others which express the same feeling of true and fulfilled love. Some of the popular ones are : "The Sun Rising," "The Good-morrow," "Song; Sweetest Love I do not go," "The Canonization" and "The Ecstasy." If you enjoy the poems included in

your syllabus, read some more which you are able to find in any anthology.

It was once believed that as a young man, he was extremely cynical about love and lived a life of sensuality, but a change occurred when he fell in love with Anne Moore and married her. He expressed cynical love in the poems which he wrote before he met Anne, but he celebrated the ecstasy of love in his poems which he wrote later. There is no evidence to prove the truth of this. It is possible that he wrote some cynical poems about love after his marriage and some poems of fulfilled love before meeting Anne Moore. In fact, it is dangerous to mix up biography and poetry. Writing poetry, particularly during the seventeenth century, was like role playing. Donne's poetry is dramatic. He creates a speaker who is responding to, or interacting with a listener (his beloved) in a dramatic situation at a moment of great significance and urgency.

All the five poems in your course are reproduced (in modernized spellings) in these lessons and are closely analysed. Read very carefully each poem with the help of the given glossary and explication which follows. Since Donne is a difficult poet you must spend time in understanding them. Don't give up after the first reading. You will enjoy them after some effort. When you struggle with the five poems with the help of the glossary and explication of each poem, consider the nature of Donne's poetry—the quality of his experience whether it is secular or religious and its expression in words and images.

The following note on Donne as a metaphysical poet will become clear only after you have mastered a couple of his poems. So, if you like, you may go straight to the poems and read the following section later.

### **31.4 METAPHYSICAL POETRY**

The term "metaphysical" as applied to John Donne and a group of poets who wrote under his influence, had its origin in the same century in which the poets wrote their works. Drummond seems to have Donne in mind when he

objected to the "modern" attempt to "abstract poetry to metaphysical ideas and scholastic quiddities," and Dryden later complained that "Donne affects the metaphysics not only in his satires but in his amorous verses," and "perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy." Dr. Johnson spoke of these poets as "the metaphysical poets" referring particularly to the exhibition of their learning.

Donne was not metaphysical in the same sense in which Dante, for example, was. Unlike Dante, he was not committed to a particular metaphysical or philosophical system, but he was interested in the fascinating, conflicting, and often disturbing philosophies of his period. The medieval way of thought, in which systems tended towards synthesis and unity, was giving way to the European scientific renaissance, which was analytical. Medieval (Ptolemaic) astronomy was challenged by Copernicus, Aristotle was challenged by Galileo. What interested Donne was not the ultimate truth of an idea but ideas themselves. There is a note of tension, springing from the contradictions in the very nature of things. Donne was keenly aware of the difficulty of metaphysical problems and saw them lurking behind any action, however, trivial it may be. In his greater poems, he comes up against fundamental problems and oppositions of a strictly metaphysical nature. He is concerned, in his love poems, with the identity of lovers as lovers and their diversity as the human beings in whom love manifests itself; the stability and self-sufficiency of love, contrasted with the mutability and dependence of human beings; with the presence of lovers to each other, though they are separated by travel and death; the spirit demanding the aid of the flesh, the flesh hampering the spirit; the shortcomings of this life summarized by decay and death, contrasted with the divine it aspires. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" the lovers are two, yet one. They are united even when they are separated physically by travels. These problems of contemporary philosophy arising out of the problems of One and Many, I and Thou are seldom as elaborate or specific as it may appear. These allusions to ideas are there not to display his learning but to support an argument. He uses ideas as images and draws them from whatever belief best expresses the emotion he has to communicate.

A learner reading Donne's poems should carefully analyse the

sources of his learned and unexpected comparisons for which he is famous. Though he draws upon everyday and commonplace experiences also, his distinctive source are the current beliefs in metaphysics, cosmology, geography, natural science, medicine and alchemy. All the poems included in your syllabus illustrate a great range of the areas from which Donne has taken his imagery. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is a farewell to his wife on the occasion of his departure for a diplomatic mission to France. He tells her not to mourn because mourning would belittle their love. The souls of true lovers are united. Distance can separate their bodies but they will suffer no real absence. Notice the sources of his images to illustrate his theme: (i) the death-bed of virtuous men (St. 1); (ii) the physical phenomena of melting, making noise, floods and tempests (St. 2); (iii) church clergy and laity (St. 2); (iv) earthquakes and the movement of the heavenly bodies (St. 3); (v) the process of refining metals (St. 5); (vi) the process of beating gold into gold leaf (St. 6); and (vii) drawing of a circle with a pair of compasses (St. 7-9). The broader subjects which they embrace are: philosophy, cosmology, religion, astronomy, alchemy, and geometry.

### **31.5 METAPHYSICAL CONCEIT**

A conceit is an elaborate metaphor comparing two apparently dissimilar objects or emotions, often with the effect of shock or surprise. Metaphysical conceits used by Donne consisted in what Johnson called, the "discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." They are the result of a habit of mind that is immediately aware of logical situations recurring in diverse kinds of experience. The relation between separate and apparently unrelated parts is established with the help of the intellect. When Donne, in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," compares two lovers to a pair of compasses it implies that all phenomena are facets of a single whole. The same flame which lights the intellect warms the heart; mathematics and love obey one principle. The fixed foot of the compasses does not move of itself, but when the circle is being described, it leans towards the other foot which moves. The firmness with which the fixed foot is pinned in the



centre is what completes the circle. When the circle is completed the outstretched foot comes back to the other foot. The two feet of the compass are the lovers and words such as "roams," "leans," and "hearkens" gather up emotion into this intellectual image :

If they are two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two,  
Thy soul the fix't foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.  
And though it in the centre sit  
Yet when the other far doth roam  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.  
Such wilt thou be to me, who must  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness draws my circle just,  
And makes me end, where I begun.

It can be seen from this that a metaphysical conceit is neither a decoration nor an illustration which can be removed from the statement but the statement itself is made with the help of the conceit. Usually, a conceit is elaborated to the furthest stage, to which ingenuity can carry it. There are rapid associations of thoughts and no association is left unexploited.

Fusion of passionate feeling and logical argument is characteristic of Donne. Profound emotion generally stimulates Donne's powers of intellectual analysis and argument. For him the process of logical reasoning can in itself be an emotional experience. As he brings to the lyric poem a new realism and urgency and a new penetration of psychological analysis, so he carries further than any previous poet,

the use of dialectic for a poem's whole structure and development. The argument of each of the five poems in your course has been very carefully analysed in the next lessons. The generalisation about the logical structure of his poems will become meaningful if you concentrate on the structure of one poem which you have liked the best.

As reasoning and analysis are not incompatible with feeling and sensuous immediacy, so there is no antithesis between wit and seriousness. Seriousness, for Donne, never becomes simple solemnity. Exaggerated tone, paradoxical argument, and surprising conclusion reached from a simple situation are the secrets of his wit. Witty analysis is most remarkable in "The Flea," which is not in your course. He starts in the tone of a serious argument trying to convince his mistress that there is nothing wrong in physical love: "Mark but this flea, and mark in this,/How little that which thou denies me is." The flea has flitted from him to her and by biting both of them and mingling their blood has achieved the union which he desires. The flea becomes a "marriage temple" and "marriage bed." He argues that her fears are false and she would not lose more honour when she yields to him. "The Relic" is another poem which displays his incomparable wit.

### **31.6 POETIC STYLE**

Donne's style in his religious poetry is the same as in his love poetry. There are the same elements of surprise, boldness and audacity in both. His wit does not show lack of sincerity. In his holy sonnet "Batter my heart, three person'd God," Donne is carrying on an argument with God. In fact, he is impatient with God and criticizes Him for not trying hard to end his subjugation to sin. Tension inside the sinner is externalized in violent images. His focus is on one moment when he is conscious of the conflict between his devotion to God and his sinfulness. God is the rightful ruler of his heart and devil has shut him out. He pleads with God to use greater force to regain his heart, to break off his unsuitable betrothal to sin. Donne uses audacious paradoxes after a series of bold images in the end of the sonnet :

For I

Except you enthrall me, never shall I be free,

Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me

Seeking a divorce from the wrong partner (devil), Donne wishes to be mated to the right partner (God). It is a new kind of subjugation. His freedom consists in subjugation to God, his purity consists in the love of God.

Donne was an original craftsman. His irregular metres and broken rhythms were the outcome of a double motive. First, he was in revolt against the smooth flow of Elizabethan love poetry; secondly, he wanted to portray accurately the searchings of his complex mind. His metres are deliberately made irregular, jerky, yet thoughtful to follow the swift process of his mind. He attains the dramatic effect by shocking abruptness, harsh transitions, uneven accents and snatches of conversation.

### **31.7 CONCLUSION**

Modern readers admire the poetry of John Donne because it communicates a unified experience, a sense of imaginative pressure, and intensity of feeling. Donne energized poetry and made it reflect a new sensibility. He deepened the poetic experience and achieved an effect which suggested both passion and penetration of thought. Assimilating all that he had learnt into his experience, giving it depth and intensity, he evolved a technique to render the complex moment of feeling accurately.

### **31.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Donne's development towards being a Metaphysical Poet.
2. Write a note on the writing style of John Donne.

### **31.9 LET US SUM UP**

John Donne (1572–1631) was an English poet, cleric, and metaphysical poet known for his innovative style and complex themes. Born into a Roman

Catholic family during the Elizabethan era, he experienced religious tensions and faced social and career challenges due to his faith. Donne's early works included love poems marked by wit and paradoxes. Later, he became a cleric in the Church of England and produced religious poems and sermons. Donne's life spanned the transition from Tudor to Stuart rule, witnessing political changes, religious strife, and the flourishing of English Renaissance literature. His works continue to be celebrated for their intellectual depth and intricate exploration of human experiences.

### **31.10 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Seventeenth Century English Poetry : *Modern Essay in Criticism* - William R. Keats William R. Keats

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 32**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**JOHN DONNE**

**UNIT - V**

**A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING BY JOHN DONNE**

**Unit Structure**

**32.1 Objectives**

**32.2 Introduction**

**32.3 Background to the Poem**

**32.4 Text**

**32.5 Explanation of the Lines**

**32.6 Summary**

**32.7 Analysis**

**32.8 Themes**

**32.8.1 Death**

**32.8.2 Separation**

**32.8.3 Love**

**32.8.4 Platonic Love Vs Earthly Love**

**32.8.5 Religious Faith**

**32.8.6 Science**

**32.9 Structure of the Poem**

**32.10 Imagery**

### **32.11 The Metaphysical Conceit of the Compass**

### **32.12 “A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning” as a Metaphysical Poem**

### **32.13 Glossary**

### **32.14 Examination Oriented Questions**

### **32.15 Multiple Choice Questions**

### **32.16 Let Us Sum Up**

### **32.17 Suggested Readings**

## **32.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learner with John Donne’s famous poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.” The lesson will provide a detailed summary as well as critical analysis of the poem.

## **32.2 INTRODUCTION**

John Donne is one of the best known poets of the seventeenth century. He is known both for his love poetry and his holy poems. “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is one of his best known love poems, in which he describes the moment of his separation from his wife Ann.

## **32.3 BACKGROUND TO THE POEM**

John Donne composed the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” in 1611 as he was preparing for one of his frequent journeys away from his wife, Ann. The occasion was Donne’s departure to France with Sir Robert Drury. The poem showcases the deep love which John Donne had for his wife. The poet argues that even during separation, the couple should not be sorrowful because their love binds them together, regardless of distance.

At the time the poem was composed, Donne and his young wife had been married for ten years. Ann, Donne’s wife was the niece of Donne’s employer; with whom he eloped in 1601. By eloping with his employer’s niece, he also ruined his

career prospects. As a result, Donne had considerable difficulty finding work, and the couple struggled to provide for their ever-growing family. The background to this poem is significant because it gives the reader an understanding of the kind of love Donne and his wife shared; it was a love that kept the marriage strong and vibrant in the face of hardship.

#### 32.4 TEXT

*As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:*

*So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.*

*Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.*

*Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.*

*But we by a love so much refined,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.  
Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.*

*If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.*

*And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.*

*Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.*



### 32.5 EXPLANATION OF THE LINES

*As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:*

The poet begins the poem with the assertion that virtuous men are not afraid of death and they humbly accept death. They are so self-effacing that they gently ask their souls to leave this world, without any protest and complaint. The poet says that the virtuous accept death even if their friends, who are sad at the death of their beloved friends urge them to live for some more time while some simply do not want them to die at all.

*So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.*

The poet asks his beloved that just like the virtuous people who accept their death humbly, they should also bid farewell to each other without making noise about it. The poet says that neither should they shed tears and raise floods with their tears, nor should they generate tempests and storms by their moaning. According to the poet, if they make much noise about their parting then it will be like a sacrilegious act which will make their love vulgar by letting the common people know about it. For the poet, his relationship with his beloved is something sacred and he does not want to degrade it by letting the common people know about it.

*Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.*

The poet says that when the earth moves, that is, during an earthquake, it brings with it fears and harms as the earthly beings are aware about it. The people calculate what damage the earthquake did and what was actually expected. However, the moving of the spheres, that is of other planets, though much greater in intensity is considered innocent by the people as neither the people are aware of the movement, nor does it harm them.

*Dull sublunary lovers' love*

*(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit*

*Absence, because it doth remove*

*Those things which elemented it.*

The poet says that earthly lovers, who place highest value on the senses and whose love is confined to the senses, and are ignorant about the true platonic love, cannot tolerate absence from their lover. As absence means the removal of the physical self on which their love is based, they lose the essence of love when they are apart from their beloved.

*But we by a love so much refined,*

*hat our selves know not what it is,*

*Inter-assured of the mind,*

*Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.*

But the love between the poet and his beloved is different. It is so superior, pure, and spiritual that even they cannot comprehend its true nature. It is something heavenly and other-worldly. They are so intimately connected with each other's soul that their love has transcended the physicality of love and they do not care about the physical features such as eyes, lips, and hands. Their souls are connected and theirs is such a spiritual union that they are not concerned about the absence of the beloved.

*Our two souls therefore, which are one,*

*Though I must go, endure not yet*

*A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.*

The poet says that the love has merged their souls into one, and now although they are two bodies, yet their souls have become one. The poet says that although it is inevitable for him to go, but even after getting separated from his beloved, their love will not get a rupture. He says that their love, even after their separation will increase in intensity. He compares his love with gold, which when beaten does not break but becomes thin like air and expands.

*If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.*

The poet says that even if they consider their souls as two, they are like the two feet of a compass, which appear to be separate but are united in reality. The poet compares the beloved, who stays back at home to the fixed foot of the compass, which does not appear to be moving, but in reality it moves if the other foot moves.

*And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.*

The poet continues the conceit of the compass and says that his beloved is like that foot of a compass, which sits at the centre but moves and follows the other foot when it moves. In this way, it grows upright and unites with the wandering foot when that completes its circle and comes home.

*Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;*

*Thy firmness makes my circle just,*

*And makes me end where I begun.*

The poet says that the beloved has the same relation with the poet which the fixed foot of the compass has with the moving foot. As the firmness of the fixed foot enables the moving foot to draw the circle correctly, similarly the beloved although fixed and firm, assists the poet to move out and then return to the place from where he began. So, according to the poet, it is the love and faithfulness of the beloved which enables the poet to undergo his journey successfully and then return home.

### **32.6 SUMMARY**

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is a poem about separation by John Donne. In the poem, the poet, who can be identified with John Donne consoles his beloved at the moment of their separation. During the development of this thought, the poem makes various comparisons to forbid his beloved at the moment of their separation.

The poem was inspired by a real life incident when John Donne was getting ready to move to France with Sir Robert Drury. At that moment, he addressed his wife, Anne Moore and advised her not to mourn at their separation as he viewed their love as something Platonic and in the separation also he saw the unbreakable union of their souls.

The poet begins the poem by referring to the virtuous persons who humbly accept their departure from this world, even when their friends request them to fight for their life. The poet expects similar kind of humility from his beloved at the time of his departure. The poet next urges his beloved not to mourn at the time of their separation and not vulgarise their love by doing so, thereby letting the common people know about it. The poet further says that only those people whose love is very earthly and gross, lament at events like separation from the beloved. The poet says that his love is spiritual and has transcended the earthly things such as the physicality of love. Their love has a metaphysical and other worldly connotation. The poet then compares their love with gold and says that just as gold expands at beating and does not break, similarly their love will strengthen at their separation and will not break.

In the next section of the poem, the poet introduces the well-known conceit of the compass. He compares his love with that of a compass. He says that the two lovers are like the two feet of the compass which, although separate, are united at the top. He compares his beloved to that foot of the compass which remains fixed. His own self he compares to the moving foot which is able to move only because of the firmness of the static foot. By making this reference to the compass, the poet is trying to say that it is because of the love and faithfulness of the beloved, that he is able to move out. He further extends this conceit of the compass and says that no matter how far he goes, he will return back to his beloved and be united with her like the two feet of the compass.

### **32.7 ANALYSIS**

The poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is one of the best known poems of John Donne. In the poem, the poet is urging his beloved not to mourn at his departure. The poem is remarkable for Donne’s use of imagery and metaphors. As belonging to the metaphysical school of poetry, Donne has used many metaphors and conceits. Donne has followed the convention of the Metaphysical poets by using certain conceits in the poem, the most remarkable being that of the compass.

### **32.8 THEMES**

#### **32.8.1 Death**

Death is a common theme in John Donne’s poetry. He has explored the theme in many of his poems like “Death Be Not Proud”, “Relic”, etc. Similarly, death is a significant theme in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.” The theme of death is delineated in the very opening stanza of the poem, when the poet makes a reference to virtuous men who humbly accept their death, “virtuous men pass mildly away.” The poet likens death to journey as both death and journey connote separation from the loved ones. In this poem specifically, the poet asks his beloved to humbly accept his departure just like the virtuous men accept death.

#### **32.8.2 Separation**

The poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is about separation. The

poem is about the particular event of a lover's separation from his beloved. However, the poet's treatment of the theme of separation is very unusual. Instead of lamenting over the separation from his beloved, the poet asks his beloved to accept the separation in a manner as the virtuous men accept death, i.e. humbly. He also says that their love will increase as a result of their separation just like gold, which expands when it is beaten.

### **32.8.3 Love**

John Donne has composed poems on diverse subjects, ranging from love poems to religious poems. However, he is better known for his love poems. The poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" also touches upon the aspect of love. The poem is an address from a husband to his wife at the time of his departure. It is because of the feeling of love that the wife is sad at the departure of her husband. Similarly, it is because of this feeling of love that the poet believes that they will not be parted even in their separation.

### **32.8.4 Platonic love Vs Earthly Love**

John Donne has composed numerous poems on love. There is a constant focus in Donne's poetry on the various aspects of love, i.e., both earthly as well as platonic. Donne is also known for comparing his love with the saints' devotion to the gods. In the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" Donne deals with this aspect of love and gives his love a rather Platonic touch. In illustrating this, Donne compares and contrasts his love with that of the common people and says that their love is not like that of the common people which cannot tolerate separation, as it will separate the two physical selves. Donne says that their love is so pure that they do not care for such earthly things as eyes, lips, and hands. Theirs is spiritual love that transcends the material world and the limitations of their own bodies. In this way, Donne gives their love a Platonic bearing.

### **32.8.5 Religious Faith**

Religious concerns are almost always discernible in Donne's poetry. The poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is also set in this tradition. In the poem, Donne compares his departure to the deaths of "virtuous men." By saying this, Donne

is suggesting the fact that religious men who are devoted to God and keep their faith do not fear death. Rather, they embrace death humbly, as they know that after death they will be united with God Himself and they will become one with God in the eternity. Donne compares the faith of these virtuous people in God to his own faith in his beloved, which is no less than a religious devotion. As the virtuous men, because of their faith are sure about their deliverance, similarly Donne's faith towards his beloved makes him confident about the strength of their love.

### **32.8.6 Science**

Along with religion, science is also a theme which is prevalent in many of Donne's works. The metaphysical poets are known for making unique comparisons in their poetry drawn from all the available sources. As during the seventeenth century, science was still in its infancy and the public in general and poets in particular were fascinated by the things it had to offer. In the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" the influence of science can be seen, whether it is the reference to mathematical tools, such as a geometrical compass, which was invented by Galileo only two years earlier, or to a circle and its infinite, perfect qualities. Scientific references are also apparent as the poet makes a reference to the "moving of th' earth," and to earthquakes as they strike fear into the hearts of men. He also uses science as he refers to the moving of the spheres, i.e. the planets.

### **32.9 STRUCTURE OF THE POEM**

The poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is written in nine four-line stanzas, called quatrains, using a four-beat, iambic tetrameter line. The rhyme scheme for each stanza is an alternating *abab*, and each stanza is grammatically self-contained. The poem is written in a simple form which is not a characteristic of Donne's poetry. Donne often invented elaborate and complicated stanzaic forms and rhyme schemes and employed them in his poetry for the handling of similarly complicated themes. The simplicity of the present poem, however, assists the reader more readily to follow the rather complicated argument of the poem.

Donne develops the main idea of the poem in three parts. In the first part, which consists of the first two stanzas, the poet argues that he and his beloved should

separate quietly and should accept their separation humbly—as quietly as righteous men go to their deaths, and as humbly as they accept their death—because their love is sacred and should not be disrespected by public emotional displays. The next part which consists of the next three stanzas considers the sacred nature of their love. The poet contrasts their sacred love with ordinary lovers whose relationship is based only on sexual attraction. The third and final part of the poem, which includes the final four stanzas imaginatively considers the ways in which the lovers’ souls will remain joined even during their physical separation.

### **32.10 IMAGERY**

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is written in the tradition of Metaphysical poetry. The Metaphysical school of poetry is remarkable for using strong imagery and making far-fetched comparisons. The present poem also uses imagery extensively and the whole poem is replete with images. The images are drawn from various sources, ranging from the most commonplace things to the heavenly bodies.

The poem addresses the moment when the lovers are preparing to bid each other farewell. Although their separation will be only temporary, it is a potentially emotional scene, and the speaker is explaining why there is no need for tears or sorrow. To make the beloved understand this point, the poet makes use of diverse images. The speaker’s task is a difficult one, and his argument is carried by the poem’s unusual imagery. The very first stanza uses the image of the dying of the virtuous men. The poet compares the dying of virtuous men to his upcoming separation from his beloved. This is an unusual analogy but Donne’s purpose is to explain that the virtuous accept both death and separation calmly and without fear and the beloved should also accept their separation calmly and without fear and sorrow.

The second stanza of the poem introduces the imagery of molten gold, “So let us melt, and make no noise”, to which he will later return. Next he draws on extreme weather conditions as imagery for emotional outpouring. The comparison is not pleasing because he is discouraging this behaviour; the poet suggests that dramatic “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests” are profane and unfitting for these lovers.



In the third stanza, Donne extends the weather imagery by introducing one of the classic images of the metaphysical conceit—the universe: “Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears, / Men reckon what it did and meant.” Here Donne is making a reference to thunderstorms and natural disasters. By making this reference, Donne highlights the fact that these natural forces are destructive and frightening, and they leave people confused about their meaning. The next lines indirectly compare the couple’s love to a force greater than natural disasters, and yet harmless, by saying “But trepidation of the spheres, / Though greater far, is innocent.” According to Donne the mighty trembling in the universe does not harm anyone, despite its magnitude and force. The indirect parallel is that the inner trembling that the lovers feel at the prospect of being apart is powerful yet causes no real harm.

In the sixth stanza, Donne uses gold imagery which carries meaning on many levels: “Our two souls therefore, which are one, / Though I must go, endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion, / Like gold to airy thinness beat.” The poet compares his love to gold as gold is bright, shining, durable, and valuable. In short, gold is everything which the poet’s love is. Donne, however, takes the imagery a step further. Describing the malleability of gold, the poet compares gold’s ability to change shape and to extend with the lovers’ ability to bend to circumstance yet keep each other spiritually close by virtue of their deep bond. Gold’s qualities are expressed in two ways: it can be melted and merged, as suggested in line twenty-one, and it can be hammered and elongated. This analogy is well crafted because it works from every angle: both gold and love can be melted and merged; both can be “hammered” and yet remain strong and essentially unchanged.

In the next three stanzas, i.e. seventh, eighth, and ninth, Donne develops the compass imagery that has become almost identical with the term “metaphysical conceit” in contemporary literary discourse. The poet introduces the image in the seventh stanza and then elaborates it in the next two stanzas: “If they be two, they are two so / As stiff twin compasses are two; / Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show / To move, but doth, if th’ other do.” Here Donne is referring to a compass used in geometry and explains that his beloved is the fixed leg in the centre, while he is the outer leg that moves. This idea is carried into the eighth stanza, where the poet adds, “And though it in the center sit, / Yet when the other far doth roam, / It leans and

hearkens after it, / And grows erect, as that comes home.” The imagery is apt as the compass is a unit, and its two legs only represent physical separation; they are not structurally separate as they are united at the top. The compass’ behaviour (leaning, straightening) conveys that the two legs are connected and so are the two lovers.

In the final stanza, Donne concludes, “Such wilt thou be to me, who must / Like th’ other foot, obliquely run; / Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begun.” Further elaborating the compass metaphor, the speaker explains that while he is away, the loyalty of his lover keeps him true. The image of the circle in line thirty-five carries multiple meanings and is particularly appropriate with the compass metaphor. Circles traditionally symbolize infinity, perfection, balance, symmetry, and cycles. Again, Donne establishes unity and integration by using the image of the circle. The circle imagery signifies that the lovers will be together forever in perfect love. Since compasses create circles, the image of the compass legs separating, drawing a circle (where the beginning meets the end), and then coming back together thoroughly illustrates the lover’s journey that “makes me end where I begun.”

Through the progression of the poem, by using certain images, the poet has built a complex, yet flowing and beautiful, argument for why the lovers should not be saddened or worried about their upcoming separation. Donne’s method is unique and a wonderful tool for understanding the Metaphysical poets. The poem, though intricate, is accessible precisely because of the array of interconnected images presented throughout. Although the images may not at first seem to be related, Donne’s poetic genius becomes apparent as the thoughtful reader pieces the images together.

### **32.11 THE METAPHYSICAL CONCEIT OF THE COMPASS**

Donne developed his well-known metaphysical conceit of the compass in the last three stanzas of the poem. In this conceit of the compass, he likens himself and his wife to the two feet of a mathematical compass. The two feet of the compass although separate are united at the top. As an instrument, a compass’ function depends on the two parts working together in harmony. So, just like the compass, Donne and his wife are joined in their love in its togetherness. Donne compares his wife Ann to the “fixed foot,” which provides strength to Donne who, as the other foot that moves

about, must roam far. He points out though, that it is Ann who “leans and hearkens” after him just like the static foot of the compass which leans after the moving foot. This argument supports his claim that their love will expand to fill the space between them. Again, Donne refers to Ann’s “firmness,” which strengthens their love even in time of separation. It is this firmness, this devotion which according to him “makes [his] circle just.” The image of the circle symbolizes perfection and infinity with a fixed centre. The notion of the infinite, something that is without end, cements the notion of Donne’s elevated affection for his wife which is in sharp contrast to some of Donne’s other works, written presumably in his younger days where he presented a more cynical conception of love.

### **32.12 “A VALEDICTION : FORBIDDING MOURNING” AS A METAPHYSICAL POEM**

Besides being a beautiful love poem, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” endures because it contains classic illustrations of the metaphysical conceit. This term refers to a technique used by metaphysical poets in which commonplace objects or ideas are used to create analogies, offering insight into something important or profound. The metaphysical conceit is especially effective when the reader is almost immediately able to identify with the poet’s meaning, despite the unexpected nature of the comparison. Today, discussion of the metaphysical conceit inevitably refers to “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” because of Donne’s skilled use of unexpected imagery.

As a Metaphysical poet, Donne expressed his love for his wife in a particular way. Many of the characteristics typical of Metaphysical poetry are found in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”

First is the intellectual descriptions of emotions using unusual and often startling comparisons. Donne expresses his emotions in quite an unusual manner. In explaining that his wife should not mourn at their separation, Donne uses all kinds of descriptions ranging from the dying of the virtuous men, to Platonism, to comparing his love with gold, then heavenly bodies, and finally the geometrical compass. In order to convince his beloved that their separation will not weaken their love, he makes all sort of references ranging from the very ordinary to the very unusual. For

instance, Donne compares his love with gold. He says that their love is just like gold which does not break when it is beaten, but expands. Similarly, their love will also expand and grow in the face of their separation. Another unusual comparison is that with the geometrical compass where Donne compares his wife to the static foot and his own self to the moving foot. According to him, no matter how far the moving foot goes, it always comes back to the static foot because of the steadfastness and devotion of the static foot.

Next metaphysical element in the poem is a preoccupation with love, death, and religion. The poem is about the love of a man for his wife. However, their love is not something like the earthly love of the common people. Donne gives their love a Platonic connotation and according to him, the love which he and his wife share is not bound merely by physical attraction. Their souls are one and even in their separation, they are united. The reference to death comes quite early in the poem i.e. in the very first stanza. Donne compares his separation with death and he asks his wife to humbly accept their separation just like the virtuous people humbly accept death. The reference to virtuous men also lends a religious connotation to the poem. According to Donne the religious men who are devoted to God and keep their faith do not fear death. Rather, they embrace death humbly, as they know that after death they will become one with God in the eternity. Donne compares the faith of these virtuous people in God to his own faith in his beloved, which is no less than a religious devotion. As the virtuous men, because of their faith are sure about their deliverance, similarly Donne's faith towards his beloved makes him confident about the eternity of their love.

Another feature of the metaphysical poems is that the diction employed is simple. Donne has also framed his poem in a simple manner. Although the comparisons are far-fetched but the language and diction employed by Donne is quite simple. Further, the far-fetched comparisons help in heightening the overall impact of the poem, giving it a metaphysical touch. Simplicity of the present poem also assists the reader more readily to follow the rather complicated argument of the poem.

Another important feature which gives the poem a metaphysical bearing is that Donne has taken images from everyday life. He has used the common-place

image of gold to illustrate the nature of his love. The image of the compass, although used by Donne in a very unusual manner is also an image taken from our everyday life.

Finally, another important element of metaphysical poetry is the formulation of an argument. In this poem also, the poet puts forth an argument and then develops it. In the present poem, Donne puts forth the argument that his beloved should not become sad during their separation as their love is beyond the earthly separation and union. To develop this argument, Donne uses various images and makes numerous comparisons like ‘teare-floods’, ‘sigh-tempests’, ‘Dull sublunary lovers’, ‘Like gold’, ‘compasses’, etc.

### 32.13 GLOSSARY

*virtuous*- having or showing high moral standards

*prophanation*-(from profane) not relating to that which is sacred or religious

*layetie*-commoners

*trepidation*-a feeling of fear or anxiety about something that may happen

*sublunary*- belonging to this world as contrasted with a better or more spiritual one

*hearkens*- calls

### 32.14 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” as a metaphysical poem.
2. What are the different themes delineated by Donne in the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”?
3. Discuss in detail the symbols and images employed by Donne in the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”
4. Explain the metaphysical conceit of the compass employed by Donne in the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”

5. How is love treated in the poem? How is it different from the traditional conception of love?
6. How does Donne deal with the concept of death in the poem?
7. Discuss the various sources from where John Donne borrowed the images he used in the poem.
8. What is the central idea of the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”?
9. Discuss John Donne as a metaphysical poet giving references from “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”
10. Discuss Donne’s treatment of religion in the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”

### **32.15 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 What type of poem is “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”?
- A) Epic poem
  - B) Sonnet
  - C) Ballad
  - D) Ode
- Q.2 In the poem, what is the speaker’s relationship with the person to whom he is addressing the valediction?
- A) Parent and child
  - B) Sibling
  - C) Spouse or lover
  - D) Friend
- Q.3 What does the title “Forbidding Mourning” suggest about the poem’s theme?
- A) It encourages open expression of grief.

- B) It advocates for stoic acceptance of loss.
  - C) It discourages the display of emotion.
  - D) It emphasizes the inevitability of mourning.
- Q.4 In the poem, what is the metaphor used to describe the separation between the speaker and his beloved?
- A) A ship sailing across the sea
  - B) A bird taking flight
  - C) A compass drawing a circle
  - D) A flower blooming in the garden
- Q.5 What celestial body is mentioned in the poem as a symbol of the constancy of the speaker's love?
- A) The sun
  - B) The moon
  - C) A star
  - D) A comet
- Q.6 According to the speaker, how should their parting be received by their beloved?
- A) With sadness and tears
  - B) With cheerful celebration
  - C) With indifference and detachment
  - D) With hope and anticipation
- Q.7 What emotion does the speaker use to compare the trembling of the legs of a compass?

- A) Fear
  - B) Desperation
  - C) Love
  - D) Anger
- Q.8 The speaker compares the connection between him and his beloved to the relationship between a compass and:
- A) A ruler
  - B) A pencil
  - C) A circle
  - D) A straight line
- Q.9 The poem's central theme revolves around:
- A) Fear of separation
  - B) Romantic betrayal
  - C) The inevitability of death
  - D) The strength of true love
- Q.10 The poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is often associated with the literary movement known as:
- A) Romanticism
  - B) Classicism
  - C) Metaphysical poetry
  - D) Victorian poetry

Answer : 1B ,2C, 3B, 4C, 5A, 6D, 7C, 8C, 9D, 10C



### 32.16 LET US SUM UP

In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” John Donne explores the theme of separation in a profound and metaphorical manner. The poem’s speaker addresses his beloved, asserting that their parting should not be accompanied by public displays of grief. He compares their love to a compass, with one leg fixed and the other exploring, symbolizing their spiritual connection despite physical distance. The poem emphasizes the strength and constancy of their love, urging the beloved to accept the separation with dignity and trust in their enduring bond.

### 32.17 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Five Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Marvell* by Joan Bennett.
2. *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism* by William R. Keats.
3. *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance and Twentieth Century Critics* by Rosemond Tuve

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## **LOVERS' INFINITENESS**

### **Unit Structure**

#### **33.1 Objectives**

#### **33.2 Introduction to the Poet**

##### **33.2.1 Themes**

##### **33.2.2 Motifs**

##### **33.2.3 Symbols**

#### **33.3 Introduction to the Poem**

#### **33.4 Detailed Consideration of the Poem**

##### **33.4.1. Critical Appreciation of the Poem**

##### **33.4.2. Theme of the Poem**

#### **33.5 Analysis of the Poem**

#### **33.6 Paraphrase and Explanation of the Poem**

##### **33.6.1. Stanza 1**

##### **33.6.2. Stanza 2**

##### **33.6.3. Stanza 3**

#### **33.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **33.8 Glossary**

### **33.9 Self-Assessment Questions**

### **33.10 Examination Oriented Question**

### **33.11 Multiple Choice Question**

### **33.12 Suggested Readings**

## **33.1 OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this lesson is to highlight the importance of John Donne as a metaphysical poet and to explore various Themes, Motifs and Symbol of his poem focusing specially on *Lovers' Infiniteness*

## **33.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE POET**

John Donne, whose poetic reputation languished before he was rediscovered in the early part of the twentieth century, is remembered today as the leading exponent of a style of verse known as “metaphysical poetry,” which flourished in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Other great metaphysical poets include Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, and George Herbert.) Metaphysical poetry typically employs unusual verse forms, complex figures of speech applied to elaborate and surprising metaphorical conceits, and learned themes discussed according to eccentric and unexpected chains of reasoning. Donne’s poetry exhibits each of these characteristics. His jarring, unusual meters; his proclivity for abstract puns and double entendres; his often bizarre metaphors (in one poem he compares love to a carnivorous fish; in another he pleads with God to make him pure by raping him); and his process of oblique reasoning are all characteristic traits of the metaphysicals, unified in Donne as in no other poet.

Donne is valuable not simply as a representative writer but also as a highly unique one. He was a man of contradictions: As a minister in the Anglican Church, Donne possessed a deep spirituality that informed his writing throughout his life; but as a man, Donne possessed a carnal lust for life, sensation, and experience. He is both a great religious poet and a great erotic poet, and perhaps no other writer (with

the possible exception of Herbert) strove as hard to unify and express such incongruous, mutually discordant passions. In his best poems, Donne mixes the discourses of the physical and the spiritual; over the course of his career, Donne gave sublime expression to both realms.

His conflicting proclivities often cause Donne to contradict himself. (For example, in one poem he writes, “Death be not proud, though some have called thee / Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.” Yet in another, he writes, “Death I recant, and say, unsaid by me / Whate’er hath slipped, that might diminish thee.”) However, his contradictions are representative of the powerful contrary forces at work in his poetry and in his soul, rather than of sloppy thinking or inconsistency. Donne, who lived a generation after Shakespeare, took advantage of his divided nature to become the greatest metaphysical poet of the seventeenth century; among the poets of inner conflict, he is one of the greatest of all time.

### **33.2.1 Themes**

#### **Lovers as Microcosms**

Donne incorporates the Renaissance notion of the human body as a microcosm into his love poetry. During the Renaissance, many people believed that the microcosmic human body mirrored the macrocosmic physical world. According to this belief, the intellect governs the body, much like a king or queen governs the land. Many of Donne’s poems—most notably “The Sun Rising” (1633), “The Good-Morrow” (1633), and “A Valediction: Of Weeping” (1633)—envision a lover or pair of lovers as being entire worlds unto themselves. But rather than use the analogy to imply that the whole world can be compressed into a small space, Donne uses it to show how lovers become so enraptured with each other that they believe they are the only beings in existence. The lovers are so in love that nothing else matters. For example, in “The Sun Rising,” the speaker concludes the poem by telling the sun to shine exclusively on himself and his beloved. By doing so, he says, the sun will be shining on the entire world.

#### **The Neoplatonic Conception of Love**

Donne draws on the Neoplatonic conception of physical love and religious

love as being two manifestations of the same impulse. In the *Symposium* (ca. third or fourth century B.C.E.), Plato describes physical love as the lowest rung of a ladder. According to the Platonic formulation, we are attracted first to a single beautiful person, then to beautiful people generally, then to beautiful minds, then to beautiful ideas, and, ultimately, to beauty itself, the highest rung of the ladder. Centuries later, Christian Neoplatonists adapted this idea such that the progression of love culminates in a love of God, or spiritual beauty. Naturally, Donne used his religious poetry to idealize the Christian love for God, but the Neoplatonic conception of love also appears in his love poetry, albeit slightly tweaked. For instance, in the bawdy “Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed” (1669), the speaker claims that his love for a naked woman surpasses pictorial representations of biblical scenes. Many love poems assert the superiority of the speakers’ love to quotidian, ordinary love by presenting the speakers’ love as a manifestation of purer, Neoplatonic feeling, which resembles the sentiment felt for the divine.

### **Religious Enlightenment as Sexual Ecstasy**

Throughout his poetry, Donne imagines religious enlightenment as a form of sexual ecstasy. He parallels the sense of fulfillment to be derived from religious worship to the pleasure derived from sexual activity—a shocking, revolutionary comparison, for his time. In Holy Sonnet 14 (1633), for example, the speaker asks God to rape him, thereby freeing the speaker from worldly concerns. Through the act of rape, paradoxically, the speaker will be rendered chaste. In Holy Sonnet 18 (1899), the speaker draws an analogy between entering the one true church and entering a woman during intercourse. Here, the speaker explains that Christ will be pleased if the speaker sleeps with Christ’s wife, who is “embraced and open to most men” (14). Although these poems seem profane, their religious fervor saves them from sacrilege or scandal. Filled with religious passion, people have the potential to be as pleurably sated as they are after sexual activity.

### **The Search for the One True Religion**

Donne’s speakers frequently wonder which religion to choose when confronted

with so many churches that claim to be the one true religion. In 1517, an Augustinian monk in Germany named Martin Luther set off a number of debates that eventually led to the founding of Protestantism, which, at the time, was considered to be a *reformed* version of Catholicism. England developed Anglicanism in 1534, another reformed version of Catholicism. This period was thus dubbed the Reformation. Because so many sects and churches developed from these religions, theologians and lay people began to wonder which religion was true or right. Written while Donne was abandoning Catholicism for Anglicanism, “Satire 3” reflects these concerns. Here, the speaker wonders how one might discover the right church when so many churches make the same claim. The speaker of Holy Sonnet 18 asks Christ to explain which bride, or church, belongs to Christ. Neither poem forthrightly proposes one church as representing the true religion, but nor does either poem reject outright the notion of one true church or religion.

### 33.2.2 Motifs

#### Spheres

Donne’s fascination with spheres rests partly on the perfection of these shapes and partly on the near-infinite associations that can be drawn from them. Like other metaphysical poets, Donne used conceits to extend analogies and to make thematic connections between otherwise dissimilar objects. For instance, in “The Good-Morrow,” the speaker, through brilliant metaphorical leaps, uses the motif of spheres to move from a description of the world to a description of globes to a description of his beloved’s eyes to a description of their perfect love. Rather than simply praise his beloved, the speaker compares her to a faultless shape, the sphere, which contains neither corners nor edges. The comparison to a sphere also emphasizes the way in which his beloved’s face has become the world, as far as the speaker is concerned. In “A Valediction: Of Weeping,” the speaker uses the spherical shape of tears to draw out associations with pregnancy, globes, the world, and the moon. As the speaker cries, each tear contains a miniature reflection of the beloved, yet another instance in which the sphere demonstrates the idealized personality and physicality of the person being addressed.

### **Discovery and Conquest**

Particularly in Donne's love poetry, voyages of discovery and conquest illustrate the mystery and magnificence of the speakers' love affairs. European explorers began arriving in the Americas in the fifteenth century, returning to England and the Continent with previously unimagined treasures and stories. By Donne's lifetime, colonies had been established in North and South America, and the riches that flowed back to England dramatically transformed English society. In "The Good-Morrow" and "The Sun Rising," the speakers express indifference toward recent voyages of discovery and conquest, preferring to seek adventure in bed with their beloveds. This comparison demonstrates the way in which the beloved's body and personality prove endlessly fascinating to a person falling in love. The speaker of "Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed" calls his beloved's body "my America! my new-found land" (27), thereby linking the conquest of exploration to the conquest of seduction. To convince his beloved to make love, he compares the sexual act to a voyage of discovery. The comparison also serves as the speaker's attempt to convince his beloved of both the naturalness and the inevitability of sex. Like the Americas, the speaker explains, she too will eventually be discovered and conquered.

### **Reflections**

Throughout his love poetry, Donne makes reference to the reflections that appear in eyes and tears. With this motif, Donne emphasizes the way in which beloveds and their perfect love might contain one another, forming complete, whole worlds. "A Valediction: Of Weeping" portrays the process of leave-taking occurring between the two lovers. As the speaker cries, he knows that the image of his beloved is reflected in his tears. And as the tear falls away, so too will the speaker move farther away from his beloved until they are separated at last. The reflections in their eyes indicate the strong bond between the lovers in "The Good-Morrow" and "The Ecstasy" (1633). The lovers in these poems look into one another's eyes and see themselves contained there, whole and perfect and present. The act of staring into each other's eyes leads to a profound mingling of souls in "The Ecstasy," as if reflections alone

provided the gateway into a person's innermost being.

### **33.2.3 Symbols**

#### **Angels**

Angels symbolize the almost-divine status attained by beloveds in Donne's love poetry. As divine messengers, angels mediate between God and humans, helping humans become closer to the divine. The speaker compares his beloved to an angel in "Elegy 19. To His Mistress Going to Bed." Here, the beloved, as well as his love for her, brings the speaker closer to God because with her, he attains paradise on earth. According to Ptolemaic astronomy, angels governed the spheres, which rotated around the earth, or the center of the universe. In "Air and Angels" (1633), the speaker draws on Ptolemaic concepts to compare his beloved to the aerial form assumed by angels when they appear to humans. Her love governs him, much as angels govern spheres. At the end of the poem, the speaker notes that a slight difference exists between the love a woman feels and the love a man feels, a difference comparable to that between ordinary air and the airy aerial form assumed by angels.

#### **The Compass**

Perhaps the most famous conceit in all of metaphysical poetry, the compass symbolizes the relationship between lovers: two separate but joined bodies. The symbol of the compass is another instance of Donne's using the language of voyage and conquest to describe relationships between and feelings of those in love. Compasses help sailors navigate the sea, and, metaphorically, they help lovers stay linked across physical distances or absences. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," the speaker compares his soul and the soul of his beloved to a so-called twin compass. Also known as a draftsman's compass, a twin compass has two legs, one that stays fixed and one that moves. In the poem, the speaker becomes the movable leg, while his beloved becomes the fixed leg. According to the poem, the jointure between them, and the steadiness of the beloved, allows the speaker to trace a perfect circle while he is apart from her. Although the speaker can only trace this circle when the two legs of the compass are separated, the compass can eventually be closed up, and the two legs pressed together again, after the circle



has been traced.

### **Blood**

Generally blood symbolizes life, and Donne uses blood to symbolize different experiences in life, from erotic passion to religious devotion. In “The Flea” (1633), a flea crawls over a pair of would-be lovers, biting and drawing blood from both. As the speaker imagines it, the blood of the pair has become intermingled, and thus the two should become sexually involved, since they are already married in the body of the flea. Throughout the *Holy Sonnets*, blood symbolizes passionate dedication to God and Christ. According to Christian belief, Christ lost blood on the cross and died so that humankind might be pardoned and saved. Begging for guidance, the speaker in Holy Sonnet 7 (1633) asks Christ to teach him to be penitent, such that he will be made worthy of Christ’s blood. Donne’s religious poetry also underscores the Christian relationship between violence, or bloodshed, and purity. For instance, the speaker of Holy Sonnet 9 (1633) pleads that Christ’s blood might wash away the memory of his sin and render him pure again.

### **33.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM**

Lover’s Infiniteness is one of the well known poems of John Donne. Grierson comments that the title is a strange one, in fact it should be Love’s Infiniteness. However, the title seems fit to the actual mood of the poem. The poet is capable of giving more and more love each day and the beloved must reciprocate. However, this would only be possible if the lover’s were themselves infinite.

At the beginning the poet describes all that he has done to gain his lady’s love. He says that he has done everything possible. He says that in spite of all his efforts if her love towards him still remains partial then he can never have it fully. This is because he has spent all his treasures of sighs, tears, oaths and letters with which he can win the lady. He says that it is possible that she might have once given him all her love but since then new love might have been created in her heart. Other men who had a great stock of tears, oaths and sighs might have out bidden him or might do so in future. If it is so, it is a cause of fresh anxiety for him. The poet asserts that the heart of the beloved was his and hence whatever grows there was his and this would be so in future also.

The poet further says that the condition mentioned above is, however, not correct. He declares that he is capable of giving more and more love each day. He declares that his lady love, too, ought to be able to give fresh rewards. Hence she cannot give her heart everyday. If she does so, it proves that she has never given her heart at all. This may seem paradoxical but the facts about love are always so. Even though the lover loses his heart yet his heart stays with him. The beloved saves her heart in losing it. He says that he will not change hearts, rather their two hearts will become one. The lovers will be infinite and they will ever be fresh.

### **33.4 DETAILED CONSIDERATION OF THE POEM**

#### **33.4.1. Critical Appreciation of the Poem**

##### **Metaphorical Inferences**

Like many of his romantic poems this one has an abrupt start too. It is unconventional in other ways too. The poet says that he does not have all of his lady's love and he thinks he is unlikely to ever have it. He has used up his treasure of tears, sighs and letters trying to win her over but his efforts have been unsuccessful. It's likely that someone else has been more fortunate than him. Throughout the poem the poet plays on the words "all" and "infiniteness". He suggests that love is infinite like God's love and it cannot be apportioned like material objects. The poet either gets all the love or none of it. The puns on the word "all" gives rise to paradox. Donne combines sacred and profane metaphors in his usual metaphysical style in this poem.

#### **33.4.2 Theme of the Poem**

The poet says that if he does not have all the love of his lady, then he is not likely to ever have it all. He has strived hard to gain her love but he has not got any more than what he had at the beginning. He has used his entire treasure of tears, entreaties and letters but he is no richer in love now than when the bargain for love began. Donne makes the whole thing sound like a business transaction rather than an emotional one. The poet is disturbed by the fact that, if the poet only has a part of his lady's love, someone else must have the rest of it. There was a time when

he had all of her love but there is more love in her heart and there are claimants for that new love. These are men who have a larger store of tears and entreaties than the poet. The poet stakes his claim for this new love too as it has sprouted in the heart which was his sometime ago. His lady had then vowed to give him her whole heart. In a way he would rather not have all her love because once one claims to have ‘all’ of a thing, one cannot have any more of it. But Donne’s heart grows every day and thirsts for more love, hence he expects his lady to show him more love every day. Her inability of showing or giving him more love makes him realize she never gave him her heart in the first place. When we love God, though we lose our heart to God we save it too. Instead of thinking in spiritual terms, the poet and his lady can marry and be one. That way they can be individuals and one at the same time.

### 33.5 ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

This poem, titled variously as “Lovers’ Infiniteness”, “Love’s Infiniteness,” or “Lovers Infinitenesse” depending on the edition, is a three-part argument in three stanzas. This type of poem, in which the lover is arguing with his beloved and trying to convince her of something (as in “The Flea”), is common with Donne. Appeals to reason, often combined with non-rational assertions, are common in Donne’s shorter poems (Dean 11).

With three eleven-line stanzas, the form of “Lovers’ Infiniteness” is unusual for Donne. The rhyming scheme is ababcdcdeee. Each stanza contains ten lines of four to five feet plus an eleventh line incorporating a different meaning of the word “all.” There is a sense of refrain in the end of each stanza (lines, 11, 22, and 33): “Deare, I shall never have Thee All./.../Grow there, deare, I should have it all./.../Be one, and one another’s All.” The refrain recalls the more musical of Donne’s poems, such as “Song” (“Sweetest love, I do not goe”).

The subject of the poem, at least on the surface, is the poet addressing his beloved, but it is important to remember that Donne, a metaphysical poet, often includes a deeper meaning in his discussions of love. The puns, metaphors, and allusions can point toward a more philosophical meaning.

Donne begins with “If yet I have not all thy love,/Deare, I shall never have it all.” The tone suggests gentleness, but the lover also seems jealous: he wants claim to “all” of this woman’s love. He has been her suitor; he has tried to “purchase” her with “Sighs, teares, and oathes, and letters.” He has not yet been wholly successful, and he seems to think that he is entitled to the lady’s love because of his efforts, rather than because he has fully persuaded her. Even if he has been mostly successful, he is creating the paradoxical metaphysical situation of giving herself entirely while remaining herself.

For the lover to demand this much from his lady is against poetic conventions, but Donne, unconventionally, is not asking for simply a marriage union. He also has abstract ideas about what love is, and, particularly, what is the totality of love. As is so often in Donne, he is aware of the paradox. He wants a totality of love, but he has also reached the limit of his capacity to feel (Stein 33); he wants more to look forward to. We will see in the third stanza how Donne resolves the paradox.

The theme of possession and, specifically, commercial transactions underscores the inadequacy the lover feels when he thinks of or discusses the “all” of love that he requires from the lady. He talks of “purchase” and what he has “spent” and is therefore “due.” He has spent his emotional capital, and he worries that new suitors have their own “stock” to cash in as they “outbid” him. In the third stanza, he imagines their growing love as a kind of deposit with interest.

Yet, he knows that love cannot literally be bought. While the poem may strike the reader as a straightforward courtship plea, the paradoxes show how inadequate stock phrases such as “winning love” or “giving one’s heart” are. The poet is humbled before the inadequacy of his understanding of love, and by his limitless desire for it. The comparison between love via finance and true love opens up a higher comparison, that between earthly love and divine love. Lines 29-30, “Love’s riddles are that though thy heart depart/It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it,” allude to Matthew 16, “Whosoever would save his life shall lose it.” The paradox of love remains on the theological level; somehow we must fully love the divine without giving up ourselves as the ones who love.

Despite love's paradoxes, the poem affirms its mysteries with reverence and celebration. If desire is infinite, it cannot be satisfied on a finite earth. "Thou canst not every day give me thy heart" because in a financial transaction, the property is lost once it is given away. How can the lover get her heart back in order to give it again? Only if he returns it back to her with interest, perhaps. Yet, the lover himself does not have an infinite love, and he has used up his stock of resources for wooing. He is human and thus lives within the rules of the finite world. No matter how idealized the love, the love is still human; it must have a limit.

The third stanza unravels the paradox with "But we will have a way more liberall." On the human level, he suggests marriage and sexual union. The physical and mystical union of himself and his lover helps them share together as "one, and one another's all." This is concrete and understandable and, at least in one aspect, satisfies the longing of the lover for infinity. They can merge into one another and yet leave room to grow together, increasing the area of the circle of their union.

On the spiritual level, beyond the roles of lover and beloved, Donne, a devout Protestant and the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, suggests a similar growth in the spiritual devotion of a person for the divine. Since we are creatures of God, we may participate in the love of God even if we do not understand it. Donne was fond of expounding in his sermons not only on the nature of God, but also the impossibility of understanding certain divine mysteries. It is a common tenet of faith that the divine is in key ways unknowable, being infinite and eternal (outside of time) and ineffable. Donne's poems, such as this one, even though they may not at first appear to be religious, often express such spiritual themes

### **33.6 PARAPHRASE AND EXPLANATION OF THE POEM**

#### **34.6.1. Stanza 1**

If yet I have not all thy love,  
Dear, I shall never have it all;  
I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,  
Nor can intreat one other tear to fall;

And all my treasure, which should purchase thee—  
Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters—I have spent.  
Yet no more can be due to me,  
Than at the bargain made was meant;  
If then thy gift of love were partial,  
That some to me, some should to others fall,  
Dear, I shall never have thee all.

(lines1-11): In the opening stanza Donne describes everything that he has done to win the love of his lady. He says that he has done all that was possible for him to win her heart. He has sighed, shed tears, taken oaths and written love letters. He has done all these actions to the maximum of his capacity. He calls these things treasures used to purchase the heart of the beloved. He says that he has used all his treasure and has nothing left. Therefore, he cannot do anything else. If, in spite of his best efforts, he has failed to win his lady's entire love, he can never buy it fully. He says that if his lady love has given him only her partial love and not entire love, he cannot have it all. If she has given her partial love to someone else, then he can never have her entire love.

### **33.6.2. Stanza 2**

Or if then thou gavest me all,  
All was but all, which thou hadst then;  
But if in thy heart, since, there be or shall  
New love created be, by other men,  
Which have their stocks entire, and can in tears,  
In sighs, in oaths, and letters, outbid me,  
This new love may beget new fears,

For this love was not vow'd by thee.  
And yet it was, thy gift being general;  
The ground, thy heart, is mine; whatever shall  
Grow there, dear, I should have it all.

Donne says that it is possible that his beloved may have given all her at that time. But, after that, other men, by their tears, sighs, oaths and letters might have created new love in her heart or might do so in future. They can do so because they have their entire stock of sighs, tears etc. The poet says that the newly created love is the cause of fresh anxiety for him because it was not there in the beginning. It was later produced in the heart of the lady love. He says that her heart was entirely his at the beginning. Using an image from agriculture he says that whatever grows there belongs to him and therefore he will have that. The poet uses an image from agriculture. He likens the heart to a ground. Once a person becomes an owner of a piece of land, he has all that grows in that land. In the same way the poet says that he will have all emotions of love that are produced in the heart of his beloved after once possessing her heart.

### **33.6.3. Stanza 3**

Yet I would not have all yet,  
He that hath all can have no more;  
And since my love doth every day admit  
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store;  
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,  
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it;  
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it;  
But we will have a way more liberal,

Than changing hearts, to join them; so we shall

Be one, and one another's all.

The poet says that he would not like to have the love of his beloved for that would stop further growth. He that has all cannot have any more. He says that his love grows to new heights everyday. He is capable of giving more and more love each day. As such, his lady love ought to be able to give him fresh rewards. He says to his beloved that she cannot give him her heart everyday and if she can do so that will mean she has in fact never given her heart to him. It is because if there is true love in her heart for him she must give rise to new love in her heart and therefore must always remain in possession of the heart. The paradoxical facts about love are that though we loose our heart in love yet the heart stays with us. In the case of true love, both the lovers must remain in possession of their hearts so that there may be new growth in the hearts. Thus true lovers save their hearts in losing them. The poet says that they will not change heart in love, rather they will join the two hearts into one.

### **33.7 LET US SUM UP**

In the poem "Lovers' Infiniteness," the author, John Donne, suggest that love is something that a person can only pursue but never truly achieve. Donne manipulates the shifts in attitude along with a set of imagery to emphasize the misconception of love. Since the beginning of history, there are man made works, telling tales of love and its power. Therefore people often believe that love is an incredible power that can truly satisfy man once acquired. However, Donne believes that love can never be fully acquired but only constantly approached. By applying this concept, the author uses the title "Lovers' Infiniteness" that correlates with the meaning of the poem yet is mysterious enough to keep the reader guessing. This indefinite title allows the reader to apply his own interpretation of the title. The author assumes that the common person is clouded with the bandwagon of society that the misconception of love would most likely be their interpretation of this poem. Donne intends to lead the reader on to think that "Lovers' Infiniteness" stands for the eternal love of a couple who regardless of life or death cannot be



separate. It is the predictability of such clichés that the author depends on to emphasize his point. The author begins with a melancholy tone, to draw upon the misconception. The first stanza portrays hopelessness and anxiety. The speaker states that regardless of all his “sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters – [he] have spent... no more can be due to [him].” (Donne 6-7) From this statement, the reader again assumes that the poem is about a man who is pursuing a woman’s love but is troubled because he cannot achieve it. The “sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters” symbolizes all of his efforts and because he still could not acquire “all [her of] love,” the author strongly emphasizes the hopelessness in the first stanza. In the second stanza, the speaker still preys on the misconception of love’s clichés by presenting anxiety. In this stanza the speaker creates a sense of sympathy by blaming himself for not being able to secure her heart. Even if “new love [is] created” between her and “other men,” the speaker accepts that it is because all of his sighs, oaths, and letters, outbid [him].” (Donne 16/17) The picture of a man losing his lover to someone who out matched him develops a feel of drama. However by the end of the second stanza, the speaker begins to insert his thought on love and its true meaning. The speaker reveals his position on the meaning of love to the reader. The misconception, anxiety, hopelessness, and sympathy are all lifted here. The reader can finalize that the poem is portraying a positive connotation by the third stanza when the speaker finally claims that “since [his] love doth every day admit new growth, [she] shouldst have new rewards in store.” His love for her grows each day without limits; there isn’t a way that he can love her enough. Therefore when he stated that he “shall never have it all,” the reader realizes that the speaker was trying to portray a connotation for love being a method of pursuit because “he that hath all can have no more;” The speaker believes that love can only be pursued. To him, a man cannot acquire love truly. Therefore love is infinite.

### 33.8 GLOSSARY

Word	Meaning
1. treasure:	wealth, valuable thing

2. bargain: an agreement between parties settling what each shall give and take.
3. partial: biased or prejudiced in favor of a person.
4. beget: to cause; produce as an effect.
5. liberal: favorable to progress or reform.

### **33.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

**Q1.** Can you distinguish the physical and spiritual love from the poetry of John Donne ? In which poems do you find preference of a specific love ?

**Q2.** How has Donne compared love to a piece of land?

### **33.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q1) How is Donne a Metaphysical poet?**

**Answer:** Metaphysical poetry is distinguished by several unique features; unique metaphors, large and cosmic themes, absence of narrative, and philosophical ideas. Donne invented or originated many of these features in his poetry, and he was a master of this type. Metaphysical poetry may be lyrical in its tone, but its driving force is not necessarily the emotion of the poet. The striving to understand the world and ideas through strange and sometimes strained comparisons, esoteric and philosophical abstract ideas, and paradoxes and heterogeneous parallels are the main differences between metaphysical and other types of poetry. These are common in Donne

**Q2) Choose a paradox in one of Donne's poems, and show how he puts two different ideas together to make a point or explain an idea.**

**Answer:** A good example of this would be "The Flea," in which Donne describes the combination of his and his lady-love's blood in the flea's body like the union of the two lovers in marriage. How Donne could convert the bite of a pest into a love poem shows his ability to create new thoughts by combining difficult ideas with each other in unusual ways.

**Q 3) How does Donne treat physical and spiritual love in his works?**

**Answer:** As a Metaphysical poet, Donne often uses physical love to evoke spiritual love. Indeed, this metaphysical conceit in much of the love poetry is not explicitly spelled out. To this end, Donne's poetry often suggests that the love the poet has for a particular beloved is greatly superior to others' loves. Loving someone is as much a religious experience as a physical one, and the best love transcends mere physicality. In this kind of love, the lovers share something of a higher order than that of more mundane lovers. In "Love's Infiniteness," for example, Donne begins with a traditional-sounding love poem, but by this third stanza he has transformed the love between himself and his beloved into an abstract ideal which can be possessed absolutely and completely. His later poetry (after he joined the ministry) maintains some of the carnal playfulness from earlier poetry, but transforms it into a celebration of union between soul and soul or soul and God.

**Q4.** How does Donne treat physical and spiritual love in his works?

**Q5.** What are the various symbols and images used in *Lover infiniteness* ?

**Q6.** How apt is the title of the poem *Lover infiniteness*?

**33.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. In "Lovers' Infiniteness," what does the speaker demand?
  - a) That God listen to his prayer
  - b) All of his lady's love
  - c) song
  - d) That he be heard
2. In "Lovers' Infiniteness," what does "infiniteness" most likely refer to?
  - a) The infiniteness of the speaker's love
  - b) The lover's heart
  - c) The infiniteness of God's love
  - d) The universe

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**THE CANONISATION, BETTER MY HEART, HYMN TO GOD****Unit Structure****34.1 Objective****34.2 The Canonisation****34.2.1 Summary****34.2.2 Themes****34.2.3 Critical Analysis****34.3 Batter My Heart, Three Person's God****34.4 "Hymn to God My God, In My Sickness"****34.5 Analysis****34.6 Self-Assessment Questions****34.7 Multiple Choice Questions****34.8 Suggested Reading****34.1 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the lesson is to make the learner well-versed with the glossary, the themes, the critical appreciation of the poem, Hymn to God My God, In My Sickness.

## **34.2 THE CANONISATION**

In “The Canonization,” Donne explores the theme of love and its spiritual and societal significance, using metaphysical conceits and intricate language to convey the depth and intensity of the speaker’s emotions.

### **34.2.1 Summary**

#### **Stanza 1:**

The speaker dismisses those who criticize his love, asserting that their criticisms are trivial and misdirected. He compares his love to the love of saints, implying that his love is as valid and worthy of praise as religious devotion.

#### **Stanza 2:**

The speaker emphasizes that his love and his beloved’s love are intertwined and beyond the understanding of others. He challenges anyone who thinks their love is profane or sinful, asserting that their love is pure and sacred.

#### **Stanza 3:**

The speaker acknowledges that he and his beloved are misunderstood by the world, but he asserts that their love elevates them above worldly concerns. He describes their love as a “dying life,” suggesting that it is both intense and everlasting.

#### **Stanza 4:**

The speaker rejects materialistic pursuits and the accumulation of wealth, claiming that his love is richer and more valuable than gold. He contrasts his love with “busy old fools” who waste their time on trivial matters.

#### **Stanza 5:**

The speaker dismisses the notion that lovers are isolated and self-absorbed. He asserts that their love is so strong that it transforms them into a single, harmonious entity, connected in both mind and soul.



**Stanza 6:**

The speaker addresses those who mock his love, inviting them to witness its intensity and sincerity. He claims that their love is so powerful that it has the ability to elevate them to a divine state.

**Stanza 7:**

The speaker uses the metaphor of alchemy to describe the transformation of his love. He implies that their love is a mystical process that turns ordinary experiences into valuable and rare elements.

**Stanza 8:**

The speaker challenges those who consider his love trivial, asserting that their love is like a pilgrimage or a spiritual journey. He claims that their love is both rare and precious, deserving of recognition.

**Stanza 9:**

The speaker rejects societal norms and expectations, asserting that he and his beloved are free from the constraints of convention. He encourages them to continue living in their unconventional and unique way.

**Stanza 10:**

The speaker concludes by challenging critics to see the truth of their love. He declares that their love has been “canonized” or made sacred, emphasizing its worth and importance.

**34.2.2 Themes**

The main themes of “The Canonization” by John Donne are rich and varied, contributing to the depth of the poem’s meaning. Here are the main themes and their significance:

**Love and Spirituality**

The theme of love is central to the poem, but it’s not just romantic love. The poem explores the idea of love as a spiritual and transformative force that elevates

the lovers to a divine realm. This theme is significant because it challenges conventional notions of love and presents it as a profound and sacred experience that transcends the physical.

### **Rejection of Materialism**

The speaker rejects material wealth and the pursuit of materialistic goals. This rejection signifies his belief in the superiority of love over worldly riches, suggesting that the intangible and emotional aspects of life hold greater value.

### **Society and Convention**

The poem challenges societal norms and expectations by portraying the lovers as unconventional and rejecting the opinions of those who mock them. This theme highlights the idea that true love operates beyond societal constraints and norms.

### **Criticism and Defiance**

The speaker addresses critics who misunderstand and trivialize their love. He expresses defiance against their judgment, asserting the worthiness and sanctity of their relationship. This theme is significant as it reinforces the idea that love is a personal and profound experience that cannot be easily judged or dismissed.

### **Transformative Power**

The theme of transformation is woven throughout the poem. The speaker compares love to alchemy, suggesting that their love has the power to transform ordinary experiences into extraordinary and valuable ones. This theme underscores the idea that love can change perspectives and elevate the human experience.

### **Union and Identity**

The concept of union is important in the poem, as the lovers are depicted as being so deeply connected that they are essentially one entity. This theme explores the idea of shared identity and unity in love.

### **Spiritual Aspects of Love**

The poem blurs the lines between romantic love and spiritual devotion. This

theme emphasizes the sacredness and purity of their love, presenting it as a form of worship or religious experience.

The significance of these themes lies in Donne's skillful use of metaphysical conceits and complex language to explore the depths of human emotions and relationships. The themes allow readers to reflect on the nature of love, its various dimensions, and its capacity to transcend societal norms and conventions. Through these themes, Donne challenges readers to contemplate the intricate connections between the physical and the spiritual aspects of love.

### **34.2.3 Critical Analysis**

The word 'Canonization' means the act or process of changing an ordinary religious person into a saint in Catholic Christian religion. This title suggests that the poet and his beloved will become 'saints of love' in the future: and they will be regarded as saints of true love in the whole world in the future.

The poem is written again in a defiant and frustrating tone. He starts the poem aggressively with imperative sentence, "For God's sake hold your tongue and let us live." The poem is written in first person plural pronoun. But the speaker remains only the lover; beloved hardly utters a word in the whole poem. The poem is written in monologue form. The first stanza makes the tempo and it seems that the whole poem needs to be finished in one breathe. The poem is perfect example of metaphysical poetry, he makes his arguments hyperbolically and that his sighs have not drowned any ship, nor has his tears flooded any ground, why should people not allow them to love. The stanza is similar to the stanza from the poem 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,' the words like tears, flood, sighs and tempest are repeated in both the stanzas.

The metaphysical conceits are again used freely by Donne in this poem, he compares himself and his beloved with fly and says that they are parasites to, for they are made so by their love," Call her one, me another fly,/ We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,/ And we in us find the eagle and the dove." This stanza makes contrasting imagery of peace and violence, Dove is an image of peace, where as fly and eagle represent the violent imagery. He compares his love with legends and says even if it be not fit for canonization; it will be fit for the verse, like those of Romeo and Juliet. The poet concludes the poem on a high note

with a lot of optimism and says after their death their love will be revered and they will be invoked and everybody will love like them.

Fusion of emotion and intellect is another important feature of the poem. The fusion is observed in the comparison of the lovers to the mysterious phoenix and the divine saints. The speaker assumes that like the phoenix, the lovers would 'die and rise at the same time' and prove 'mysterious by their love'. Reference to this mythical being well sums up Donne's theory of sexual metaphysics; a real and complete relation between a man and a woman fuses their soul into one whole. The poet is both sensuous and realistic in his treatment of love. The romantic affair and the moral status of the worldly lovers are compared to the ascetic life of unworldly saints. Thus, 'canonization' is in many ways a typical metaphysical poem where the complexity of substance is expressed with simplicity of expression. The general argument and its development are clear like its dramatic situations. The allusions are sometimes too forced, but that is a part of such poetry.

The poem is written in five stanzas, metered in iambic lines ranging from trimeter to pentameter; in each of the nine-line stanzas, the first, third, fourth, and seventh lines are in pentameter, the second, fifth, sixth, and eighth in tetrameter, and the ninth in trimeter. (The stress pattern in each stanza is 545544543.) The rhyme scheme in each stanza is ABBACCCDD. The poem was used by Cleanth Brooks in his "Well wrought Urn: The Study of Poetry" as an example to show the readers how the poems be studied from formalistic point of view.

### **34.3 BATTER MY HEART, THREE PERSON'D GOD**

Introduction: his poem is part of John Donne's Holy Sonnets sequence, which was probably written during the years 1609-1611 and meditates on God, death, divine love, and faith. "Holy Sonnet 14" comes later in the series and depicts a speaker's personal crisis of faith. The poem also boldly compares God's divine love to a rough, erotic seduction. This intimate and unconventional portrayal of a speaker's longing for faith has made the poem one of Donne's most famous.

**Summary and Analysis:** The speaker asks the “three-personed God” to “batter” his heart, for as yet God only knocks politely, breathes, shines, and seeks to mend. The speaker says that to rise and stand, he needs God to overthrow him and bend his force to break, blow, and burn him, and to make him new. Like a town that has been captured by the enemy, which seeks unsuccessfully to admit the army of its allies and friends, the speaker works to admit God into his heart, but Reason, like God’s viceroy, has been captured by the enemy and proves “weak or untrue.” Yet the speaker says that he loves God dearly and wants to be loved in return, but he is like a maiden who is betrothed to God’s enemy. The speaker asks God to “divorce, untie, or break that knot again,” to take him prisoner; for until he is God’s prisoner, he says, he will never be free, and he will never be chaste until God ravishes him.

### **Critical Analysis**

This poem is an appeal to God, pleading with Him not for mercy or clemency or benevolent aid but for a violent, almost brutal overmastering; thus, it implores God to perform actions that would usually be considered extremely sinful—from battering the speaker to actually raping him, which, he says in the final line, is the only way he will ever be chaste. The poem’s metaphors (the speaker’s heart as a captured town, the speaker as a maiden betrothed to God’s enemy) work with its extraordinary series of violent and powerful verbs (batter, o’erthrow, bend, break, blow, burn, divorce, untie, break, take, imprison, enthrall, ravish) to create the image of God as an overwhelming, violent conqueror. The bizarre nature of the speaker’s plea finds its apotheosis in the paradoxical final couplet, in which the speaker claims that only if God takes him prisoner can he be free, and only if God ravishes him can he be chaste.

As is amply illustrated by the contrast between Donne’s religious lyrics and his metaphysical love poems, Donne is a poet deeply divided between religious spirituality and a kind of carnal lust for life. Many of his best poems, including “Batter my heart, three-personed God,” mix the discourse of the spiritual and the physical or of the holy and the secular. In this case, the speaker achieves that mix by claiming that he can only overcome sin and achieve spiritual purity if he is forced by God in the most physical, violent, and carnal terms imaginable

### 34.4 HYMN TO GOD MY GOD, IN MY SICKNESS

#### GLOSSARY

1. **Title**      **in my sickness** : The poem was written probably in his great sickness in December 1623 to comfort himself.
2.              **holy room** : Heaven. According to Christians, angels and saints play on their harps and sing songs in Heaven.
3.              **Thy Music** : The poet will join the choir of saints singing harmoniously around the throne of God. It also means that the poet will be made into music itself.
4.              **I tune the instrument** : instrument is the soul.

In order to prepare for eternal life in Heaven after death, the poet must tune his soul so that its music is in accord with the serene and joyous music in Heaven. This hymn is his attempt to compose his mind to accept suffering and death to gain resurrection into eternal life.

4.              **Cosmographers** : geographers.
5.              **map** : In ancient philosophy it was believed that every man was a microcosm (i.e., little world). Donne changes the traditional metaphor of man as microcosm (the little world) to man as a map of the world. As he lies in the sickbed, he is the map of the world.
6.              **(9-10) South-west discovery** : This refers to the Straits of Magellan – the narrow water channel connecting Atlantic Ocean with Pacific Ocean between Tierra del Fuego and Chile in South America. As Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521), the Portuguese navigator, who was the first one to circumnavigate the world, made a South-west journey through the Straits of Magellan (and later died in Philippines), so Donne will make his last journey "through the straits of fever" (per fretum febris). South suggests heat and west (where the sun sets) suggest death;

so, Donne's "South-west discovery" is that he proceeds westward (dies) by going south (by fever). The word "straits" has two meanings: (i) a water channel connecting two seas and (ii) difficulties. East (where the sun rises) suggest life, rebirth.

7. **(13-14) West and East ...** are one. Donne says elsewhere :  
"if a flat Map be but pasted upon a round Globe, the farthest East and the farthest west meet, and are all one."
8. **(16-17) Pacific Sea** suggests heavenly peace; eastern riches stand for heaven; and Jerusalem stands, as always, for the Heavenly City.
9. **(18) Anyan, Magellan, Gibraltar :** All these are straits. Anyan is Bering Straits; Magellan, as explained earlier, is Magellan Straits; and Gibraltar is the Strait of Gibraltar. The straits at places are very narrow (e.g., the narrowest breadth of the Strait of Gibraltar is 9 meters); so navigation in straits is very dangerous. Donne develops the idea that the riches of the world (which typify the Bliss of Heaven) can be reached only through straits i.e., through difficulties.
10. **(21) Paradise :** The original home of Adam and Eve.  
**Calvary :** The hill outside the ancient city of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified.
11. **(22) Adam's tree :** The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Paradise. Adam committed Sin by disobeying God and eating the fruit from the Forbidden tree. Jesus Christ, by taking the punishment for this Sin upon himself, made eternal life for man possible.
12. **(23) both Adams :** Adam and Christ; the sinner and the receiver of punishment for Sin respectively.
13. **(24) the first Adam's sweat :** suffering and death that were

the consequences of Adam's sin.

14. **(25) the last Adam's blood :** Christ's sacrifice which promised resurrection of the dead. All those who wash themselves in Christ's blood, that is, have faith in Christ, will be absolved of their Sin.
15. **(26) in his purple wrapped :** At crucifixion Christ was dressed in purple robes and was crowned with a crown of thorns. The triumphant Christ wore royal robes and heavenly crown when he came to Heaven.

### 34.5 ANALYSIS

"Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness" is Donne's splendid achievement in religious poetry. Conceived as a deathbed meditation on human suffering, physical death and resurrection in heaven, the poet is in perfect control of his emotion. He gains assurance that his sufferings on the sickbed and death will lead to eternal life in heaven. He uses splendid conceits to achieve this comfort.

In the first stanza, Heaven, man's goal after death, is pictured as a place with angels and saints singing and playing on their harps around the throne of God, the King of Kings. Donne evolves a concrete metaphor of himself on his deathbed as a court musician who is tuning up his instrument at the door of the King's Court in preparation for entering His Court to take his place in the choir of saints. He will be made not only one of the musicians who produce the harmonious music of heaven, but also part of the music itself. For this, he must tune his "instrument" ( i.e. soul) to remove all that will create discord in the serene and joyous music of the "choir of saints." He must enter Heaven with his soul free of all earthly blemishes.

After the statement of the personal problem, the argument begins with stanza 2. Donne introduces the metaphor of geographical exploration and elaborates through stanzas 3 and 4. The poet's physicians, who study



him with great concern may be thought of as geographers and he, lying on the sickbed, may be thought of as a map of the world. The physicians as geographers diagnose his case as South-west discovery. For the geographers, the "South-west discovery" refers to the discovery of the South-west Passage called the Straits of Magellan. As Ferdinand Magellan passed through the stormy straits which he discovered to die in the West, in the Philippines, so Donne himself is about to pass through the straits ( i.e. difficulties, sufferings) of fever to his own "West" (death). In case of Donne on his deathbed the South-west discovery means death (West) through high temperature (South).

The third stanza carries forward the metaphor of exploration. Just as the geographers looking at Magellan's passage on the map think only of Magellan's death, similarly, Donne's physicians only see that he will die of fever and feel sad. But Donne himself experiences joy and excitement of an actual explorer who has at last found the long-sought westward passage to the East. He does not regret that the currents in the "straits" will allow no one to return from his passage. Not afraid of the hardships, he goes forward into the West which now opens into the East. West and East which seem far removed from each other on a flat map are really very close on a globe; similarly death (his West) and resurrection in Heaven (his East) are very close to each other. Death leads to rebirth or resurrection in Heaven.

Medieval geographers tried to locate the Earthly Paradise which was considered a type of Heaven. In stanza 4, Donne develops the idea that bliss on earth, i.e., the riches of the world, can be reached only through straits. He identifies particular geographical strait with each of the three continents – Europe, Asia, Africa – which constituted the whole world for the medieval geographers and then each continent is identified with one locality of Earthly Paradise with its heavenly bliss. Peace and bliss on earth, typical of Heaven, can be reached through suffering ("straits").

In the last two stanzas, he uses theological imagery to present this argument. Suffering and death are punishment for Adam's Sin. After undergoing them, Donne

may expect salvation through Christ's saving Grace. He makes use of the myth that the Cross was erected on the original site of the Garden of Eden. For Donne, this means that paradise with Adam's tree, which brought death, and Calvary with Jesus Christ's Cross, which brought resurrection and eternal life are related. The two Adams – the Adam who brought suffering and death and Adam who brought resurrection meet in Donne. As the first Adam's sweat (suffering and death) surrounds Donne's face (his mortal body), so the last Adam's blood (sacrifice and resurrection) may embrace Donne's immortal soul.

In the final stanza, the emphasis is on the parallel between Donne's experience on one hand, and Christ's crucifixion on the other. He prays that his soul ("me") be received by God in Heaven. At the time of crucifixion Christ dressed in a purple robe was offered a "crown of thorns." In Heaven, he was offered the Heavenly crown after he triumphed over the mortal sufferings. Donne equates his own mortal sufferings with Christ's sufferings on the Cross. Wrapped in the "purple" (red) of Christ's redeeming blood and having borne his sufferings on his sickbed, he prays that his soul ("me") be received in Heaven with the crown of resurrection and eternal life. In the last three lines, Donne describes the poem as a sermon on the word of God, which he used to preach to others to save their souls. This is sermon in the form of a poem where he addresses to himself for the purpose of confirming his religious faith. Like a sermon, the poem closes with a Biblical text ("my text") in the end : "Therefore that He may raise, the Lord throws down." The Biblical text which he has chosen for this poem-sermon summarizes the message of the poem. God requires man to experience suffering and death in order that He may justly grant man immortality. Suffering and death are man's atonement for the Original Sin.

#### **34.6 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Donne as a Metaphysical poet.
2. Comment upon Donne's use of conceit, imagery, and diction

with special reference to “A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning.”

3. Trace the development of thought in “The Relic”.
4. Analyse recurring religious themes in Donne’s Poetry.

### **34.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 In “The Canonization,” the speaker compares his love to the :
- A) Stars in the sky
  - B) Sun and moon
  - C) Saints and martyrs
  - D) Flowers in a garden
- Q.2 What is the central metaphor used in “Batter my heart, three-person’d God”?
- A) A stormy sea
  - B) A prison break
  - C) A wounded heart
  - D) A burning fire
- Q.3 In “Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness,” what does the speaker emphasize as he approaches death?
- A) His regret for missed opportunities
  - B) His unwavering faith in God’s love
  - C) His anger at the injustice of life
  - D) His sorrow for leaving loved ones behind
- Q.4 In “The Canonization,” what does the speaker mock as the worldly pursuits of critics?

- A) Scientific discoveries
  - B) Political power
  - C) Romantic relationships
  - D) Literary fame
- Q.5 In “Batter my heart, three-person’d God,” the speaker desires God to:
- A) Strengthen his resolve
  - B) Renew his faith
  - C) Break, burn, and rebuild him
  - D) Shower him with blessings
- Q.6 In “Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness,” what does the speaker express a desire for when facing death?
- A) A grand funeral procession
  - B) Eternal salvation
  - C) Immortality through fame
  - D) A peaceful departure
- Q.7 What is the speaker’s attitude toward earthly love in “The Canonization”?
- A) He glorifies and idealizes it.
  - B) He rejects and condemns it.
  - C) He expresses nostalgia for it.
  - D) He dismisses it as trivial.
- Q.8 In “Batter my heart, three-person’d God,” the speaker uses violent imagery to convey his need for:
- A) Physical healing
  - B) Spiritual transformation

C) Material wealth

D) Romantic love

Q.9 In “Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness,” what does the speaker express regarding his relationship with God?

A) He questions God’s existence.

B) He blames God for his suffering.

C) He seeks forgiveness for his sins.

D) He acknowledges God’s supremacy and mercy.

Q.10 What does the speaker ask of God in “The Canonization”?

A) To make him wealthy

B) To reunite him with his beloved

C) To grant him eternal life

D) To bless his creative endeavors

Answer : 1C, 2B, 3B, 4D, 5C, 6B, 7A, 8B, 9D, 10B

### 34.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. John Donne : *Life, Mind and Art* - John Carey

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**COURSE CODE:ENG-122**

**POETRY-1**

**LESSON No. 35**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**ALEXANDER POPE**

**UNIT - VI**

### **THE RAPE OF THE LOCK**

#### **Unit Structure**

#### **35.1 Objectives**

#### **35.2 The English Augustan Age or The Age Of Pope**

#### **35.3 External Changes that took place in the new age**

#### **35.4 His Life**

#### **35.5 His Works : Influence and Significance in Literature**

#### **35.6 Examination Oriented Questions**

#### **35.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **35.8 Suggested Reading**

#### **35.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to make the learner explore the development of Augustan age and acquaint him / her with influence and significance in literature.

#### **35.2 THE ENGLISH AUGUSTAN AGE OR THE AGE OF POPE**

About the middle of the seventeenth century, a change began to come over the spirit of English literature. This change is due to no mere fluctuation in

literary fashion, but is deeply rooted in the life of the time. The age of the Renaissance was an age of spiritual and material expansion. Englishmen realised for the first time their solidarity as a nation ; and, released suddenly from continental struggles, especially from the dread of Spanish supremacy, they found an outlet for their excited emotions in drama and song. Loyalty to Elizabeth became an article of faith; pride and delight in their country's past as religious creed. But the emotional fervour was too high-pitched to last. Already in the early years of the seventeenth century, its splendid exuberance had degenerated into extravagance and violence. The lofty idealism that had steadied the venturesome bark of Elizabethan poesy was growing attenuated, and the great minds in the closing years of the age, like Bacon and Milton, reflect in their writings the dawn of fresh interests. In their works, the purification of civic and political life emerges more and into the forefront.

Increasingly, during the seventeenth century, men's thoughts were directed to problems of civic and national life. The wild speculative interest and imaginative fervour of the Renaissance gave place to a partial application of these ideals to actual existence; and naturally enough literature itself became involved with the problems of practical politics. One may speak therefore, of three features in the literature of the new age.

Firstly, the triumph of the classical ideal was, after all, a natural result of the Renaissance. Secondly, the Romantic spirit had been aroused among other things by a study of Greek and Roman Classics. It was the substance that excited men at first—when the early exhilaration had worn off, the methods of the old writers attracted more and more attention. This classicism was fostered and encouraged by the political needs of the age; but even then the change might have been more gradual, less decisive, had it not been for the fact that a brilliant set of writers had arisen in France, actuated by classical methods, who excited a profound influence upon the literature of Europe. The influence, upon England was especially marked for Court reasons. Much of Charles' exile had been spent in France; he had been attracted towards its literature, and did his best to enforce the ideals he saw there, actuating English literature. Thirdly, psychologically, the new

spirit involved the substitution of the critical for the imaginative spirit. Such a change is inevitable when literature is made the vehicle of attacking the political life of the day. The creative imagination moves on the plane of primal human qualities; it is concerned with the interpretation of human nature, and although passing movements may give “a local habitation and a name” to some of its diaramic pictures, the main object is not to criticize the life of the day, but to interpret it.

The new classical spirit, however, is above all critical and analytic, not creative and sympathetic; it brings the intellect rather than the poetic imagination into play. And the merits of the new school are to be found in its intellectual force and actuality; just as its demerits lie in its lack of deep imagination and tendency to deal with manners and superficialities, rather than with elemental things and the larger issues of life. Obviously then, this change was better adapted for a kind of literature which aimed especially at clearness, conciseness, and concentrated force. The less attractive aspect of this ideal is seen in the verse of the day; the finer and more valuable aspects in its prose.

The object of the leading writers of the time was to avoid extravagance and emotionalism. This, in many cases, they did so successfully as to suppress altogether the emotional and basic qualities of great poetry, though their method found congenial expression in the satire. Poetry, starved of emotional sustenance, had to fall back on epigram, but the “good sense” ideal formulated in 1673 by Boileau was an admirable one for prose that had suffered from Romantic extravagances.

Summing up, therefore, different aspects of change in literature, we may say: There was (1) the academic aspect — the substitution of classicism for Romanticism; (2) the political aspect, due (a) to the general influence of France at this time, and (b) the particular influence through the medium of the king and his court; (3) the psychological aspect that underlay these, signifying surely more than a change of fashion, a change of attitude. While influencing all of them was the general drift of the age, towards matters of civil and national interest.



### 35.3 EXTERNAL CHANGES THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE NEW AGE

The horrors of the Plague had darkened the careless gaiety of Restoration London, and the Great Fire that led to the transformation of its architecture are reflected in the literature of the time. The Plague was no new scourge. From medieval times, it had exacted its grim toll ever and anon. The Black Death of 1349 and the Sweating Sickness of 1507, were not easily forgotten. Worst of all was the Plague that broke out first in Tudor times, with repeated visits during the seventeenth century.

The characteristics of an age are more faithfully reflected in its imaginative literature than in its formal histories and chronicles. Pope reflects the hard brilliance, somewhat facile optimism of his generation in much the same way as Tennyson mirrors in his work the religious perplexities and social ideals of the Victorian England; and Addison is called the Thackeray of his age, in his pictures of the tastes, the fashions, and the follies of the “Town”.

The poet, the dramatist of the preceding ages depended for his livelihood upon a patron. Patronage still existed and Pope made his fortune by what has been called “a kind of joint stock patronage,” where the aristocratic patron found it convenient to induce his friend to subscribe towards the maintenance of the poet. But the older system was dying out. At first, the poet or the pamphleteer attached himself to some influential Minister, using his pen on behalf of this gentleman’s cause. Afterwards, when the Minister found he could get his work done more cheaply than by hiring men of taste, the literary man was thrown upon the suffrages of a public then rising into existence.

The coffee-house and later the clubs were centres around which radiated the thoughtful and intelligent. The politicians, lawyers, clergymen, literary men, met at these places and discussed the problems of the hour. Thus, the author and the public were forced into intimate proximity. The coffee-houses were the lineal descendants of the barbers’ shops (monastic or lay), the university dining and debating halls, and the taverns of the Middle Ages. Coffee-houses now multiplied rapidly and soon each house had its distinctive clientele – lawyers favouring one politician to another, and so forth. The

famous “Wills” in Covent Garden was patronised by Pepys and Dryden. This place was termed the “Coffee-house.” It was a home for scandal and lampoons. Dryden was an agreeable, good-natured, somewhat, self-opinionated man. He enjoyed a great reputation as a conversationalist, in much the same way as did Addison who succeeded him.

Therefore, the coffee-house of the time was, as we see, the school of wit and dialectic. What the tavern had been to the sixteenth century, the coffee-house was to the seventeenth and eighteenth. It reached the height of its popularity in the eighteenth, but before its close coffee-house had passed into practical oblivion.

### ALEXANDER POPE

#### 35.4 HIS LIFE

Alexander Pope was born on May 21, 1688 in London in a Roman Catholic family. His father was a prosperous tradesman. He, himself, was a sickly and delicate child. Sickly in body and lonely in spirit, he found his only delight in books. In those days, Roman Catholicism was a great handicap and the child was, therefore, denied the privilege of education at a first-class school. With a studious bent of mind, he made up for his imperfect schooling by reading at home. His religion also made it impossible for him to enter any of the professions, and he could not take up any business because he was not only weak in health but actually deformed. His own preference for literature, and the fact that his father was financially independent, and had retired to a small estate on the borders of Windsor forest, made it possible for him to follow his own inclinations. He displayed remarkable precocity in verse-writing, as many thousands of lines had been written by him before he was sixteen.

When he was fourteen, a translation of Statius was made by him, which was followed two or three years later by the *Pastorals*, which was published around 1709. He later on came in close association with poets like Walsh, Gray, Addison and Swift. He became a member of the Scribblers’ Literary Club formed under the presidentship of Swift. It was soon after

this that Voltaire called him “The best poet of England and, at present, of all the world.” Thus, by the time Pope was twenty-four, he had come to be regarded as the leading poet of his time.

In appearance, Pope was singularly unimpressive. He had a body of miserable weakness. He had inherited headaches from his mother and a crooked figure from his father. By middle age, his physical weakness was so constant that he could not dress without help. His chronic ill-health made him complain of his life as a “long disease.”

Pope died in 1774 and was buried at Twickenham. He deserved to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but being a catholic, his religion prevented him from the honour which was certainly his due.

### **35.5 HIS WORKS : INFLUENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN LITERATURE**

Three poems in which Pope is emphatically the spokesman of his age are *The Rape of the Lock*, picturing its frivolities; *The Dunciad*, unveiling its squalor; *The Essay on Man*, echoing its philosophy. His own attitude towards literature is nicely expressed in the *Essay on Criticism*, where the merits and limitations of the eighteenth-century school of poetry are clearly exhibited. What they admire, what they dislike, is patent to the most casual reader. The neatness of his rapier wit is happily shown in the passing allusion to the churlish old critic John Dennis (1657-1734), author of a tragedy, *Appius and Virginia* :

*But Appius reddens at each word you speak.*

Of his work, as a whole, it may be said that he was a master of literary mosaic. There is nothing of the easy breadth and vigour of Dryden in his satirical verse; on the other hand, he excelled his predecessor in exquisite finish and in detailed touches. His poems have no solidarity or homogeneity, with the exception, perhaps, of *The Rape of the Lock*. Rather they may be likened to polished fragments, cunningly fitted in, to form a whole and remarkable workmanship, rather than integral beauty.

Using the Drydenian couplet, he imparted to it a gossamerlike delicacy

of touch that more than compensated for the lack of strength. If at times the glitter and sparkle fade into dullness, the occasions are comparatively rare, and the amazing thing is that he sustained his mercurial smartness and aptness for so long. There are few graces of style beyond crispness and lightness. The beauties, though abundant, are of the obvious kind. No one can dress up a commonplace sentiment or humdrum thought in finer clothes than he; but there is no hint in his work of high imagination, of subtle fancy, no sense of mystery, no romance, no depth of feeling, no greatness of impulse. In the era that followed, the deficiencies of Pope in this respect were so glaring as to call down on him undeserved contempt. With Jane Austen, we must grant him the “two inches of ivory,” and within these limitations there is no more skillful artist. If he is not to be reckoned with the master-spirits of English Literature, he was at any rate, an incomparable craftsman and a delightful wit.

### **35.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Give an assessment of English Augustan Age.
2. Write a note on the biography of the author Alexander Pope.

### **35.7 LET US SUM UP**

Alexander Pope (1688–1744) was an influential English poet, satirist, and critic of the 18th century. Born in London, he faced lifelong health challenges due to a rare illness that stunted his growth. Despite his physical limitations, Pope became one of the leading literary figures of his time. He is best known for his satirical works, including *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*, which targeted social follies and literary mediocrity. His translation of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* earned him acclaim, showcasing his mastery of heroic couplets. Pope’s wit, keen observation, and skillful use of form left a lasting impact on English literature.

### **35.8 SUGGESTED READING**

1. *The Age of Pope* - John Dennis

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**BACKGROUND TO THE POEM****Unit Structure****36.1 Objectives****36.2 Introduction****36.3 Background to the Poem****36.4 Critical Summary of the Poem****36.4.1 Canto I****36.4.2 Canto II****36.4.3 Canto III****36.4.4 Canto IV****36.4.5 Canto V****36.5 Examination Oriented Questions****36.6 Multiple Choice Questions****36.7 Let Us Sum Up****36.8 Suggested Readings****36.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to discuss the background of the poem and also to give a critical appreciation of the Poem.

## 36.2 INTRODUCTION

The Rape of the Lock is a mock-epic narrative poem written by Alexander Pope.

## 36.3 BACKGROUND TO THE POEM

The poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, is a masterpiece of its kind. It was written to patch up a quarrel occasioned by a little piece of gallantry of Lord Petre who, in a pleasure party, found means to cut off a favourite lock of Arabella Fermor. A mutual friend, Mr. Caryll, laid the matter before Pope so that his wit might laugh away the clouds of unpleasant feeling that gathered between the two families of Fermor and Lord Petre. It was in response to Mr. Caryll's suggestion that Pope composed the poem. He wrote a letter to Mrs. Arabella Fermor, in which he made his noble intentions clear to her, as to why he had written the poem, the contents of his letter written to her are as follows ;

MADAM,

*It will be in vain to deny that I have some regard for this piece, since I dedicate it to you. Yet you may bear me witness, it was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humour enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the air of a Secret, it soon found its way into the world. An imperfect copy having been offer'd to a Bookseller, you had the good-nature for my sake to consent to the publication of one more correct : This I was forced to, before I had expected half my design, for the Machinery was entirely wanting to complete it.*

*The Machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the Critics, to signify that part which the Deities, Angels, or Demons are made to act in a Poem : For the ancient Poets are in one respect like many modern Ladies : Let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These*

*machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian doctrine of Spirits.*

*I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard words before a Lady; but tis so much the concern of a Poet to have his words understood, and particularly by your Sex, that you must give me leave to explain two or three difficult terms.*

*The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book call'd Le Comte de Gabalis, which both in its title and size is so like a Novel, that many of the Fair Sex have read it for once by mistake. According to these Gentlemen, the four Elements are inhabited by Spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs and Salamanders. The Gnomes or Demons of Earth delight in mischief : but the Sylphs, whose habitation is in the Air, are the best-condition'd creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle Spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true Adepts, an inviolate preservation of Chastity.*

*As to the following Cantos, all the passages of them are as fabulous, as the Vision at the beginning, or the Transformation at the end; (except the loss of your Hair, which I always mention with reverence). The Human persons are as fictitious as the Airy ones; and the Character of Belinda, as it is now manag'd, resembles you in nothing but in Beauty.*

*If this poem had as many Graces as there are in your Person, or in your Mind, yet I could never hope it should pass through the world half so uncensur'd as you have done. But let its fortune be what it will, mine is happy enough, to have given me this occasion of assuring you that I am, with the truest esteem, MADAM,*

*Your most obedient, humble servant,*

*A. POPE.*

The poem has justly been regarded as the finest example of witty mock-epic ever written. There is in it, a deft combination of the serious and the non-serious. As an expression of the artificial life of the age—of its card-playing, parties, toilets, lap-dogs, tea-drinking, snuff-taking, and idle—vanities, the poem reflects the boundless ambition of the Elizabethans. It is not only a satire on society; it is also a witty parody of the heroic style in poetry.

### **36.4 CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE POEM**

*The Rape of the Lock* is a poem, ridiculing the fashionable world of Pope's day. Its immediate aim was to reconcile the two families of the author's acquaintance into making up a quarrel over a somewhat trivial incident. This quarrel is presented in terms of the great epic wars such as those between the Greeks and the Trojans, and between God and Satan. The poem has been admired for the brilliance of its conception and the consistency of its execution. It is a sound judgement to say that the effect of the poem lies in the exquisite adjustment between the epic and mundane planes on which it moves.

#### **36.4.1 Canto I :**

In the very opening lines, we have a statement of the theme and an invocation to the Muse of poetry. This follows the epic manner of the *Iliad*. The custom of beginning epic poems with a proposition of the whole work and an invocation of some God for his assistance to go through with it was solemnly and religiously observed by all the ancient poets. But, in the context of this poem, the invocation has a mock-epic character. We then enter the mundane world with a description of lap-dogs and sleepless lovers. But this is immediately followed by an account of "the light militia of the lower sky" which constitutes the mock-epic machinery of this poem. Four orders of these supernatural beings salamanders, nymphs, gnomes and sylphs—are mentioned by Pope. The chastity of maidens is saved



from the lust of bold gallants by the intervention of sylphs. And here the mock-epic machinery is brought into a close relationship with the mundane world. An amusing description is given about how aristocratic ladies behave, and how the sylphs and the gnomes function. Some maidens, falling under the influence of the gnomes, develop excessive ambitions with regard to their matrimonial prospects. Such girls often refuse suitable offers of marriage, thinking only of peers and dukes. They are bound to feel frustrated when their hopes come to nothing. It is the gnomes, who play mischief with these girls. But sylphs are the protectors of maidens and virgins. When a maiden is about to fall a victim to a man, who gives an entertainment in her honour, her guardian-sylph so contrives that she feels more attracted by a man who arranges a bigger entertainment in her honour. If a virgin is about to yield to Florio's amorous appeal, her guardian-sylph so contrives that the advances of Demon would divert her attention. Different young gallants appeal to the different vanities of a young girl, with the result that her heart shifts from one gallant to another like a moving toy-shop. Ariel offers himself as Belinda's guardian-sylph.

When Belinda wakes up from her dream of Ariel and Ariel's account of the activities of Spirits, she sees a love-letter waiting for her. Going through this letter, with its mention of the wounds of love, the charms of love, and the ardours of love, Belinda forgets what she has seen and heard in her dream. Thus, we are again in the mundane world.

Belinda now gets ready for her toilet. A lady's efforts at self-decoration belong to the mundane world. But at Belinda's toilet operations, the sylphs are in attendance. Here is an exquisite adjustment between the mock-epic and the mundane worlds, the climax being reached with the lines in which we are told that "the busy sylphs surround their darling care", "some setting her head, some arranging her hair, some folding the sleeve, and some folding her gown, and here Canto I ends.

### **36.4.2 Canto II**

This opens with a hyperbolic description of Belinda's beauty and charms

which belong to the mundane world. This is followed by the Baron's worship of love, another ceremony of the mundane world. But the next moment, the mock-epic machinery is introduced. Ariel exhorts his fellow spirits to take every possible precaution to protect Belinda against a serious misfortune that threatens her. Once again the mock-epic machinery is brought into a close relationship with the affairs of the mundane world. As Ariel puts it, he does not know whether Belinda would allow her chastity to be violated, or some delicate china-jar in her house would crack; whether she would stain her honour or her new brocade; whether she would lose her heart or her necklace at a ball; or whether her pet dog, Shock, would meet a tragic end. Ariel then assigns various duties to various sylphs warning them that any negligence would be severely punished. The catalogue of punishments and torments to which the negligent sylphs are to be subjected has a mock-epic quality.

### **36.4.3 Canto III**

This contains an account of the fashionable gathering at Hampton Court; a description of the game of ombre played by Belinda with two knights; a reference to coffee-making and coffee-drinking; and the clipping of a lock of hair from Belinda's head, which forms the central incident of the poem. All these episodes belong to the mundane world, but there are strong mock-epic suggestions in the poem. The game of ombre is described like an "epic-battle" with Ariel and other sylphs playing their part like the gods and goddesses in the Homeric battles. Even when Belinda is sipping coffee, the sylphs hover round her. Coffee stimulates the Baron's brain and he thinks of a clever stratagem to obtain the coveted lock. The account of how the lock is clipped, is again a matter belonging to the mundane world, but Belinda's guardian-spirits could not be absent from the scene, though they have to retreat quickly as Ariel finds an earthly lover lurking in Belinda's heart. At this stage comes the revelation that Belinda has been in love with the Baron, though she has kept her love a secret from him, which was a natural thing for her to do. Interestingly enough, one of the sylphs does interpose himself between the blade of the scissors in order to protect the lock, but is cut into two and the victorious Baron is jubilant.

#### 36.4.4 Canto IV

This opens with a rhetorical account of the rage, resentment and despair of Belinda over her ravished hair. This brief mundane account is followed by the journey of a gnome to the gloomy CAVE of Spleen. Belinda's lament at the end of this Canto is an excellent satire on the high society of the time. Belinda wishes that she had never gone to Hampton Court, and that she had lived unadmired on some lonely island where there were no gilded coaches, where there was no one to play the game of ombre, and where there was no tea to drink. She deplores the fact that she used to roam with youthful lords when she should have stayed at home and said her prayers.

#### 36.4.5 Canto V

The highlight is Clarissa's speech which contains the moral of the poem. This speech is a parody of the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus in Homer's *Iliad*. While Clarissa's plea for good humour and sanity belongs to the mundane world, it has a mock-epic side to it. Then, there is the battle of the sexes which is part of the mock-heroic design of the poem. The battle is compared to that of Mars against Pallas and of Hermes against Latona. Umbriel, perched on the top of a candle stick, witnesses the fight.

Belinda shouts for the return of her lock of hair but it was not to be found anywhere. Only the Muse of poetry knew where the lock had flown. The Muse had seen the lock ascending to the sky in the shape of a new star with a long line of hair trailing behind it. The lock of hair would remain in sky, in the form of a star, forever and the fashionable people would survey it from heaven. In the end, the poet urges Belinda to stop lamenting the loss of a lock of her hair 'as the Muse will give a name to it, which is now a constellation, the name of "Belinda" and it will be immortalised as she, herself, will die in due course of time.

#### 36.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Critically evaluate the poem *Rape of the Lock*.

2. Discuss the background of the poem and enumerate on how it influenced the poem with respect to style and technique.

### **36.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 What event triggers the central conflict in “The Rape of the Lock”?
- A) A stolen necklace
  - B) A stolen kiss
  - C) A kidnapped prince
  - D) A stolen lock of hair
- Q.2 Who is Belinda, the protagonist of the poem?
- A) A mischievous sprite
  - B) A wealthy heiress
  - C) A vengeful witch
  - D) A cunning thief
- Q.3 What supernatural element is introduced into the story to create a mock-epic tone?
- A) An enchanted sword
  - B) A talking parrot
  - C) A mischievous gnome
  - D) A sylph
- Q.4 Which character is often associated with vanity and shallowness in “The Rape of the Lock”?
- A) Ariel
  - B) Canto

- C) Clarissa
  - D) Thalestris
- Q.5 What is the primary source of conflict between the “sylphs” and the “gnomes” in the poem?
- A) A dispute over a magical amulet
  - B) A battle for control over the elements
  - C) A rivalry for Belinda’s protection
  - D) A struggle for control of the human world
- Q.6 What object is used as a symbol of Belinda’s lost innocence and her social status?
- A) A mirror
  - B) A fan
  - C) A diamond necklace
  - D) The lock of hair
- Q.7 Which term best describes the poem’s satirical portrayal of high society?
- A) Admiring
  - B) Serious
  - C) Ironic
  - D) Tragic
- Q.8 What does Pope satirize in “The Rape of the Lock” through the trivialization of a social incident?
- A) Political corruption
  - B) Religious hypocrisy

- C) Intellectual arrogance
  - D) Vanity and superficiality
- Q.9 Which classical literary form does “The Rape of the Lock” imitate and parody?
- A) Epic
  - B) Tragedy
  - C) Comedy
  - D) Romance
- Q.10 What is the ultimate lesson or moral that the poem conveys?
- A) The importance of wealth and status
  - B) The folly of vanity and superficiality
  - C) The inevitability of tragic outcomes
  - D) The power of love to overcome all obstacles

Answer: 1D, 2B, 3D, 4C, 5C, 6D ,7C, 8D, 9A, 10B

### 36.7 LET US SUM UP

*The Rape of the Lock* explores themes of social vanity, the trivialization of high society, and the consequences of frivolous actions. Through its satirical lens, the poem critiques the shallow preoccupations of the aristocracy, highlighting the absurdity of magnifying trivial incidents. The theft of a lock of hair becomes a mock-epic adventure, revealing the theme of how seemingly insignificant matters can escalate and disrupt social harmony.

### 36.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. *Augustan Satire* - Jan Jack
2. *The Age of Pope* - John Dennis

**POETRY****MOCK-EPIC STYLE IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*****Unit Structure****37.1 Objectives****37.2 Introduction****37.3 Mock-epic Style of the Poem****37.4 Conclusion****37.5 Examination Oriented Questions****37.6 Suggested Readings****37.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to make the learner learn the mock-epic style of the poem.

**37.2 INTRODUCTION**

The mock epic is a poetic form which uses the epic structure but on a miniature scale and has a subject that is mean or trivial. The purpose of a mock-heroic or mock-epic poem is satirical. The writer makes the subject look ridiculous by placing it in a framework entirely inappropriate to its importance. The subject of such a poem is trivial but the treatment of the subject is heroic or epic.

The best known and the most brilliant example of the form comes

in Pope's, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712). The central incident in the poem is the theft of a lock of hair and the ensuing quarrel between two families. All the main features of epic surround this incident. The style is elevated, there is the celestial machinery in the form of the sylphs, a voyage (though only in Belinda's barge on the Thames), a visit to the underworld, and battles (though one is only at cards). By placing this incident in such a framework, Pope hoped to show the rape as trivial and tried to reconcile the two families, as a quarrel had arisen between the two families as a result of the theft of the lock of hair.

### **37.3 MOCK-EPIC STYLE OF THE POEM**

All the main features of an epic surround the principle event of this poem. Trivial occurrences are handled with all the seriousness and dignity which properly belong to the epic. In other words, there is a deliberate and sustained discrepancy between the theme of the poem and the treatment of the theme. Such a discrepancy is the essence of this particular kind of parody. The effect is further supported by the arrangement of the plot upon the regular epic plan, the employment of the 'machinery' which every epic was supposed to require, and by many passages in which scenes and phrases from the great epics of the world are directly imitated and burlesqued. All this is well managed in the poem and it, thus, makes it as the most perfect thing of its kind in English literature.

*The Rape of the Lock* is the masterpiece of the mock-heroic because it mocks at the maximum amount of the epic. There is a general mockery of the epic form with its Vocations, its similes, its frequent use of "He Said". There is a mockery of the epic matter or substance with its machinery, its battles, its journeys on water and down to the underworld. Apart from this, there is particular mockery of a scene or a detail or a certain speech or a comment by the poet. And the scale of the mockery is always varying. We find Belinda flashing lightning from her eyes as in Cowley's epic *Devides*, Soul flashes it, and her screaming like the Homeric heroes. We find an altar at which ardent



prayers are fatefully half-granted and a goddess who is worshipped, but the altar is built of French romances and the goddess is the image of the vain Belinda in the mirror of her dressing-table. We find a battle drawn forth to combat, like the Greeks, on a velvet plain ; but it is only a game of cards on an expensive cardtable. We find a supernatural being threatening his inferiors with torture ; but its a sylph, not Jove, who utters the threats. And the tortures mentioned are neither the thunderbolts of Jove nor the agonies of Hades, but cruelties devised ingeniously from the resources of the toilet-table. The scale of the imitation is always varying. The story of the epic covers years ; that of *The Rape of the Lock* covers only hours. The gods of the epic are heroic beings, Pope's sylphs are very small.

The opening invocation, the description of the heroine's toilet, the journey to Hampton Court, the game of ombre magnified into a pitched battle—all lead upto the moment when the peer produces the fatal pair of scissors. But the action of mortals was not enough. Pope knew that in true epics, the affairs of men were aided or crossed by heavenly powers. He, therefore, added four bodies of fairy creatures - Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs and Salamanders as agents in the story. Belinda, the heroine, is under the special protection of the sylphs, whose devotion is not however, enough for saving the lock when the peer advances to the attack.

The poem contains parodies of Homer, Virgil, Aristotle, Spenser and Milton, as well as reminiscences of Ovid and the Bible. There are several instances of burlesque treatment. There is Belinda's voyage to Hampton Court, which suggests the voyage of Aeneas up the Tiber in Virgil. There is the coffee party which is a parody of the meals frequently described in Homer. There is Belinda's petticoat which is treated as the shield of Ajax, while her lament suggests Virgil's Dido. Clarissa's plea for sanity and goodwill is a parody of Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus in the *Iliad*. The combat at the end recalls the fighting which is found anywhere in the ancient epics. The Cave of Spleen is a parody of an allegorical picture, examples of which may be found in English poets like

Spenser. The description of the coffee-equipage is reminiscent of Virgil's use of the epic style in the *Georgics* to describe the lives of bees.

There are three major parallels between *The Rape of the Lock* and the great English epic, *Paradise Lost*. First, there is the dream of pride and vain-glory insinuated into Belinda's ear, which recalls the dream insinuated into Eve's ear in Books V and VI of *Paradise Lost*. Then, there is the parody of the ceremony performed by Belinda at her dressing-table, where Belinda worships herself, and which, vividly recalls the new-born Eve's admiration of herself as mirrored in the pool of Eden in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*. But perhaps the crucial parallel is the third, which occurs just before the cutting of the lock of hair, when Ariel searches out the close recesses of the virgin's thought. There he finds an earthly lover lurking in her heart and here, Ariel retires with a sigh, resigned to fate. This situation echoes the moment in *Paradise Lost*, when after the fall of Adam and Eve, the angels of God retire, mute and sad, to heaven. The angels could have protected Adam and Eve against any force attempted by Satan, but against man's own free choice of evil, they are helpless as Ariel and his comrades are in the face of Belinda's free choice of an earthly lover.

An outstanding mock-heroic element in the poem is the comparison between the arming of an epic hero and Belinda's dressing herself and using cosmetics in order to kill. Pope describes a society-lady in terms that would suit the arming of a warrior like Achilles. Then there are the two battles which receive an ironically inflated treatment. In the description of these battles, there are several echoes of Troy and Carthage. The first battle is the card-game between Belinda and the Baron. The second battle, which has even more of the mock-heroic element, is the battle of the sexes which is compared to the battles of gods and goddesses as described by Homer. The erotic slaughter of the fops that takes place is one of the highlights of this mock-epic poem. The climax of the mock-heroic battle is reached when Belinda uses two formidable weapons – a pinch of snuff and bodkin. The battle of the sexes is part of the mock-

heroic design of the poem. The battle is compared to that of Mars against Pallas, and of Hermes against Latona. Umbriel, perched on top of a candlestick, witnesses the fight. Minerva, in like manner, during the battle of Ulysses with the suitors of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, perched on a beam of the roof to witness it. Jove's suspending his golden scales in the air refers to the passage in Homer where Jupiter, before the conflict between Hector and Achilles, weighs the issue in a pair of scales. The genealogy of Belinda's hair-pin is a parody of the history of Agamemnon's sceptre in the *Iliad*.

Again and again Pope introduces us into the epic world and brings us back to the world of trivialities. To take only one example, the transition from the "declining of the day" and "the sun obliquely shooting his burning ray" to the merchant returning from the Exchange after the day's work is a startling lapse from grand generality to trivial particulars. Such switches in and out of the epic world and the heroic style are, of course, characteristic of the mock-epic; but few mock-heroic poets are able to accomplish them with such dexterity.

In addition to the mighty trivial contrast, we have other contrasts which may be described as follows : primitive-sophisticated ; antique-contemporary ; masculine- feminine ; principled - opportunistic ; dramatic-histrionic. It is also to be noted that the gap between the contraries varies from the broadest burlesque of heroic wrath in Sir Plume's boastful words to Clarissa's rational appeal for sense and good humour, which partly recalls Sarpedon's ringing cry to battle in Book XII of *Iliad*.

According to the critic, Ian Jack, this is the poem which Hazlitt described as the most exquisite specimen of filigree work ever invented and which even Housman thought possibly the most perfect long poem in the language. When Pope was asked to write something that would restore everyone to good humour, it occurred to him to emphasise the triviality of the whole affair by describing it in the full pomp and splendour of epic verse. No poet has ever succeeded so well in "using a vast force

to lift a feather” (as Pope himself described it in the postscript to his translation of the *Odyssey*). The style of the closing lines of Canto II, for example,

*With beating hearts the dire event they wait,  
Anxious, and trembling for the birth of fate.*

would be splendidly appropriate at a crucial moment in an epic poem. When we realise that ‘the birth of fate ’ is to be no more than the snipping off of a lock of hair, the result is high comedy.

### **37.4 CONCLUSION**

An outstanding mock-heroic element in the poem is the comparison between the arming of an epic hero and Belinda's dressing and using cosmetics in order to kill. Belinda arms for a battle just as an epic hero prepares himself. The epic phrase for armour “glittering spoil,” wittily suggests this. Thus , Pope describes a society lady in terms that would suit the arming of Achilles.

### **37.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the *Rape of the Lock* as Mock-Epic Poem.
2. Discuss the poem as a satire on the aristocratic society.

### **37.6 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *Alexander Age* - Bonamy Dobree
2. *The Age of Pope* - John Dennis

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### **USE OF SUPER NATURAL MACHINERY IN THE RAPE OF THE LOCK**

#### **Unit Structure**

#### **38.1 Objectives**

#### **38.2 Introduction**

#### **38.3 Use Of Super Natural Machinery**

#### **38.4 Conclusion**

#### **38.5 Examination Oriented Question**

#### **38.6 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **38.7 Suggested Readings**

#### **38.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the use of supernatural machinery in the poem *The Rape of the Lock*.

#### **38.2 INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Johnson gave high praise to *The Rape of the Lock*. He calls the poem, “the most airy, the most ingenious, and the most delightful” of all Pope's compositions, occasioned by a frolic of gallantry, rather too familiar, in which Lord Petre cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair. *The Rape of the Lock* stands forward as the most exquisite example of ludicrous poetry.

### 38.3 USE OF SUPER NATURAL MACHINERY

Dr. Johnson not only defends, but heartily approves of Pope's use of the supernatural machinery in the poem. He supports Warburton who said that the preternatural elements were very happily adapted to the purposes of the poem. The heathen deities can no longer gain attention. The employment of allegorical persons always excites conviction of its own absurdity ; they may produce effects but cannot conduct actions. Pope brought in view a new race of beings, with powers and passions proportionate to their operation. The sylphs and gnomes act, at the toilet and at the tea-table, what more terrific and more powerful phantoms perform on the stormy ocean, or the field of battle; they give their proper help, and do their proper mischief.

He further observes that in this poem, Pope makes new things familiar, and familiar things new. A race of Aerial people, never heard of before, is presented to us in a manner so clear and easy, that the reader seeks for no further information, but immediately mingles with his new acquaintance, adopts their interests, and attains their pursuits, loves a sylph, and detests a gnome. Those familiar things are made new, every paragraph proves it. The subject of the poem is an event below the common incidents of common life ; nothing real is introduced that is not seen so often as to be no longer regarded ; yet the whole detail of a female's day is here brought before us, invested with so much art of decoration that though nothing is disguised, everything is striking, and we feel all the appetite of curiosity for that from which we have a thousand times turned fastidiously away.

In the letter written to Arabella Fermor, Pope describes what he means by the machinery of the poem, "*The machinery, Madam , is a term invented by the critics to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem ... These machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian doctrine of spirits,*"

The sylphs, according to Pope, were once beautiful women, but the

gentle process of death, cast off their earthly bodies and assumed airy bodies. But all the vanities that filled their hearts as beautiful women for instance, their love for cards and for gilded coaches, survived death and they carried these vanities with them in the next state to their existence. When beautiful women die in the fullness of their pride, they return to those elements from which they were first derived for example, termagants, who are violent-tempered women, pass into their native element, fire and become salamanders or spirits of the fire. Women of gentle and pleasing disposition gently pass into nymphs or water-spirits. Prudish women who affect too much modesty and propriety of conduct sink downwards and become gnomes or earth-spirits. Light-hearted coquettes ascend high and become sylphs or spirits of the airs, who merrily fly about in the atmosphere. They can “assume what sexes and shapes they please.”

Pope has given a very amusing description of the occupations of the sylphs. He attributes to the mischievous influence of the sylphs or gnomes many unguarded follies of the female sex which he holds up to ridicule. The foremost occupation of the sylphs is the protection of fair and chaste ladies who reject the male sex. It is they who guard and save the chastity of maidens who are on the point of yielding themselves up to their lovers. They save these maidens from falling victims to the allurements of treacherous friends and handsome young men whose music softens their minds and dancing inflames their passions. The gnomes or earth-spirits fill the minds of proud maidens with foolish ideas which make them indulge in vain dreams of being married to Lords and peers. It is these gnomes who teach young coquettes to ogle and pretend blushing at the sight, and even the thought, of fashionable young men who cause their hearts to flutter. It is the sylphs, however, who safely guide the maidens through all dangers. It is most amusing to note how these sylphs do this. Whenever a maiden is about to yield to the seduction of one particular young man, another more attractive and tempting appears on the scene and the fashionable lady at once transfers her favours to the newcomer. This may be called levity or fickleness in women but it is all contrived by the sylphs. A new lover,

richer and brighter than the old, saves the honour of a maiden, by diverting her coquetry to himself.

In the very beginning, we are humourously told by Ariel, Chief of Sylphs (who has been named after Shakespeare's immortal creation in *The Tempest*) that these various tasks have been assigned by "laws eternal". Some of them play in the "field of purest ether" and bask in the "blaze of day"; some amusingly enough perform the awful task of guiding the course of wandering stars like comets, some pursue the shooting stars ; some drink the vapours near the earth ; some again, in order to paint their wings, dip them in the colours of the rainbow; some cause tempests to rise on the seas ; some shower kindly rains on tilled fields. There are others who preside over the destiny of the human actions. Of these, the Chief has charge of national affairs and guards the British Throne.

Ariel further says that to him and his followers the task of serving fashionable ladies has been assigned. The functions of these sylphs is to save the powder from being blown off from the cheeks of fashionable young ladies, to prevent perfumes from evaporating, to prepare cosmetics by extracting fresh odours from the spring flowers, and to make washes for their complexion by collecting the coloured raindrops from the rainbow before they fall in showers. These sylphs also curl the hair of the ladies, "assist their blushes, teach them to put on enchanting airs and also suggest new ideas about dress". The sylphs also show a delightful down- scaling of the epic machines. They are "light" by any heroic standards. They feel scared when a crisis approaches. Yet they are in every detail Belinda's intimates and counsellors. They explain the various complicated conventions and anxieties that make up Belinda's day. Belinda is told in a dream that sylphs guide and protect her through the dangers of life. Ariel tells her that he is there to protect her purity according to sylphic theology. Defended by sylphs, the "melting maids" are safe. Reassuring Belinda in this way, Ariel is, in effect, undermining her moral position, taking away with one hand the credit he gives with the other. He explains how a woman's



defence is achieved.

The machines are present at every crucial situation in the play. The sylphs are present in the course of Belinda's journey by boat to Hampton Court. They have been warned by Ariel to be alert and vigilant and fifty of them have been deputed to take charge of Belinda's petticoat. They are in attendance on Belinda when she plays ombre. They hover around her when she sips coffee. And they withdraw only when Ariel sees an "earthly lover lurking at her heart". A gnome called Umbriel, goes to the Cave of Spleen and returns with a bag full of sighs, sobs, screams, and outbursts of anger and a phial filled with fainting fits, gentle sorrows, soft griefs etc. — all of which are released over Belinda. And the sylphs are present to witness the flight of Belinda's lock of hair to the sky.

Pope has provided the myth of the sylphs in order to symbolise the polite conventions which govern the conduct of maidens. It also represents his attempt to do justice to the intricacies of the feminine mind. The machinery of sylphs is the principle symbol of the triviality of Belinda's world. The sylphs who protect Belinda are also her acceptance of the rules of social convention, which presume that a coquette's life is a pure game.

The machinery is superior not only on account of its novelty, but because of the satire that results from it. The use of this machinery serves other purposes also. It imparts qualities of splendour and wonder to the actors and the actions in the story.

Critic Thomas Campbell opines that the adaptation of the Rosicrucian machinery in *The Rape of the Lock* is indeed an inventive and happy creation. It is an epic poem in that delightful miniature which diverts us by its mimicry of greatness, and yet astonishes by the beauty of its parts, and the fairy brightness of its ornaments.

Joseph Warton's commentary on *The Rape of the Lock* is highly appreciative and worth quoting. He writes that it is judicious to open the poem by introducing the guardian-sylph warning Belinda against some secret impending danger. The account which Ariel gives of the

nature, office and employment of these inhabitants of air, is finely fancied – into which several strokes of satire are thrown with great delicacy and address.

When Belinda is sipping coffee at the tea-table, the guardian spirits are very active and importantly employed :

*Straight hover round the fair her airy band ;*

*Some, as she sipped, the fuming liquor fanned.*

But nothing can excel the behaviour of the sylphs, and their wakeful solicitude for their charge, when the danger grows more imminent :

*Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair.*

The methods by which they endeavour to preserve her from the intended mischief are such, that they could only be executed by sylphs and have therefore, an admirable propriety as well as the utmost elegance :

*A thousand wings by turn, blow back the hair ;*

*And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear ;*

*Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.*

Still further to heighten the piece, and to preserve the characters of his machines to the last. just when the fatal scissors were spread :

*A wretched sylph too fondly interposed ;*

*Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain...*

#### **38.4 CONCLUSION**

The machinery of the poem is constantly kept in the readers' view, to the very last. Even when the lock is transformed, the sylphs, who had so carefully guarded it, are here once again artfully mentioned, as finally rejoicing in its honourable transformation, as it rises to heaven :

*The sylphs behold it kindling as it flies ;*

*And pleased pursue its progress through the skies.*

### 38.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

1. Discuss the use of supernatural elements in the poem the *Rape of the Lock*.

### 38.6 LET US SUM UP

The supernatural elements in *The Rape of the Lock* serve several important purposes. First, they contribute to the mock-epic tone by elevating the trivial incident of the stolen lock of hair to a grand scale, parodying the conventions of epic poetry. Second, they provide a satirical lens through which the absurdities of high society can be exaggerated and critiqued, highlighting the vanity and shallowness of the characters. Third, the sylphs and gnomes reflect the dual nature of Belinda's character, symbolizing her innocence and susceptibility to social pressures. Lastly, the supernatural beings embody the theme of female agency, representing the competing forces that influence Belinda's choices and actions.

### 38.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *The Age of Pope* - John Dennis
2. *The Augustan Age* - John Butt

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**POPE'S USE OF SATIRE IN *The Rape of the Lock*****Unit Structure****39.1 Objectives****39.2 Introduction****39.3 Pope's Use Of Satire****39.4 Conclusion****39.5 Examination Oriented Questions****39.6 Multiple Choice Questions****39.7 Let Us Sum Up****39.8 Suggested Readings****39.1 OBJECTIVES**

The lesson acquaints the learner with the use of satire in the poem. It shows how the writer targets the specific section of society and tries to reform the same.

**39.2 INTRODUCTION**

*The Rape of the Lock* is a poem ridiculing the fashionable world of Pope's day and is a masterpiece of satirical poetry. The poem is a satire on beautiful aristocratic women of the eighteenth century, whose lives centred round petty interests and the quest of shallow pleasures. It exposes to ridicule

their laziness, idleness, frivolities, vanities, follies, shams, shallowness, superficiality, prudery, hypocrisy, false ideas of honour, excessive interest in toilet and self-embellishment. Pope also mocks at certain other aspects of the life of the eighteenth century. He laughs at “little” men engaging in tasks so “bold”, and at gentle ladies who are capable of “such mighty rage” :

### 39.3 POPE’S USE OF SATIRE

*In tasks so bold can little men engage,  
And in soft bosoms dwell such mighty rage ?*

Pope also mocks at the late rising of aristocratic ladies and gentlemen of the time. It was the twelfth hour when Belinda opened her eyes to fall asleep again :

*How lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,  
And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake.*

The poet even makes fun of the vanities of women. He says that these vanities do not even end with the death of women :

*Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,  
That all her vanities at once are dead  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
And though she plays no more, o'er looks the cards.  
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,  
And love of ombre, after death survive.*

The aristocratic ladies of those days were fond of gilded chariots and of ombre, and Pope makes fun of their fondness for such things. He also gives satirical division of ladies of different temperaments into different categories – fiery termagants, yielding ladies, grave prudes, and light coquettes. He mocks

at the extravagant aspirations of the ladies who imagined matrimonial alliance with peers and dukes and dreamt of “garters, stars, and coronets,” Pope satirizes the fickleness and superficiality of the ladies by referring to their hearts as moving toy-shops and their varying vanities.

Pope also makes fun of Belinda by telling us that when she wakes up, her eyes first open on a love-letter in which the writer has spoken of “wounds, charms, and ardours .” He not only laughs merely at a fashionable lady's desire to receive love-letters but also at the conventional vocabulary of those love-letters. He also ridicules women's excessive attention to self-embellishment and self-decorations. In a famous satirical passage, Belinda is described as commencing her toilet operations with a prayer to the “cosmetic powers”. Belinda is depicted here as a warrior getting ready for the battle to kill men with her graces and charms. He laughs in the same vein at a lady's petticoat which was by no means impenetrable :

*Oft have known that seven-fold fence to fail,  
Though stiff with hoops and arm'd with ribs to whale.*

The lines in which Belinda's reaction to the clipping of the lock is described are a satire on a woman's tantrums :

*Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,  
And screams of horror rent the affrighted skies.*

To the ladies of the time, their domestic pets were as important as their husbands and that showed in them a superficiality of mind and a lack of any depth of feeling which the poet has admirably satirised :

*Not louder shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,  
When husbands, or when lap-dogs, breathe their last.*

In connection with the satire on men, one of the most amusing passages in the poem is the one in which the Baron is described as building an altar

of love-vast French romances with three garters, half a pair of gloves, and all the trophies of his former loves, and setting fire to it with his amorous sighs and with tender love-letters. The Baron's worship of "Love" is comparable to Belinda's worship of the "cosmetic powers".

Pope has also mocked the kind of conversation that went on among the ladies and the knights at the court. This conversation was void of any substance. The talk generally centred around dance-parties, court-visits, and the scandalous behaviour of some member of the court. The pauses in conversation were filled by snuff-taking, fan swinging, singing, laughing, ogling and all that. The emptiness and the shallowness of the upper classes of the time could not have been more effectively exposed to ridicule. Pope does not even spare the hungry judges and the jury-men who were in a hurry to get back home :

*The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,  
And wretches hang that jury-men may dine.*

Pope has not even spared the game of ombre and coffee-drinking and satirized these two things. The satire becomes pungent when the coffee had the effect of stimulating the dormant wisdom of the politician. In the poem, there is confusion of values which are ridiculed. These passages include the one in which we have the catalogue of things lost on earth and which are treasured on the moon. Pope has satirized the blindness and the hypocrisy with which the fashionable world of the eighteenth century tried to maintain its fine exterior.

Critic Joseph Warton says that *The Rape of the Lock* is the best satire extant and it contains the truest and liveliest picture of modern life. Another critic, J.C. Cunningham is of the opinion that *The Rape of the Lock* is the achievement of a spirited imaginative intelligence. To marshal a host of literary allusions, at varying levels of suppression, from the blatantly overt to the secretive; to carry the mimicry of epic structure down to niceties of heroic idiom and tone; to maintain a firm discrimination

between the admirable and the trashy in contemporary society, unmasking hypocrisy and pretentiousness. Such activities engage the intelligence but there is a sustained effort of wit and imagination behind those other aspects of the poem which are less readily found in other mock-heroic. Creating his brilliant myth of high society in Queen Anne's England, Pope continually prompts us not merely to measure it against the Homeric myths but also to see the element in it of romantic fiction and wistfulness.

The satire in *The Rape of the Lock* on aristocratic manners, makes a comment on polite society at large, and on fashionable women in particular. It exposes all values, especially trifling and artificial ones, by showing how small any world observing those values would have to be. Pope composed his poem with a long tradition of satires on women in mind. Belinda at her dressing-table is the heiress of a whole race of previous lady charmers. To an even greater degree than her predecessors, Belinda moves in a filigree world, a fairyland adorned with jewels, lap-dogs, and snuff-boxes. Her moves are seen to correspond to the glorious and bright light of Soul, the pervasive supernatural divinity of the poem. Indeed, Belinda herself is a sort of goddess and as such is truly divine, "Belinda smiled and all the world was gay". And all through, she is the main target of Pope's satire exposing the insincerity of the fashionable game of love, because in his opinion, women are frivolous beings whose one genuine interest is in love-making: "Every woman is at heart a rake." This view is implied in the more playful lines in *The Rape of the Lock*.

#### **39.4 CONCLUSION**

Thus, Pope's urbane satire represents the culmination of a tradition of pseudo-epic poems in which the values and idiosyncrasies of an entire culture are satirised. Pope satirised mildly and genially, the restrained and refined manners of the upper classes by sending Belinda to a fashionable party at Hampton Court, where ministers of State do "sometimes counsel take and sometimes tea." His satire is cast in the form of a credible plot in which the various characters (Sir Plume, the Baron, Belinda) make



themselves appear ridiculous by their thought, speech and actions.

### 39.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *The Rape of the Lock* as a mock-heroic poem.
2. “*The Rape of the Lock* presents a true picture of the aristocratic life of the eighteenth century.” Discuss.
3. Discuss Pope as a great satirical poet with special reference to *The Rape of the Lock*.
4. Discuss Pope’s use and treatment of supernatural machinery in *The Rape of the Lock*.
5. Discuss the character of Belinda in the poem, *The Rape of the Lock*

### 39.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Q.1 What does the “lock” in “The Rape of the Lock” refer to?
- A) A stolen piece of jewelry
  - B) A stolen horse
  - C) A lock of hair
  - D) A secret code
- Q.2 What is the primary reason for the conflict between Belinda and the Baron in the poem?
- A) Religious differences
  - B) Political disagreements
  - C) A misunderstanding over a card game
  - D) A quarrel over a love letter

- Q.3 What term is often used to describe the supernatural creatures who protect Belinda in the poem?
- A) Elves
  - B) Goblins
  - C) Sylphs
  - D) Fairies
- Q.4 What is the social class of the characters depicted in “The Rape of the Lock”?
- A) Peasants
  - B) Aristocrats
  - C) Merchants
  - D) Soldiers
- Q.5 Which literary form does “The Rape of the Lock” imitate and satirize?
- A) Drama
  - B) Tragedy
  - C) Epic
  - D) Romance
- Q.6 What is the significance of the “goddess” Ariel in the poem?
- A) She represents the forces of nature.
  - B) She serves as a messenger between characters.
  - C) She symbolizes the power of love.
  - D) She reflects the theme of vanity.
- Q.7 What is the primary theme that “The Rape of the Lock” satirizes?

- A) Political corruption
  - B) Religious piety
  - C) Social vanity
  - D) Intellectual pursuits
- Q.8 What is the role of the Baron in “The Rape of the Lock”?
- A) He is Belinda’s protector.
  - B) He is a villainous kidnapper.
  - C) He is a loyal friend of Belinda.
  - D) He is a wise counselor.
- Q.9 What term is often used to describe the tone of “The Rape of the Lock”?
- A) Tragic
  - B) Melancholic
  - C) Ironic
  - D) Romantic
- Q.10 What social event is the main setting of the poem?
- A) A wedding
  - B) A coronation
  - C) A funeral
  - D) A masquerade

Answer: 1C, 2C, 3C, 4B, 5C, 6B, 7C, 8B, 9C, 10D

### 39.7 LET US SUM UP

*The Rape of the Lock* is a mock-heroic poem that employs the elevated language and grandeur of epic poetry to satirize the trivial concerns of high society.

Through playful exaggeration, the stolen lock of hair becomes the epic subject, and the actions of the characters are portrayed with epic seriousness. This contrast between the grand style and the insignificant subject matter serves to highlight the absurdity of the aristocratic culture and its fixation on superficial matters.

### 39.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Arthur Compton & Rickett. *A History of English Literature*
2. Sir Ifor Evans. *Short History of English Literature*.
3. Bonamy Dobree. *Alexander Pope*.
4. John Dennis. *The Age of Pope*.
5. Ian Jack. *Augustan Satire*.
6. John Butt. *The Augustan Age*.
7. George Saintsbury. *Eighteenth Century Literature*.

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