

BA ENG-202

# ENGLISH POETRY FROM ELIZABETHAN AGE TO ROMANTIC AGE

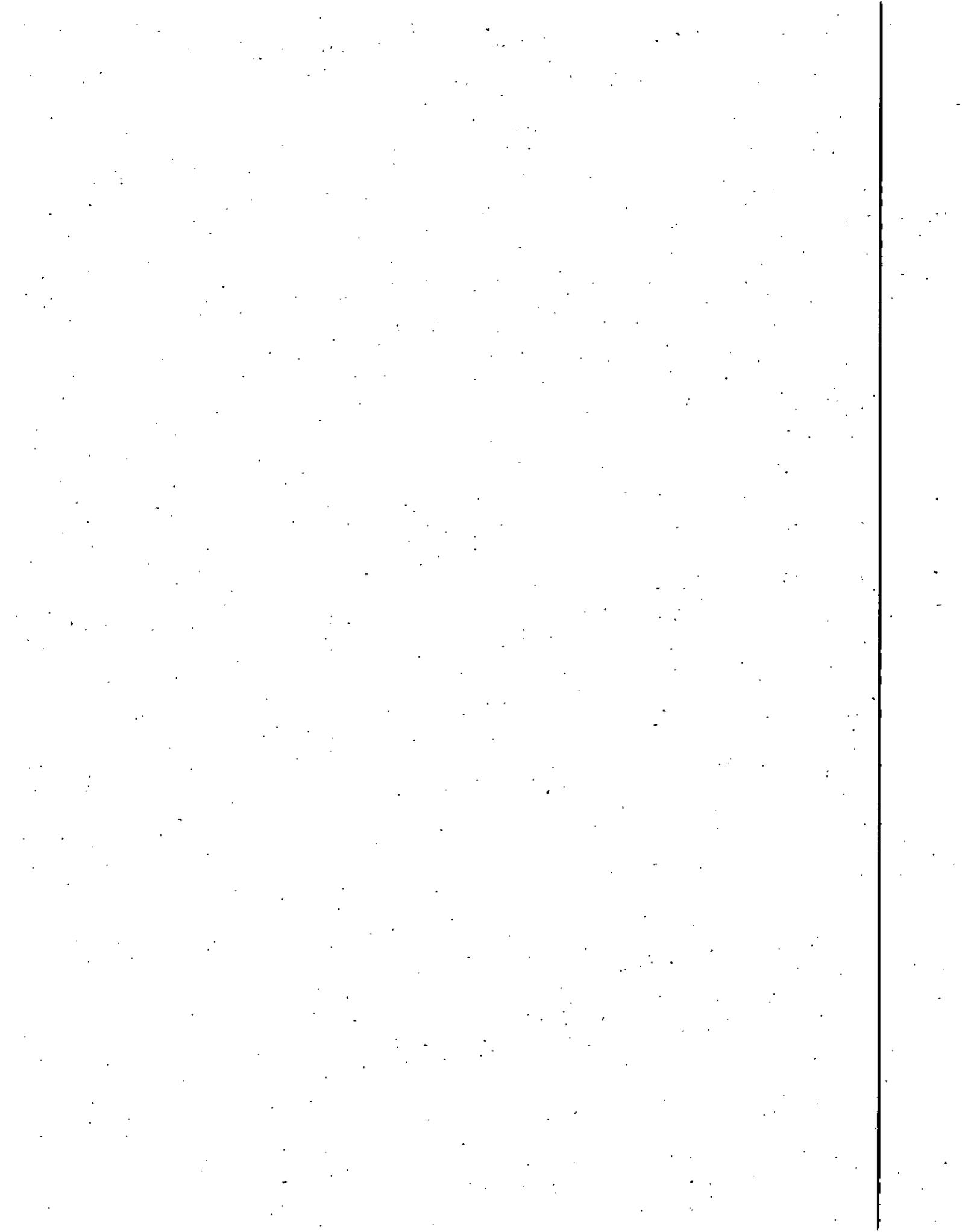


**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**SWAMI VIVEKANAND**

**SUBHARTI UNIVERSITY**

Meerut (National Capital Region Delhi)



# ENGLISH POETRY FROM ELIZABETHAN AGE TO ROMANTIC AGE

BA ENG-202

Self Learning Material



Directorate of Distance Education

SWAMI VIVEKANAND  
**SUBHARTI**  
UNIVERSITY  
UGC Approved Meerut  
*Where Education is a Passion ...*

MEERUT-250005

UTTAR PRADESH

**Developed by : Dr. Manisha Luthra**

**Assessed by:**

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# SYLLABUS

B.A. English 1<sup>st</sup> Year (II- Sem)

English Poetry From Elizabethan Age to Romantic Age

Course Code: BA ENG-202

## Course Objectives

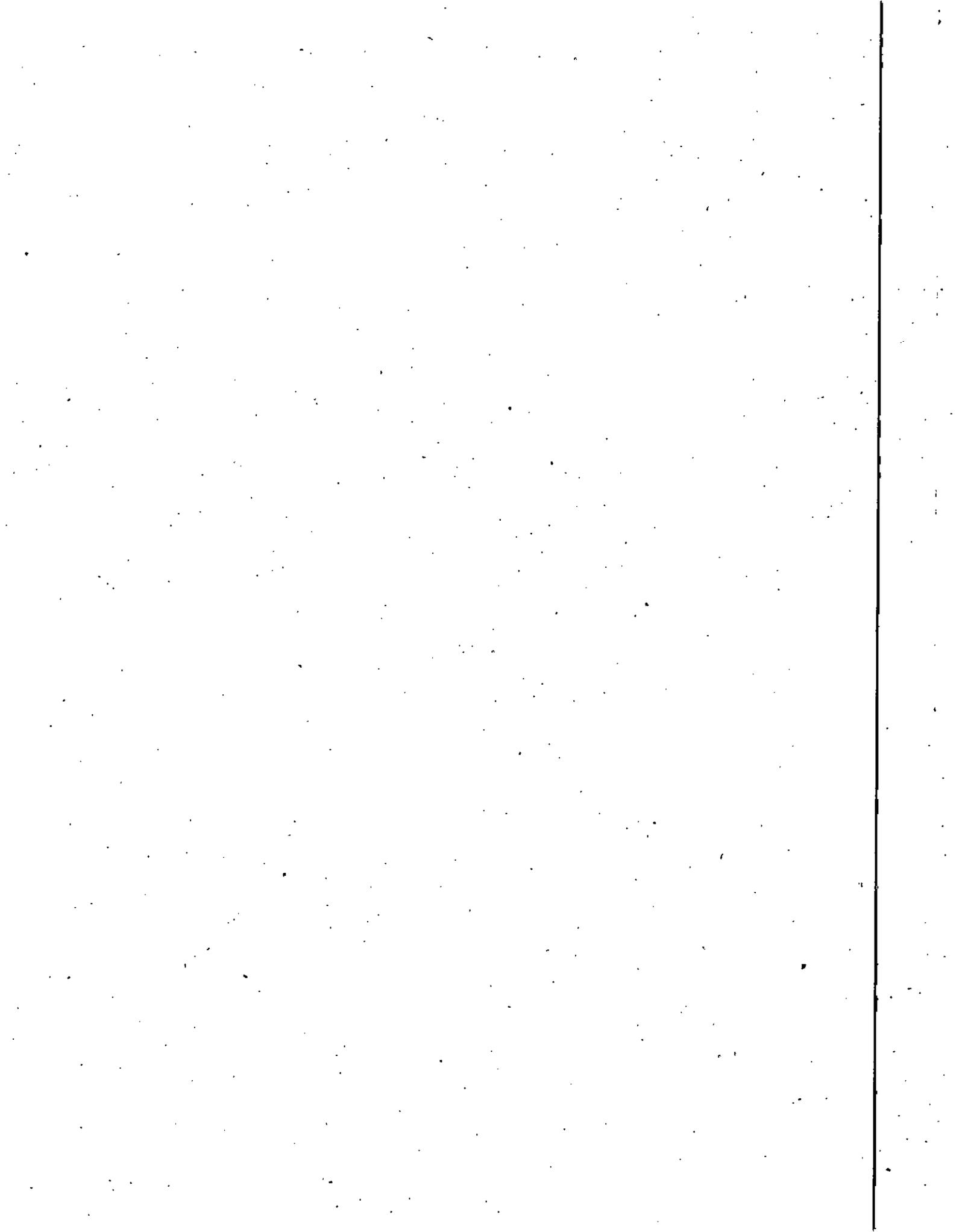
To enable the student

1. Explain the meaning and theme of William Shakespeare Sonnets.
2. Explain the writings and critical analysis of John Donne.
3. Explain the writings of John Milton, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert and Alexander Pope.

<b>Unit- One</b>	<b>William Shakespeare:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a.Sonnet XXX- 'when to Sessions....'</li><li>• b.Sonnet LXXXIII- 'That time of year...'</li><li>• c.Sonnet CXVI- 'Let me not marriage ...'</li></ul>
<b>Unit- Two</b>	<b>John Donne</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a.Song: Go and Catch a falling Star....'</li><li>• b.'The valediction forbidding mourning'</li></ul>
<b>Unit- Three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>John Milton</b> : Lycidas'</li><li>• <b>Andrew Marvell</b>: The Garden.</li></ul>
<b>Unit- Four</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>George Herbert</b> : The Coller</li><li>• <b>Alexander Pope</b>: Essay on man (Book lines- 1 to 18)</li></ul>

## Suggested Readings-

- Critical Studies by Mallik Dr. Nilanko.
- Hippocrane A Guide by Suman Das.



# William Shakespeare-Sonnet

Notes

**(Structure)**

- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 About the Age
- 1.4 Elizabethan Poetry
- 1.5 About the Author
- 1.6 Critical Appreciation of When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought
- 1.7 Let me not Marriage of True Minds
- 1.8 That Time of Year thou Mayst in me Behold
- 1.9 Textual Analysis
- 1.10 Summary
- 1.11 Keywords
- 1.12 Review Questions
- 1.13 Further Readings

## 1.1 Learning Objectives

After studying the chapter, students will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of Shakespeare
- To understand the Elizabethan age,
- To know about life of Shakespeare
- To know and understand various literary trends of the Elizabethan age,
- To critically analysis Shakespeare's sonnet
- Explain Shakespeare's style of writing sonnets
- Critically analyse Shakespeare's sonnet, When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought

Notes

## 1.2 Introduction

It happens very rarely in the history of literature that a craftsman who has acquired perfect control of the medium and a masterly ease in handling the techniques and conventions of his day is also a universal genius of the highest order, combining with his technical proficiency a unique ability to render experience in poetic language and an uncanny intuitive understanding of human psychology. William Shakespeare (1564–1616) has a remarkable combination of all these qualities and has been praised for his knowledge of the human psyche. In the Elizabethan age the art of words in England flourished without the sustaining influence of the other arts, in subsidiary forms. Further this art of words, which is the art of literature, gained great encouragement from the court and from the Queen herself. Yet even in Elizabethan times when literature seems to be so much at the centre of the national life, it failed to command the attention of the nation as a whole. In later times the court has not often been as genial and as helpful as it was under Queen Elizabeth. It is strange that a country which has achieved so much in its literature should yet have regarded contemporary literature so often with indifference or, in some periods, even positive hostility. The governmental attitude to printing and to the general circulation of books was hostile from the times of Tudor to the beginnings of the eighteenth century and censorship acted in capricious form.

When the Tudors granted a charter to the Stationer's company in 1557, it was not with any desire of improving the art of printing or of spreading learning or imaginative literature, but to license, control, suppress and watch more closely the activities of printers and publishers. It was on 29th June, 1566 that Queen Elizabeth signed a decree passed by the star chamber requiring every printer to enter into recognizance for his good behaviour. No books were to be printed or imported without the sanction of a special commission of ecclesiastical authorities. Later in 1586 all printing was restricted to London and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and all books had to be licensed. It was under the same period that in spite of great restrictions, some of the greatest literature in English was produced.

The great writers did not have their works printed in good and beautiful books. So while Shakespeare touched the resources of language in a way unmatched in any period of English literature, his plays were published in wretched conditions that were unsightly to read and whose texts were so carelessly reproduced that it has ever since puzzled the ingenuity of generations of commentators. Sonnets composed by Shakespeare about love, became an irresistible poetical fashion during the decade from 1590 to 1600. The sonnets are of the English form, which is now generally referred as Shakespearean. William Shakespeare is widely

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known in literary circles as the 'famous playwright of English literature'. He has thirty-seven plays to his credit; all of them with varied themes and characters. In addition, he has also written three narrative poems and 154 sonnets. The Shakespearean sonnet is divided into four stanzas. The first three are quatrains (four line stanza) followed by a couplet (two line stanza). The form is often named after Shakespeare, not because he was the first to write in this form but because he became its most famous practitioner. It has the following rhyme scheme 'abab, cdcd, efef, gg'. The division of three quatrains and a final concluding couplet offered him greater amount of variety with regard to rhyme and theme than is usually found in its Italian predecessors. All his sonnets typically use iambic pentameter, a ten syllable line where the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed.

Shakespeare uses the three quatrains to develop an idea with three different images and finally reach the conclusion in the couplet. The change in mood or theme mostly happens in the beginning of the third quatrain with a final couplet concluding the arguments. But most often, he waits till the couplet ends and usually summarizes the theme of the poem or introduces a fresh look at the theme. Out of these 154 sonnets, the first 126 sonnets written are addressed to a fair young man in his youth and the last 28 sonnets are addressed to a dark lady. Nobody knows that a flesh and blood person exists in reality or not. The themes of the sonnets abound in love, beauty and mortality. This sequence was published in 1609.

The in this unit, you will study Shakespeare's Sonnet 30 When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought, Sonnet 116 etc. Shakespeare's Sonnets are laced with a plethora of feelings and emotions which are still relevant to today's time. His sonnets are often breath-taking, sometimes disturbing and sometimes puzzling and elusive in their meanings. As sonnets, their main concern is 'love', but they also reflect upon time, change, aging, lust, absence, infidelity and the problematic gap between ideal and reality when it comes to the person you love. It is asserted that probably the sonnets were written, and perhaps revised, between the early 1590s and about 1605. Versions of Shakespeare's Sonnets 128 and 144 were printed in the poetry collection *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. They were first printed as a sequence in 1609, with a mysterious dedication to 'Mr. W.H.' A detailed description of Shakespeare's life and works is given in this unit.

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### 1.3 About the Age

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With the revival of learning the study of the ancient Greek and Latin classics was promoted. Reason came in for faith, hence began a revived interest in life and its pleasures, art, literature, science, and philosophy. This attitude is called

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humanism – concern with human instead of divine. Literature henceforth answered the call of life.

Long before Elizabeth I ascended the throne, the parliament, at the instance of her father, Henry VIII, had declared the English church independent of the Pope, making the king and his successors its heads and defenders of the faith.

Elizabeth inherited this tradition. By the defeat of the Spanish Armada that had long posed a threat to the security of England another external obstacle to its progress was removed. It was a glorious epoch of English history. All the time the message of the ancient Greek and Latin classics was flowing freely into the century which, coupled with the blessings of peace and prosperity and the enlightened era of literary activity, flourished particularly in the fields of drama, poetry and criticism.

Although James I, who succeeded Elizabeth, failed to follow in her footsteps and even in some areas reversed them, the glory that England achieved during her reign lasted throughout his also. In literature it is common to extend the period of her influence to the end of James I's reign.

Although several kinds of verse forms were attempted in this age – the epic, romance, the pastoral, the verse tale, the elegy, the sonnet, the lyric, the satire, it is mainly an age of the last three. Following close upon the heels of the renaissance, it availed itself of all that the Greek and Latin classics had to offer but the form of whatever it chose to write is largely its own. It was rather attempted and attracted by its matter. It is important to bear in mind because in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the writers were more attracted by its form than by its matter.

Ranking next only to drama, poetry proved no less popular. For the first time it began to be published in anthologies. The first one was called after the name of its printer, "Tuttle's Miscellany". This was originally called "Songs and Sonnets written by Surrey and Others". This collection of poetry represents the first available instance of blank verse in English. Twenty years later "England's Helion" published in 1600 had poems of Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, Lodge, Greece, Peck and Shakespeare.

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### 1.4 Elizabethan Poetry

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The period of the reign of Elizabeth-I. It was a time of rapid development in English commerce, maritime power and nationalist feeling. The defeat of the Spanish Armada occurred in 1588. It was a great (in drama: the greatest) age of English literature. The age of Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Ben Johnson and many

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other extraordinary writers of prose and of dramatic, lyric and narrative poetry. Elizabethan age was a great age of English literature. During this time the writing of poetry was the part of education among the educated people. That is why many books of poetry by different writers appeared during this age. The Elizabethan era, often hailed as a golden age for English literature, spanned Queen Elizabeth's long reign from 1558 to 1603. This period saw many poetic luminaries rise to prominence, including Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare and Elizabeth herself. Elizabethan poetry is notable for many features, including the sonnet form, blank verse, the use of classical material, and double entendres.

The proper Elizabethan literary age began in 1579, but before that year, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey made their poetic contributions. Sir Wyatt brought the sonnet form Italy and made it popular in England. He followed the tradition of the Petrarchan sonnet with octave and sestet.

There was later changed into English sonnet style by Shakespeare, who divided the sonnet into three quatrains summed up by a couplet. The Earl of Surrey wrote the first blank verse in English. The Elizabethan age produced many beautiful lyrics. One of the finest lyricists was Sir Philip Sidney.

### **William Shakespeare as Poet**

The greatest dramatist Shakespeare was also a great poet of this age who wrote around 130 sonnets and they are very famous in English literature. He developed a new form of sonnet called the English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet, which rhyme ababcdcd efef gg. It is different from Petrarchan sonnet. Many of his sonnets refer to a girl, a rival poet and a dark-eyed beauty.

### **Edmund Spenser**

Edmund Spenser was a famous poet who introduced the Elizabethan age properly. In 1579, he wrote *The Shepherd's Calendar*, a poem in twelve books, one for each month of the year. His greatest work was *The Faerie Queen*. Though it was planned to be written in twelve books, he could complete six of them. It is an allegorical work with three themes: a political theme, a moral theme, and a fairy tale. More than the story, this work is known for its magic feeling, wonderful music in verse, and the beauty of the sound. It is written in Spenserian stanza of nine lines, with the rhyme scheme ababbcbcc.

### **Lyrics of the Elizabethan Age**

The Elizabethan age produced many beautiful lyrics. One of the finest lyricists was Sir Philip Sidney, who was a courtier, statesman, soldier and a poet. His books of sonnets *Astrophel* and *Stella* was printed in 1591, after his death. Another great poet was Sir Walter Raleigh, who was also a soldier, sailor, explorer, courtier and

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a writer. Some examples of best Elizabethan lyrics can be found in the plays of Shakespeare. His longer poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are rather cold and without feelings. But the occasional lyrics found in his dramas are full of feelings and passion. The famous dramatist Marlowe has also written some fine lyrics.

### Sonnets

Perhaps the best-known innovation of Elizabethan poetry is the Elizabethan, or English, sonnet. Thomas Wyatt, a court poet for Henry VIII, introduced the Italian sonnet to England, but Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, reworked it into its typical English form. Elizabethan sonnets are written in iambic pentameter and consist of 14 lines, often divided into three quatrains and a couplet.

The lines rhyme using a scheme: ababcdcd efef gg. The first eight lines are called the "octet" and the final six lines are the "sestet."

Elizabethan sonnets often feature a turn, or "volta," between the octet and sestet, where the material introduced in the octet is seen from a different perspective in the sestet. In some sonnets, this turn comes in the final couplet, such as in William Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, "My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun." Elizabethan sonnets also appear in the drama of the time, such as at the beginning of "Romeo and Juliet."

### Blank Verse

Although iambic pentameter had been used in English poetry since the Middle Ages, the Earl of Surrey used it in a new way in his translation of Virgil's "Aeneid": He left the lines unrhymed. This poetic form, called "blank verse," has the advantage of freeing poets from the burden of rephrasing thoughts so that they rhyme and was held by some to be the purest approximation of natural human speech. In the Elizabethan era proper, blank verse was Shakespeare's and Christopher Marlowe's meter of choice for drama; it gave speech a serious, elevated tone, while leaving prose to be used for those with lower social rankings and for comedy.

Blank verse persisted in popularity far past the Elizabethan era, used by such notable works as John Milton's "Paradise Lost" and William Wordsworth's "Prelude." *Shaping the Present With the Past*. Although the term "Renaissance" wasn't used until the 19th century, it accurately describes at least one feature of Elizabethan literature: It often perceived itself as giving "rebirth" to classical matter to usher in a new era of literature in English. This quality is perhaps most easily seen in its appropriation of the past. Sir Philip Sidney employs the conventions of classical poetry in his sonnets, such as his invocation to the muse in "Astrophil and Stella": "Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart, and

write.”

Similarly looking backwards, Edmund Spenser’s greatest work, the epic “Faerie Queene,” is full of archaisms -- intentionally old-looking spelling or syntax, such as “yclept” for “called.” He uses these to create the sense of an earlier, less spoiled realm in which he can set his allegorical history of England.

### **Double Entendres**

This discussion wouldn’t be complete without a mention of Elizabethan poetry’s great love of double entendres: words or phrases that have a benign literal meaning but also have a second connotation -- usually a sexual one. In Act 3, Scene 1 of “Hamlet,” for instance, Hamlet directs a polemical diatribe at Ophelia, and tells her, “Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a / breeder of sinners?” On a literal level, playgoers could interpret this line kindly: Hamlet is worried about Ophelia and wants to shelter her from the world and from men. But in Elizabethan slang, “nunnery” meant “brothel.” So Hamlet simultaneously insults Ophelia. This ambiguity is in keeping with Hamlet’s madness -- whether feigned or not.

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## **1.5 About the Author**

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William Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564 in Stratford. The name of his father was John Shakespeare and his mother’s name was Mary Arden. His father was a successful glove maker and an alderman, and his mother was the daughter of a farmer. There is a great confusion regarding the date of birth of William Shakespeare. Some people are of the view that the George’s Day i.e. 23 April is his actual date of birth. This date was traced by the eighteenth-century scholar by mistake and it proved appealing to the biographers because this is the same date on which he died in 1616. William Shakespeare had seven brothers and sisters and he was the eldest surviving son of his parents. There are no clear evidence found about the life history of William Shakespeare. Most biographers estimated about his life that in 1553, he got education from the King’s New School, Stratford which was a free school chartered. This school was at a four hundred metre distance from their house.

In Elizabethan era, there was a great variation in the grammar schools. In spite of the variation in the schools, the curriculum of the schools was largely similar. Royal decree standardised the Basic Latin Text. There was intensive education in grammar provided in the schools and this education was based upon the Latin Classical Authors. In 1582, William Shakespeare got married with Anne Hathaway who was twenty six years old and he was eighteen years old at that time. The marriage certificate was issued on 27 November 1582 by the consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester. Two neighbours of the Hathaway posted bonds in

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Shakespeare-Sonnet*

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which they guaranteed that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The Worcester Chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once, otherwise these were read three times.

Therefore the marriage ceremonies were arranged hastily. After the six months of their marriage Anne gave birth to a girl child whose name was Sussana. After two years of their marriage twins, one daughter and one son were born. Daughter's name was Judith and son's name was Hamnet. In August 1596, Hamnet died at the age of eleven due to unknown reason.

After the birth of the twins, William Shakespeare left few traces of the history and in 1592, he is mentioned as part of the London Theatre. But in 1588 and in October 1589 before the Queen's bench court at Westminster his name was appeared in a case regarding complaint bills. So we can say that during that period of history he was mentioned in a law case. Most of the scholars named the period of 1585 to 1592 as the lost years of William Shakespeare. But some of the biographers had attempted to report this period.

They had reported many apocryphal stories which were written by William Shakespeare. The first biographer of William Shakespeare wrote about a legend in Stratford. He told in the biography that Shakespeare was prosecuted for poaching of deer in the local squire Thomas Lucy's estate. He fled from there to London to get escaped from this prosecution. Shakespeare wrote a scurrilous ballad about Thomas Lucy to take revenge from him. In the sixteenth century, Shakespeare has started his career in theatre by minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. According to John Aubrey Shakespeare was also employed as a country school master. In the opinion of the twentieth century scholars, A catholic landowner Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire has employed him as a school master. In his will, Alexander has mentioned about William Shakeshafte. After the death of William Shakespeare, some evidences were collected to know about Shakeshafte and it was found that this was a very common name used in the Lancashire area.

It is unclear when William Shakespeare had started writing plays and novels or stories. But from his records of performances and contemporary allusions it had been found that in 1592, a number of his plays were being played on the London stage. At that time, he was famous in London because the playwright attacked him in a print of Groats-Worth of Wit. Different scholars have different opinion on the words of Greene and its meaning. Most of the scholars were of the opinion that William Shakespeare was reaching at the upper rank than his capability and was trying to match the writers who got their education in the universities and Greene used the term university wits for those university educated

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like Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe and Greene himself. The phrase in Robert Greene's writing "Oh, Tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" taken from Henry VI, part 3, of William Shakespeare along with the pun Shake-scene clearly shows that Greene makes a target to William Shakespeare in his writing. In the theatre, Greene was the first person who attacked the theatrical works of William Shakespeare.

There is no clear demarcation of the time during which Shakespeare started his work. Many biographers are of the view that the career of Shakespeare started from mid-1580 or just before Greene's remarks. After 1594, the Lord Chamberlain's Men which was a company owned by a group of players performed the plays of Shakespeare along with William Shakespeare. Within no time this company became a leading company in London. In 1603, after the death of Queen Elizabeth, the new king James I awarded the company a royal patent and gave it a new name King's Men.

On the banks of the River Thames, a partnership of the members of the company made their own theatre which they named the Globe, in 1599. In 1608, the Black friar's indoor theatre was also taken over by the company.

Shakespeare made a number of investments in the property and the records proved that he purchased a number of properties with the companies and his association with the company made him a rich and wealthy man. In 1597, he purchased the house in Stratford, New Place which was the second largest house of the city and in 1605, he made an investment in the shares of the parish tithes in Stratford. In 1594, the plays of Shakespeare were published in quarto edition and upto 1598, he became so popular that his name was selling like hot cakes and his name started appearing on the title pages of the books and magazines. Shakespeare had become a successful playwright and after this success he started acting in his own plays as well as the plays written by the other writers. Ben Johnson assigned roles to William Shakespeare in his plays *Sejanus His Fall* in 1603 and *Every Man in His Humour* in 1598 and he mentioned about this in his 1616 edition.

Some scholars are of the opinion that in 1605, William Shakespeare's acting career was near to its end as his name was absent from the cast list for Jonson's *Volpone*. But it is also a truth that in 1623, edition of *First Folio* mentioned William Shakespeare as one of the principal actors in all these plays and the list of the plays in which Shakespeare was mentioned also include the plays staged after the play *Volpone*. But there is no record found regarding the types of roles played by Shakespeare. John Devis of Hereford mentioned in 1610 that Shakespeare played kingly roles and he called him as 'Good Will'. In 1709, Rowe gave the statement that Shakespeare played the role of ghost in *Hamlet* and he was the ghost of the father of Hamlet. From further studies, it was made

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clear that he played a variety of roles like the chorus in *Henry V*, Adam in *As You Like It* etc. But the source of this information is not clear.

The lifetime of Shakespeare's career can be divided into two places i.e. between London and Stratford. A year before the purchase of New Place in Stratford for his family in 1596, William Shakespeare was living at the north of the River Thames in the parish of Bishopsgate of St. Helen. By 1599, Shakespeare got shifted to Southwark across the river and constructed his theatre known as the Globe Theatre with his company. Then he shifted towards the north of the river in 1604. This area was in the north of St. Paul's Cathedral and there were many fine houses. At that place he got rooms on rent from a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear. He was a French Huguenot named Christopher Mountjoy.

The first biographer who repeated the recording of tradition given by Johnson was Rowe. He told that Shakespeare got retired and shifted to Stratford before some years of his death. Shakespeare was working in London as an actor in 1608. According to the statement given by Cuthbert Burbage in 1635, Shakespeare acted in a number of plays after purchasing the lease of the Blackfriars Theatre. In 1609, there was bubonic plague raged in London throughout. There was closing of the London public playhouses repeatedly due to outbreak of the plague and the number of closures of the playhouses was almost sixty in between May 1603 to February 1610. Due to the closures of the public playhouses there was no acting work in the theatres and the retirement from the work was very uncommon in those days.

There were continued visits to London during the years from 1611 to 1614 by Shakespeare. In 1612, there was a court case of the daughter of Mountjoy regarding the marriage settlement and Shakespeare was called as a witness there. In 1613, William Shakespeare purchased a gatehouse in the former Black friars priory. And in 1614, during the month of November, Shakespeare was staying in London with John Hall, his son-in-law. Shakespeare wrote few plays after 1610 and none after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher who succeeded him as the house playwright of the King's Men.

At the age of fifty-two years, William Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and before a month of his death, he had signed a will. In this will, he had described himself in perfect health.

But the reason of his death is not clear from any of the sources. Half a century later, John Ward, the vicar of Stratford, wrote in his notebook: "Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted". This may be the reason of his death because Jonson and Drayton were known to him. Of the tributes from fellow authors, one refers to his relatively sudden death: "We wondered, Shakespeare, that thou went'st so soon / From the world's stage to the grave's tiring room."

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After the death of Shakespeare, he had left his wife and two daughters Sussane and Judith. Sussane got married to John Hall in 1607 and Judith got married to Thomas Quinter two months before the death of Shakespeare. He had signed his last will and testament on 25 March 1616. On the following day, it was found that Thomas Quiney who was the younger son-in-law of Shakespeare had an illegitimate relationship with Margaret Wheeler who had died during child birth and they had an illegitimate son. Thomas was ordered by the church court to do public penance, which would have caused much shame and embarrassment for the Shakespeare family. In his will Shakespeare gave a large part of his property to his elder daughter Sussane but she was told to pass it down intact to her first son. Her younger daughter had three children but all of them died before getting married. His elder daughter had one girl child, Elizabeth. She got married twice. But in 1670,

she died without any child. Thus, the family of William Shakespeare ended here. In his will Shakespeare had hardly mentioned about his wife who was entitled to one third of his property. He had made a point of leaving her "my second-best bed" a bequest. This bequest given by Shakespeare has led to great speculation. It is believed by some of the scholars that Shakespeare has insulted his wife Anne by giving her the bequest but some of the scholars believe that the meaning of the second-best bed may be the matrimonial bed which enriches the significance of the bequest and the importance of his wife in his life. After two days of the death, Shakespeare was buried in the Chancel of the Holy Trinity Church and his grave was next to those of his wife Anne Shakespeare and Thomas Nash, husband of his granddaughter.

Most of the playwrights revised the plays of the others and it is believed that Shakespeare also did the same thing. *Titus Andronicus* and the early history plays were under this controversy but *The Lost Cardenio* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are the well attested documentations. A number of the plays were revised after the original composition and the textual evidences of this have been found. It is recorded that in the early 1590, Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* and three parts of *Henry VI* which are considered as the first recorded works of Shakespeare during a vogue for historical drama.

There are no records found with the help of which we could estimate the exact date of Shakespeare's plays. But from different studies it is found that *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew* belong to the earliest period of Shakespeare. The first histories of Shakespeare were based on the corruption and weaknesses of the ruling party and were describing the origins of Tudor Dynasty. His early plays were influenced by the Elizabethan Dramatists like Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd. The

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play *The Comedy of Errors* was based on the classical models. In the early classical and Italianate comedies of William Shakespeare, there is tight double plot and precise comic sequence which gives way to the romantic atmosphere of his most acclaimed comedies in the mid-1590s. The play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is full of fairy magic, comedy, lowlife scenes and romance. In his next comedy *Merchant of Venice*, there is a portrayal of Shylock who is a Jew and a money lender. It is a reflection of the views of Elizabethan writers but appears derogatory to the modern audience.

In the sequence of comedies, Shakespeare had written about wit and wordplay in *Much Ado About Nothing*, about the lively merrymaking in *The Twelfth Night* and about the charming rural setting in *As You Like It*. In the late 1590s, after writing *Richard II*, Shakespeare started writing in verse and introduced prose comedy. He wrote *Henry IV* part one and two and *Henry V*. In these he complicated his characters as the characters were switched between prose and poetry, serious and comedy scenes. In these plays, he has achieved a mature work and experience in narrative variety. In the end of this period Shakespeare wrote two tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, another one is *Julius Caesar*. *Romeo and Juliet* were a famous romantic tragedy in which he wrote about sexually charged adolescence, then love followed by death.

*Julius Caesar* was based on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. It introduced a new type of drama. According to Shakespearean scholar James Shapiro, in *Julius Caesar*, "the various strands of politics, character, inwardness, contemporary events, even Shakespeare's own reflections on the act of writing, began to infuse each other".

Shakespeare wrote problem plays in the early seventeenth century and these were known as the best-known tragedies like *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* etc. Some critics remarked that the tragedies written by Shakespeare represent the peak of his art. The greatest tragedy written by him is *Hamlet* in which the tragic hero Hamlet is discussed more than any other tragedies written by him. Hamlet is shown introvert and his fatal flaw is a hesitation. Other tragic heroes of the Shakespearean tragedies are *King Lear* and *Othello*. In the Shakespearean tragedies, there are fatal flaws and these errors became the reason of the destruction of the heroes of the play and the characters who love the hero. For example, in *Othello*, the villain of the play Iago murders the innocent wife of the hero of the play *Othello* who loves Othello in sexual jealousy with him. In the play *King Lear*, the hero of the play *King Lear* gives up his powers and commits mistakes which lead to the torture of the Earl of Gloucester and in the end, there is a murder of his youngest daughter Cordelia. According to the critic Frank Kermode, 'The play offers neither its good characters nor its audience any relief from its cruelty'. *Macbeth* is considered as the most compressed and

shortest tragedy of Shakespeare in which Macbeth and his wife are incited by their uncontrollable ambition and the lady Macbeth murders the honest and rightful king to usurp the throne. Shakespeare makes use of a supernatural element in this tragic play. Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus are the last major tragedies written by Shakespeare which contains the finest poetry. The critic and the poet T.S. Eliot considered it as the most successful tragedies of Shakespeare.

In the last years of his career, Shakespeare started writing about romance and tragicomedy. In this period, he wrote The Tempest, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tales.

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## 1.6 Critical Appreciation of when to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought

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### When to the sessions of sweet silent thought (Sonnet 30)

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,

For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,

And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,

And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er

The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

All losses are restored and sorrows end.

Paraphrase of the poem:

When in these sessions of gratifying silent thought

I think of the past,

I lament my failure my failure to achieve all that I wanted,

And I sorrowfully remember that I wasted the best years of my life:

Then I can cry, although I am not used to crying.

For dear friends now hid in death's unending night,

And cry again over woes that were long since healed,

And lament the loss of many things that I have seen and loved:

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Then can I grieve over past griefs again,  
And sadly repeat (to myself) my woes  
The sorrowful account of griefs already grieved for,  
Which (The account) I repay as if I had not paid before.  
But if I think of you while I am in this state of sadness, dear friend,  
All my losses are compensated for and my sorrow ends.

This Sonnet 30 was written by William Shakespeare. In this sonnet the poet writes about his failures, griefs and sufferings. He talks about his friends who have died, and he expresses his feelings. He thinks that he had done nothing in his life. But in the end of the sonnet, William Shakespeare writes positive thoughts. He writes that the thoughts of his friends help him in bringing positivity in his life and these thoughts help him in recovering all those things which he had lost in his life. The thinking about his friends helps him in forgetting his miseries of life and mourning over all the bad things that happened in his past life.

Sonnet 30 is one of the first group of 154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare in the first group of sonnets. These sonnets are thought to be about a fair young man. Shakespeare mentioned about this young man in his other sonnets also. He described him as a fair young man who is good looking, gentle, and a person full of all virtues which are never ending. Some people are of the opinion that Shakespeare had a relationship with a homosexual person who was young and beautiful, and he is mentioning that person in his sonnets. But there is also a possibility that Shakespeare simply wanted to describe a male friend and his friendship which was above the so called romantic love between man and woman. The original volume of the sonnet which was published in 1609 is dedicated by the publisher to a Mr. W.H. Some people think that this is the same fair young man who is mentioned in the sonnet. Some of the candidates for W.W. are William Houghton, William Hewes, William Hathaway and with reverse initials it may be Henry Walker, Henry Wriothesley.

Like all 154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare, Sonnet 30 also follows the Shakespearean Sonnet form. This form was based on the Surrey or the English Sonnet form. In this type of sonnets there are fourteen lines which are divided in three quatrains and a couplet. If we have to write down the rhyming scheme of the sonnets, it would be abab cdcd efef gg. This form of Shakespearean sonnet is also known as Petrarchan sonnet form because while using the metrical structure of the English sonnet and Surrey sonnet, Shakespeare usually used the rhetorical form of the Italian form. In this type of sonnet, the sonnet is divided into two parts: one is the octet part and the other is the sestet part. Octet is made up of first eight lines and it usually tells us about the subject and helps in developing

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it. The other part sestet is made up of last six lines and it leads the reader towards the climax. The change which occurs between the end of the eighth line and in the beginning of the ninth line is known as volta. Thus, volta is between the octet and sestet. Shakespeare gave a strong pause at the end of each quatrain usually. In Petrarchan form he suggests placing a chief pause after eighth line in about twenty or so of the sonnets. In about two thirds of the Shakespearean sonnets, there is a chief pause after the twelfth line of the sonnet.

Iambic pentameter is used in almost all the sonnets, as it is here. This is a metre based on five pairs of metrically weak/strong syllabic positions. Occurring after much metrical tension throughout the quatrains, the couplet exhibits a quite regular iambic pentameter pattern:

x / x / x / x / x /

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

x / x / x / x / x /

All losses are restored and sorrows end. (30.13-14)

/ = ictus, a metrically strong syllabic position. x = nonictus.

The first line is a frequent target for metrists, possibly because of the ease with which the initial triple rhythm can be carried right through the line, producing this unmetrical reading:

/ x x / x x / x x /

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought (30.1)

Differences in scansion, however, tend to be conditioned more by metrists' theoretical preconceptions than by differences in how they hear the line. Most interpretations start with the assumption that the syllables in the sequence "-ions of sweet si-" increase in stress or emphasis thus:

1 2 3 4

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

1 = least stress or emphasis, and 4 = most.

Metrists who are most committed to the concept of metrical feet (for example Yvor Winters, W. K. Wimsatt, and Susanne Woods) tend to find a "light" iamb followed by a "heavy" iamb:

1 2 3 4

/ x x / x / x / x /

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

Metrists with a slightly more flexible conception of feet may find either a pyrrhic followed by a spondee, or the four-position minor ionic replacing two iambs. Metrists rejecting feet may find an ictus moving to the right.

Graphically, these stanzas add up to more or less the same thing:

1 2 3 4  
/ x x / x x // x /

## Notes

### When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

The poem *When to the Sessions of Sweet Thought* begins with the thought of the poet about his losses incurred in the past. The speaker in the poem talks about his shortcomings and failures in his life. He also talks about the loss of his lovers and his close friends. The narrator makes use of the financial language and legal language within the words of the sonnet. He makes use of the words like sessions, dateless, summon etc. and many other legal terms. It seems as if the narrator is trying to take meticulous accounts of his personal grievances and trying to add an unhealthy dose of guilt to the proceedings of the poem. The poem or the sonnet is an abstract but with the proceedings, as the remembering process makes it a drama. In almost middle of the poem the tone of the speaker is changed. The speaker begins talking about the restoration and gain felt after the talking about the loss of his dear friend and the ending is with a joyous tone. The Sonnet starts with a gloomy atmosphere as a funeral gloom and then leads towards bankruptcy and ends with a happy ending. Sonnet 30 seems to the readers like a typical Hollywood classic, or rather a classic that Hollywood might dream about.

### Quatrain 1

In first quatrain the first line of the sonnet 'When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought', The phrase sessions of sweet thought tells us that Shakespeare is remembering about the past events of his life. The word session refers to the judge who is sitting in the court of law and the word summon is also a legal word and a court term. Summon means a call by the court or the legal authority to answer a charge or to provide evidence related to the court case. It also means to call a certain quality into action. Shakespeare in this sonnet is recalling his old memories in his mind. There is small pause in the phrase sessions of sweet thought as the poet wants to express his painful feelings rather than sweet emotions. He wants to lay stress on the fact that old memories bring pain and grief to him. In the third and fourth line of the sonnet, the poet regrets as the word sigh is used in the third line which means to lament.

### Quatrain 2

In the second quatrain of the sonnet, the speaker of the poem talks that he is not able to reminiscence his friends by using his own eyes and then he says that his friends are hidden in death's dateless nights. He means to say that his friends are gone long ago and dateless means the time is without any limit and cannot be

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counted. He does not want to say that his friends have died but he just wanted to say that they are hidden in the night and the night is everlasting and it will never end. Some poets describe that the phrase death's dateless nights is a chilling phrase which expresses coldness after the death which is felt by everyone. Further into the quatrain the narrator uses the term cancelled to describe the relationship with past friends, as if the time with them has expired. As if everything in his past has expired or been lost. The phrase Moan the expense is also used to express the moaning of the narrator over what the loss of 'precious friends' and how it costs him in sorrow.

### Quatrain 3

In line nine, in the beginning of the third quatrain, the poet narrates about his sorrows and hardships of his life and mourns over it. The lines from woe to woe tell over is like a metaphor used by the poet to express his griefs, sorrows, failures of life etc. He used this metaphor in such a way that his failures and sorrows are like an account book and he is reading that account book again and again. The word heavily tells us about the pain felt in reading this account book or the poet reads this account book very painfully. The words fore-bemoaned moan is very close to the meaning of the words grievance foregone. These words express the thought of continuous reviewing of the past sorrows and pains of the poet.

### Couplet

The last two lines of the sonnet forms the couplet i.e. the thirteenth and the fourteenth lines of the sonnet end the sonnet in a satisfactory note. In the end of the sonnet the speaker describes that the recollection of his dear friends helps in vanishing the sorrows and woes of his life. The speaker tells us that the memory of his friends gives him joy and it wipes out all of his pain he has suffered on remembering them. The couplet takes away all the frustration, sorrows mentioned in the three quatrains. It states that the mountain of failure can easily be removed by the thought of the beloved. Many people are of the opinion that the couplet of the sonnet is like a jack in the box and it brings the happy and satisfactory ending of the speaker. Some also say that the couplet of Sonnet 30 to be weak, perfunctory, trite and gives an appearance of intellectual collapse.

William Shakespeare wrote about the sorrows of his life in this sonnet. He also expressed his feelings about the death of his dear friend but in the end of the sonnet, he is satisfied by stating that the memories of his friends and near and dear ones help him in bringing happiness in his life. This poem is full of meaning because it is an inclusion in the most famous collection of sonnets in English language. Sonnet 29 which reflects the speaker's position as an outcast and failure has the same thought progression as the sonnet 30. The poet laments that the fortune as not been kind to him. He wishes that the fortune changes a bit.

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## 1.7 Let me not Marriage of True Minds

Over the course of Sonnet 116, the speaker makes a number of passionate claims about what love is—and what it isn't. For the speaker (traditionally assumed to be Shakespeare himself, and thus a man), true love doesn't change over time: instead, it goes on with the same intensity forever. The speaker establishes this argument from the poem's opening lines, boldly declaring that love isn't really love at all if it bends or sways in response to roadblocks. Instead, he argues that love weathers all storms. It's like a star that sailors use to navigate, providing an unmoving reference point they can use to plot their course across the globe. Love, then, is something that perseveres through "impediments," obstacles, and difficulties without losing any of its passion or commitment.

As the poem progresses, the speaker considers more kinds of change and extends his initial argument. In lines 9-10, he adds that true love doesn't falter even as beauty fades—represented in the poem by the image of youthful, rosy cheeks losing their vitality. Because love isn't primarily concerned with the body, it's not affected by aging. In lines 11-12, the speaker generalizes his argument even further by claiming that love doesn't change under any circumstances. It goes on, he claims, "to the edge of doom." In other words, only when a lover dies does love finally change or end.

The speaker is so confident in his argument that he's willing to issue a bet: if he's wrong, then love itself is impossible, and "no man [has] ever loved." In making this bet, he puts up his own behavior as evidence. Here, the speaker acknowledges that he isn't simply an observer of love, but himself a lover. His own relationships might be measured against the standard he's advanced here—and he offers confident assurance that his love does live up to this standard. This means that, beneath the sonnet's generalizations about what love is and isn't, the poem is itself a declaration of love.

At this point it's important to note that this sonnet is part of a sequence of love poems, traditionally believed to be addressed to a young man. Their relationship, as depicted in the Sonnets as a whole, is tumultuous, full of infidelity and gusts of passion. There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to whether this context should affect the interpretation of Sonnet 116. If it doesn't, the poem is a powerful statement about love, addressed to all readers in all times. But if it does, the poem comes across instead as an attempt to repair a damaged relationship, a personal plea directed to a particular person; the speaker is trying to prove to the young man that he does love him in spite of everything, and that his love won't change. For a generous reader, this will be a romantic statement of affection. For a more skeptical reader, it raises some questions. The speaker hasn't just described love as something unchanging; the poem paints a picture

of love as a sort of eternal ideal far from the messy reality of real people's lives: It's a star—unattainable and inhuman. In a way, this image of love ceases to be something that humans can actually build and instead becomes something they can only admire from a distance.

The speaker has engaged in hyperbole to defend his position, invoking all lovers in all times in line 14. This, along with the poem's idealism, might make the speaker feel a bit unreliable; some readers may wonder how realistic the speaker's account of love really is, and find it grandiose instead of intimate. The poem's claims about love can't necessarily be taken on face value, then: they should be evaluated for their sincerity and plausibility—and in these respects, they may be found wanting.

**Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come:  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.**

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 find 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.

*William  
Shakespeare-Sonnet*

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**1. Let me not to the marriage of true minds**

Let me not = Whatever else I agree to, I will not concede that etc.; I will not be forced to admit that.

The negative wish, if that is how it might be best described, almost reads like the poet's injunction against himself to prevent him from admitting something which he was on the point of conceding. Perhaps he was being told frequently by others, and the beloved himself, that love could not last for ever, that there were impediments, that there was change and alteration, loss and physical decay, all of which militate against true love. And finally, as an act of defiance, he insists that it is not as others see it, that love can surmount all these obstacles, that although nothing can last forever, yet true love can last and hold out until the final reckoning.

the marriage of true minds - this suggests a union that is non-physical, Platonic and idealistic. See the introduction above.

true = constant, faithful, unchanging, truthful. Compare Polonius in Hamlet: --to thine own self be true,

And it must follow as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man.

**2. Admit impediments. Love is not love**

Admit = accept, agree that there are; allow to enter or to intrude. By all commentators this is taken to be a clear reference to the marriage ceremony, when the officiating clergyman proclaims: 'I require and charge you, as you will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you do know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, that ye confess it.' However the only word which links this extract from the Marriage Service in The Book of Common Prayer to the sonnet is impediment, which has become the plural impediments here. But the use of marriage in line 1 and impediments immediately following makes the connection almost inevitable.

Love is not love = that sort of love is not true love which etc.

**3. Which alters when it alteration finds,**

Which changes (ceases, becomes unfaithful, becomes less) when it finds a change in the beloved, or a change in circumstances.

**4. Or bends with the remover to remove:**

bends = yields, changes direction, is untrue and inconstant towards a loved one.  
the remover = one who moves, one who shifts his ground, one who changes himself.

to remove = to make oneself different in accordance with the changes in the other person. In this context, the word remove has a rather indefinite meaning, suggestive of moving something or someone out of the way, possibly even suggestive of subterfuge. Compare however:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved

Where I may not remove nor be removed. 25

Not being moved or removed implies eternal constancy and fidelity.

**5. O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,**

an ever-fixed mark = a sea mark, a prominent navigational feature, a beacon, for guidance of shipping. In the days before lighthouses, mariners used well known and prominent features on the land as a guide to fix their position at sea. The spires of coastal churches, towers, outcrops of rock of a particular shape or colour were obvious sea marks. Beacons were no doubt also lit at the entrances to major ports, but there was no widespread network of lighthouses as in modern times. Mostly sailors were highly dependent on local knowledge. The point of the metaphor here is that the ever-fixed mark is permanent and unshakeable, always there as a guide to the storm tossed mariner.

**6. That looks on tempests and is never shaken;**

That looks on tempests - because of their height, the sea-marks would appear to be looking down on the world below, and almost riding above the tempests. Because of their solidity storms had no effect on them.

**7. It is the star to every wandering bark,**

It - i.e. love, as in line 5. Love is both the ever fixed mark and the Pole star to guide the lover through the stormy waters of life.

the star - the most obvious reference is to the Pole or North star. In the Northern hemisphere it always appears to be unmoving in the Northern sky, while all the other stars circle around it. Julius Caesar boasts of being immovable, like the northern star:

But I am constant as the northern star,

Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality

There is no fellow in the firmament.

wandering bark = ship or boat that is wandering and possibly lost. It can identify its position by reference to the Pole star.

**8. Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.**

Whose worth's unknown = the true nature and value of which is unknown. It was not known at the time what the stars were made of, or how they shone, although various theories existed. Modern astronomy cannot be said to begin before the

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eighteenth century, even though Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo had more or less overturned, by Elizabethan times, the Ptolemaic system of an earth-centred universe.

although his height be taken = although its angle of elevation above the horizon could be measured. The height of the Pole star above the horizon at its zenith was a guide to the ship's latitude. The measurement would probably have been done with a quadrant. The sextant was introduced slightly later. (See OED quadrant 5, sextant 3.) The illustration of a quadrant opposite is of one which would be used on land. For sea travelling no doubt much more compact versions were available. his height = the height (angle) of the star. Q gives high, which is probably intended to be highth, a variant form of height.

To take the height of (something) = to measure its position relative to the horizon. The phrase could also be used in a figurative sense meaning 'to assess the importance, quality, type etc. of something'.

### **9. Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks**

Time's fool - In Shakespeare's day readers would probably understand this in terms of the fool employed in large establishments by the nobility, a favoured character whose wit enlivened many a dull day. But their position was probably precarious, and they were liable to physical punishment, or dismissal.

### **10. Within his bending sickle's compass come;**

bending sickle - the sickle had a curved blade, and several meanings of 'bending' are appropriate, as 1.) curved; 2.) causing the grass that it cuts to bend and bow; 3.) cutting a curved swathe in the grass.

compass = scope, the arc of the circle created by the sweep of the sickle. But with a reference back to the nautical metaphors of the previous lines. Time, with his scythe, or sickle, sweeps down the mortal lovers, the rosy lips and cheeks, as if they were blades of grass.

### **11. Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,**

his = Time's. All life is fleeting, and human life is measured by the brief hours and weeks of experience. In comparison with the eternity of love, any unit of time is short.

### **12. But bears it out even to the edge of doom.**

bears it out = endures, continues faithful.

the edge of doom = the last day, the day of judgement, the day of death. doom in Shakespeare can mean a person's death, as it still does in the phrase, to meet one's doom. Or it can be applied to the day of the Last Judgement, or the judgement itself.

If this be error and upon me proved,

If this be error = if my claim that love lasts for ever is erroneous. error also suggests wandering (from the truth), as above in line 7. every wandering bark. From the Latin verb errare - to wander.

upon me proved - a legalistic term, meaning, approximately, 'proved against me'. The combination of this term with that of error possibly implies religious heresy and action taken against it, as for example in the frequent practice used by the Inquisition to compel victims under torture to confess to the error of their ways.

**14. I never writ, nor no man ever loved.**

I never writ = I have never written anything.

nor no man ever loved = and no man has ever loved (even though he believed himself to be in love).

The fact that there is no logical connection between love's eternal status and whether or not the poet has written anything, or men think themselves to be in love, is largely irrelevant, because the poem has by now made its seemingly *irrefutable claim*. The weakness of the concluding couplet does contribute to a slight sense of disappointment, because the preceding lines are so vibrant with life and love. Perhaps this is intentional, in order to underscore the transitory nature of all that we experience, and to show that, despite our grandiose claims to immortality, we all must depart beneath the eternal vault, and love itself paradoxically, though eternal, is part of mortality:

**For the sword wears out the sheath  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself have rest.**

**Summary**

This sonnet is supposed to be addressed to Shakespeare's friend, the Earl of Southampton. He wrote this sonnet to emphasize the consistency of true love and friendship, when the Earl was presumably attracted towards the physical charms of a dark lady.

He begins by saying that true love or friendship never changes. If it happens to change or alter than it is not true love. If a lover leaves his beloved when she gets cold with the coming of age, then he is not a true lover. He compares love to the light house. The waves and sea storms come and strike against the light house but they fail to do any harm to it. It remains firm and continues to guide the ships. In the same way true friendship cannot be broken or shaken away by difficulties of life or other charming diversions. In the second metaphor Shakespeare compares true friendship to the polar star, which is unaffected by time and age and always guides the wandering sailors to come on the right path

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so that they reach at the desired place. In the same way true friendship remains constant and guides the loved one to come back to the right course of life, so as to be able to achieve happiness and the targets of life.

In the third quatrain, the poet hints to the attraction of his friend towards physical charm of a dark mistress. He speaks of the everlasting nature of true friendship which would not wither with time and age. Physical charms would go away with the age and thus the attraction would no longer remain in old age, but true love and friendship is immortal. It does not perish, time is personified here to show that it would easily cut the crop of physical beauty, but it cannot do any harm to true love or friendship, which have their basis in values and not charms. Thus it remains constant till the end of life.

In the concluding couplet, Shakespeare expresses his full faith in the philosophy of love stated in the three quatrains. He says that if his views on true love and friendship are proved wrong then he would conclude that no man ever loved in this world and he would give up all claims to be a poet. So he stresses that true love and friendship is forever.

### Critical Analysis:

It is a typical English sonnet. It has three quatrains and a couplet. Its theme is permanence of love. The thought progresses step by step and concludes with the determined declaration in the couplet. This is the 116th sonnet of the 154 sonnets addressed to a young man, 'Let me not' is addressed to the Youngman, who is supposed to be the Earl of Southampton.

In the sonnet Shakespeare speaks about his philosophy of love. It does not depend on the reaction of the loved one or the external factors. Time, place and physical constraints cannot alter the path of true friendship or love. It is said that Shakespeare was in love with a charming widow, referred to as Dark Mistress. She was physically very beautiful. Shakespeare's friend and patron, the Earl of Southampton was also attracted towards her and turned away from the poet.

Through this sonnet, the poet assures his friend and patron of his constant friendship. He assures that his love is as fixed as a light house and as constant as the pole star and it would be so till his confirmed end. The poet is willing to stake the whole of his literary reputation if in any way his statement is proved wrong.

It is perhaps the most moving sonnet in English language. 'Impediments' recall Shakespeare's - knowledge of the Prayer Book. Lines 7 and 8 show his knowledge of astrology. The rhyme scheme is ab ab, cd cd, ef ef, g g.

### Theme:

There are different shades of love. In this sonnet Shakespeare chooses philosophy and spiritual value of love to put forth his ideas. Time, place and human relations

have their effect on every human activity. Shakespeare is of the opinion that time, place and other diversions like physical charms cannot change true love and friendship. True love triumphs over all hurdles and remains constant throughout life. Nothing can hamper the union of true lovers or friends. Although the body gets weak, is adversely affected by time and age, but love which is really true, remains constant and young as ever. This is an absolute truth.

### Metaphor:

Shakespeare uses metaphors in this sonnet to illustrate and emphasise his point of view. He compares true love or friends to the light house. Sea waves and violent sea storms attack the lighthouse every time, but it remains unmoved and constantly stands fixed. Like wise true love also suffers the vagaries of time and place, but remains fixed. It remains devoted to his lover, as the light house remains faithful to its work of showing the right path to reach the target.

In the same way true love guides a person to achieve target in life. The second metaphor is of pole star. It shines the right path to those sailors who have caught the wrong path, so it brings them on the right path. In the same way love, brings a person on the right track of life.

### Structural Analysis

Sonnet 116 is about love in its most ideal form. It is praising the glories of lovers who have come to each other freely, and enter into a relationship based on trust and understanding. The first four lines reveal the poet's pleasure in love that is constant and strong, and will not "alter when it alteration finds."

The following lines proclaim that true love is indeed an "ever-fix'd mark" which will survive any crisis.

In lines 7-8, the poet claims that we may be able to measure love to some degree, but this does not mean we fully understand it. Love's actual worth cannot be known – it remains a mystery. The remaining lines of the third quatrain (9-12), reaffirm the perfect nature of love that is unshakeable throughout time and remains so "ev'n to the edge of doom", or death.

In the final couplet, the poet declares that, if he is mistaken about the constant, unmovable nature of perfect love, then he must take back all his writings on love, truth, and faith. Moreover, he adds that, if he has in fact judged love inappropriately, no man has ever really loved, in the ideal sense that the poet professes. The details of Sonnet 116 are best described by Tucker Brooke in his acclaimed edition of Shakespeare's poems: [In Sonnet 116] the chief pause in sense is after the twelfth line. Seventy-five per cent of the words are monosyllables; only three contain more syllables than two; none belong in any degree to the vocabulary of 'poetic' diction. There is nothing recondite, exotic, or metaphysical in the thought. There are three run-on lines, one pair of double-endings. There

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is nothing to remark about the rhyming except the happy blending of open and closed vowels, and of liquids, nasals, and stops; nothing to say about the harmony except to point out how the fluttering accents in the quatrains give place in the couplet to the emphatic march of the almost unrelieved iambic feet. In short, the poet has employed one hundred and ten of the simplest words in the language and the two simplest rhyme-schemes to produce a poem which has about it no strangeness whatever except the strangeness of perfection.

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### **1.8 That Time of Year thou Mayst in me Behold**

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Sonnet 73 takes up one of the most pressing issues of the first 126 sonnets, the speaker's anxieties regarding what he perceives to be his advanced age, and develops the theme through a sequence of metaphors each implying something different. The first quatrain, which employs the metaphor of the winter day, emphasizes the harshness and emptiness of old age, with its boughs shaking against the cold and its "bare ruined choirs" bereft of birdsong. In the second quatrain, the metaphor shifts to that of twilight, and emphasizes not the chill of old age, but rather the gradual fading of the light of youth, as "black night" takes away the light "by and by". But in each of these quatrains, with each of these metaphors, the speaker fails to confront the full scope of his problem: both the metaphor of winter and the metaphor of twilight imply cycles, and impose cyclical motions upon the objects of their metaphors, whereas old age is final. Winter follows spring, but spring will follow winter just as surely; and after the twilight fades, dawn will come again. In human life, however, the fading of warmth and light is not cyclical; youth will not come again for the speaker. In the third quatrain, he must resign himself to this fact. The image of the fire consumed by the ashes of its youth is significant both for its brilliant disposition of the past—the ashes of which eventually snuff out the fire, "consumed by that which it was nourished by"—and for the fact that when the fire is extinguished, it can never be lit again.

In this sense, Sonnet 73 is more complex than it is often considered supposed by critics and scholars. It is often argued that 73 and sonnets like it are simply exercises in metaphor—that they propose a number of different metaphors for the same thing, and the metaphors essentially mean the same thing. But to make this argument is to miss the psychological narrative contained within the choice of metaphors themselves. Sonnet 73 is not simply a procession of interchangeable metaphors; it is the story of the speaker slowly coming to grips with the real finality of his age and his impermanence in time.

The couplet of this sonnet renews the speaker's plea for the young man's love, urging him to "love well" that which he must soon leave. It is important to note

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that the couplet could not have been spoken after the first two quatrains alone. No one loves twilight because it will soon be night; instead they look forward to morning. But after the third quatrain, in which the speaker makes clear the nature of his "leav[ing] ere long," the couplet is possible, and can be treated as a poignant and reasonable exhortation to the beloved.

Sonnet 73 is part of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets. Moreover, this sonnet is part of the Fair Youth sequence, a series of poems (from sonnets 1 to 126) that are addressed to an unnamed young man. The Fair Youth sequence has strong romantic language that portrays intense imagery. Particularly, Sonnet 73 focuses on old age and is addressed to a friend (the unnamed young man).

Moreover, Sonnet 73 is a Shakespearean sonnet. This means that the poem has three quatrains and a final rhyming couplet. It has an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme and it is composed in iambic pentameter. The main theme in Sonnet 73 is the process of aging and how the lyrical voice feels about it. Most of the poem is introspective with a pensive tone, but, the final couplet, addresses the unnamed young man directly.

### Summary of Sonnet 73

**Popularity:** Written by William Shakespeare, a renowned English poet, and playwright, "Sonnet 73" is a beautiful composition that compares life with the cosmos. It was first published in 1609. The poem explores the phenomenon of time and the aging. The popularity of the poem lies in the representation of life with time when compared with the whole universe.

**"Sonnet 73" Representative of Life and Time:** As this poem is about the age of life, the poet tells his friend that he needs him the most in his old age when the spring of his life is going to fade away. The speaker illustrates that he has less time to live through vivid imageries such as "winter bough", "twilight's afterglow" and "fire's dying". These imageries reflect that he is heading toward his impending death. Therefore, he imagines himself on deathbed, calling for the love and sympathy of his friend. He sums up the purpose of the revelation of his decreasing powers in the closing couplet, where he requests his friend to love him more when he is on the verge of death. The poem contains an important message that the power of true love can help us to pass the trials of our lives happily.

**Major Themes:** The poem comprises two major themes; love and death. The natural imagery used in the poem develops the idea that death is unavoidable. Heading toward the end of life, the speaker portrays the cycle of life and immortal nature of human beings. Considering man's mortality, he explores the theme of love that will stand despite old age. In fact, he wants his love to understand the transience of life. To him, death will separate them. Therefore, they should make the most of what time has offered them.

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### Analysis of Literary Devices in "Sonnet 73"

Literary devices are tools that represent the writer's idea, feelings, and emotions. It is through these devices the writers make their words appealing to the readers. Shakespeare has also used some literary devices in this poem to discuss the phenomenon of aging and time. The analysis of some of the literary devices used in this poem has been listed below.

**Alliteration:** Alliteration refers to the repetition of the same consonant sounds in the same lines of poetry such as /s/ sound in "Death's second self that seals up all in rest."

**Imagery:** The use of imagery enables readers to understand the writer's feelings and emotions. Shakespeare has used visual imagery such as, "When yellow leaves", "sunset fadeth in the west," "by black night doth", "thou see'st the twilight" and "boughs which shake against the cold."

**Symbolism:** Symbolism is the act of using symbols to signify ideas and qualities, giving them symbolic meanings different from literal meanings. Shakespeare has used symbols such as, "Black night" and "sunset fadeth." Both night and sunset symbolically stand for end or death.

**Consonance:** Consonance is the repetition of the same consonant sounds in the same line such as /b/ sound in "Which by-and-by black night doth take away."

**Personification:** Personification is to attribute human characteristics to inanimate objects. Shakespeare has used personification in the eighth line, "Death's second self, that seals up all in rest" as if the death is human to have a self.

**Metaphor:** Shakespeare has used metaphors at several places in the poem such as, "When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang", "the twilight of such day", "black night" and "glowing of such fire that on the ashes of his youth doth lie." These metaphors convey the late stages of his life. These phrases represent present, past and future time.

**Metonymy:** It is a figure of speech that replaces the name of things with something else with which it is closely associated. Here "bare ruin choirs" substitute the stripped branches.

The closer glimpse of literary analysis reveals that Shakespeare has skilfully projected his ideas about old age and love under the cover of these literary devices.

### Analysis of poetic devices in "Sonnet 73"

Poetic and literary devices are the same, but a few are used only in poetry. Here is the analysis of some of the poetic devices used in this poem.

**Sonnet:** A Shakespearian sonnet consists of fourteen lines made up of three quatrains and one rhyming couplet.

**Quatrain:** A quatrain is a four-lined stanza taken from Persian poetry. Here first three stanzas are quatrains.

**Couplet:** There are two constructive lines in a couplet, usually in the same meter and joined by rhyme. This sonnet ends with a couplet, which usually reveals the central idea of the poem such as,

“This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.”

**Rhyme Scheme:** The rhyme scheme followed by the entire sonnet is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

**End Rhyme:** End rhyme is used to make the stanza melodious. Shakespeare has used end rhyme in this poem such as in the first and second lines of the first stanza the rhyming words are, “behold”, “cold”, “hang” and “sang.”

**Iambic Pentameter:** It is a type of meter consisting of five iambs. This poem comprises iambic pentameter such as, “That time of year thou mayst in me be”

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## 1.9 Textual Analysis

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**That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.**

In the first stanza, the lyrical voice constructs a metaphor in order to characterize the nature of old age. Throughout these first lines, the lyrical voice relates old age to a particular “time of the year”. First, old age is portrayed as autumn, where “yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang”. The lyrical voice suggests that aging is similar to the moment of the year when the leaves have almost completely fallen, the weather is cold, and the birds left their branches. This metaphor emphasizes the harshness and emptiness of old age. This can be read, especially, when the lyrical voice says that “boughs [...] shake against the cold”-and “Bare ruin’d choirs”. Sonnet 73 portrays the lyrical voice’s anxieties towards aging, and, in this particular stanza, the lyrical voice seems to be implying that autumn is the particular time of the year when death occurs. Moreover, the lyrical voice compares his aging process to nature, and, particularly, to autumn.

**In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest.**

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In the second stanza, the lyrical voice compares the process of aging to the twilight. As the lyrical voice feels troubled about aging, he/she uses another metaphor to describe how he/she feels towards old age. The lyrical voice says that old age is similar to the twilight, as it can be seen in him/her ("In me thou seest the twilight of such day"). Then, a particular scenario is described, where the sun fades ("As after sunset fadeth in the west") and night approaches ("Which by and by black night doth take away"). This metaphor emphasizes the gradual fading of youth, as the twilight shifts to night "by and by". Notice that, in the final line, death is directly related to this particular time of the day ("Death's second self") and it is described as the one that brings eternal rest ("seals up all in the rest"). As in the first stanza, these lines portray aging as the end of a cycle. In the previous stanza, this cycle is represented by the different natural seasons, and in this stanza the cycle is represented by the moments of the day.

**In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire  
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.**

In the third stanza, the lyrical voice compares him/herself to ashes. The lyrical voice mentions that there are remains of fire in him/her ("In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire/That on the ashes of his youth doth lie"). This fire represents youth, and, according to the lyrical voice, it will soon be consumed. Again, this metaphor shows the lyrical voice's troubled thoughts about aging. Notice the lyrical voice's emphasis on the consummation of this fire: "As the death-bed wereon it must expire/Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by".

**This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.**

In the final couplet, the lyrical voice defines a purpose. The lyrical voice notices that his/her love for his/her significant other grows stronger, as he/she ages, and despite of the old age. The couplet addresses this young unnamed man from the Fair Youth sequence ("thou"). The lyrical voice tells this young man to strengthen his love and to understand everything that he/she has said throughout the stanzas ("This thou perceives, which makes thy love more strong"). The possibility of dying, the old age, emphasizes the need to love even more than before ("To love that well"), taking into account that he or the loved one could soon part from the world.

In this poem, the speaker invokes a series of metaphors to characterize the nature of what he perceives to be his old age. In the first quatrain, he tells the beloved that his age is like a "time of year," late autumn, when the leaves have almost

completely fallen from the trees, and the weather has grown cold, and the birds have left their branches. In the second quatrain, he then says that his age is like late twilight, "As after sunset fadeth in the west," and the remaining light is slowly extinguished in the darkness, which the speaker likens to "Death's second self." In the third quatrain, the speaker compares himself to the glowing remnants of a fire, which lies "on the ashes of his youth"—that is, on the ashes of the logs that once enabled it to burn—and which will soon be consumed "by that which it was nourished by"—that is, it will be extinguished as it sinks into the ashes, which its own burning created. In the couplet, the speaker tells the young man that he must perceive these things, and that his love must be strengthened by the knowledge that he will soon be parted from the speaker when the speaker, like the fire, is extinguished by time.

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### 1.10 Summary

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William Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564 in Stratford. In Elizabethan era, there was a great variation in the grammar schools. In spite of the variation in the schools, the curriculum of the schools was largely similar. Royal decree standardised the Basic Latin Text. The lifetime of Shakespeare's career can be divided into two places i.e. between London and Stratford. A year before the purchase of New Place in Stratford for his family in 1596, William Shakespeare was living at the north of the River Thames in the parish of Bishopsgate of St. Helen.

At the age of fifty-two years, William Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and before a month of his death, he had signed a will. In this will, he had described himself in perfect health. Most of the playwrights revised the plays of the others and it is believed that Shakespeare also did the same thing. *Titus Andronicus* and the early history plays were under this controversy but *The Lost Cardenio* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are the well attested documentations.

In the sequence of comedies, Shakespeare had written about wit and wordplay in *Much Ado About Nothing*, about the lively merrymaking in *The Twelfth Night* and about the charming rural setting in *As You Like It*. In the late 1590s, after writing *Richard II*, Shakespeare started writing in verse and introduced prose comedy. Shakespeare wrote problem plays in the early seventeenth century and these were known as the best-known tragedies like *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* etc. The greatest tragedy written by him is *Hamlet* in which the tragic hero Hamlet is discussed more than any other tragedies written by him. Sonnet 30 was written by William Shakespeare. In this sonnet the poet writes about his failures, griefs and sufferings. He talks about his friends who have died, and he expresses his feelings. Sonnet 30 is one of the first group of

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154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare in the first group of sonnets. These sonnets are thought to be about a fair young man. Like all 154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare, Sonnet 30 also follows the Shakespearean Sonnet form. This form was based on the Surrey or the English Sonnet form. In this type of sonnets there are fourteen lines which are divided in three quatrains and a couplet. Iambic pentameter is used in almost all the sonnets. This is a metre based on five pairs of metrically weak/strong syllabic positions.

According to the poet the marriage of true minds refers to the union or meeting of two souls who are faithful in love. By this the poet means eternal love which is not affected by circumstances or time but always remains constant. Thus the coming together of true minds unites the lovers forever.

The ever fixed mark is used for light house which stands in the sea. The light house guides ship to follow the correct path. It doesn't leave nor stops its work in spite of attack of sea waves and sea-storms. True love is compared to light house. It signifies love that is fixed or constant and does not change in adverse circumstances. Love which alters is not true love and such relationships developed with weak bonds of love are not pure and do not signify the real nature of love.

The Poet's use of metaphors is evident in the image of the star and the bark. The star refers to the pole star which guides the ships at sea. It helps them to come to right path. It always gives them, whatever may be the conditions. In the same way true love guides lovers in their trials. It doesn't separate them. This comparison symbolizes true love which is firm. The phrase means that love is not a victim of time, and it cannot perish with time. Time destroys all nothing remains forever, as this is the law of nature. But true love is timeless. Time, place and relations cannot destroy them. It is immortal. In contrast, beauty or physical attraction declines with the passage of time but true love and friendship support an individual irrespective of the age. Physical beauty is very much short lived, within few years with increase in age, the physical charms fizzle out i.e. beauty is mortal. Beauty is dependent on age and wears away as time passes. Time has been personified in the sonnet and it is portrayed like an instrument which cuts the crop of physical beauty. Thus time affects appearance of living beings.

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### 1.11 Keywords

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**Quatrain:** It means a stanza of four lines, especially one having alternate rhymes.

**Bubonic Plague:** It is the most common form of plague in humans, characterized by fever, delirium, and the formation of buboes.

**Friar:** It is the member of any of certain religious orders of men, especially the four mendicant orders (Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans).

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## 1.12 Review Questions

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1. Discuss Shakespeare's early life and works.
2. What are sonnets? What kind of sonnets did Shakespeare write?
3. What is the metre and rhyme scheme of Sonnet 30?
4. Critically analyse Shakespeare's Sonnet 30 When To The Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought.
5. How is the use of a 'young man' in sonnets common to Shakespeare's sonnets?
6. Explain the four Quatrains of Shakespeare's Sonnet 30.
7. What does the poet mean by 'the marriage of true minds'?
8. Why does Shakespeare refer to the 'ever fixed mark'?
9. How are the images of star and bark connected with love?
10. Discuss Love's not time's fool'.
11. What is the effect of time on beauty?

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## 1.13 Further Readings

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## John Donne

### (Structure)

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 About the Age
- 2.4 Donne and the Metaphysical School of Poetry
- 2.5 John Donne
- 2.6 Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star by John Donne
- 2.7 Textual Analysis
- 2.8 A Valediction Forbidding Mourning
- 2.9 Analysis of A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
- 2.10 A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning Summary
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- 2.12 Keywords
- 2.13 Review Questions
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### 2.1 Learning Objectives

After studying the chapter, students will be able to:

- To discuss the age of John Donne
- To describe the metaphysical school of poetry and Donne
- To describe the text and analysis of the poem
- To Describe the song : Go and Catch a Falling Star

### 2.2 Introduction

The object of this unit is to acquaint you with the Metaphysical School of Poetry and its pioneer poet John Donne by presenting an elaborate discussion on John Donne's representative poem - The Valediction forbidding mourning. John Donne was born in 1572 in London, England. He is known as the founder of the

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Metaphysical Poets, a term created by Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth-century English essayist, poet, and philosopher. The loosely associated group also includes George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and John Cleveland. The Metaphysical Poets are known for their ability to startle the reader and coax new perspective through paradoxical images, subtle argument, inventive syntax, and imagery from art, philosophy, and religion using an extended metaphor known as a conceit. Donne reached beyond the rational and hierarchical structures of the seventeenth century with his exacting and ingenious conceits, advancing the exploratory spirit of his time. Donne entered the world during a period of theological and political unrest for both England and France; a Protestant massacre occurred on Saint Bartholomew's day in France; while in England, the Catholics were the persecuted minority. Born into a Roman Catholic family, Donne's personal relationship with religion was tumultuous and passionate, and at the center of much of his poetry. He studied at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities in his early teen years.

He did not take a degree at either school, because to do so would have meant subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, the doctrine that defined Anglicanism. At age twenty he studied law at Lincoln's Inn. Two years later he succumbed to religious pressure and joined the Anglican Church after his younger brother, convicted for his Catholic loyalties, died in prison. Donne wrote most of his love lyrics, erotic verse, and some sacred poems in the 1590s, creating two major volumes of work: *Satires* and *Songs and Sonnets*.

In 1598, after returning from a two-year naval expedition against Spain, Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton. While sitting in Queen Elizabeth's last Parliament in 1601, Donne secretly married Anne More, the sixteen-year-old niece of Lady Egerton. Donne's father-in-law disapproved of the marriage. As punishment, he did not provide a dowry for the couple and had Donne briefly imprisoned.

This left the couple isolated and dependent on friends, relatives, and patrons. Donne suffered social and financial instability in the years following his marriage, exacerbated by the birth of many children.

He continued to write and published the *Divine Poems* in 1607. In *Pseudo-Martyr*, published in 1610, Donne displayed his extensive knowledge of the laws of the Church and state, arguing that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their faith. In 1615, James I pressured him to enter the Anglican Ministry by declaring that Donne could not be employed outside of the Church. He was appointed Royal Chaplain later that year. His wife died in 1617 at thirty-three years old shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child, who was stillborn. The *Holy Sonnets* are also attributed to this phase of his life.

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In 1621, he became dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral. In his later years, Donne's writing reflected his fear of his inevitable death. He wrote his private prayers, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, during a period of severe illness and published them in 1624. His learned, charismatic, and inventive preaching made him a highly influential presence in London. Best known for his vivacious, compelling style and thorough examination of mortal paradox, John Donne died in London on March 31, 1631.

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' by John Donne was written by Donne for his wife Anne, in either 1611 or 1612. It was penned before he left on a trip to Europe. It was not published until after his death, appearing in the collection Songs and Sonnets. The poem is divided into sets of four lines, or quatrains. Donne has also structured this piece with a consistent pattern of rhyme, following the scheme of abab. In regards to meter, Donne chose to use iambic tetrameter. This means that each line contains four sets of two beats. Generally, the first of these is unstressed and the second stressed.

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### 2.3 About the Age

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The seventeenth century brought about a change in the intellectual world and a change in the political, social and economic affairs. There was, however, little change in the method of agriculture. Little was now heard of the anti enclosure movement.

Social changes seemed to be little more significant. Aristocracy seemed to be losing its ground. Acquisition of land created the Neo-rich class; they were absorbed into the 'gentry' and not the aristocracy. The remarkable feature of the social structure of this period was 'the rise of the gentry'. The phrase summarizes the multiple movements of society over several generations, whereby many members of the gentry were gaining economically at 'the expense of the peerage'. Corresponding to this notable change was the increasing dominance that the House of Commons began to acquire, climaxed in the Civil War.

These changes had a great impact on literature. Empirical science was a new development of the times. Medieval scholasticism was being replaced by free exercise of reason and judgment.

Copernicus's hypothesis was to change the whole mental horizon in Europe; its immediate effect is not reflected in the literature of the day, for we find Milton building the scheme of Paradise Lost on the old Ptolemaic cosmology, nor do we find Donne discarding it.

What is more interesting is to note the emergence of serious religious issues. University education did not change much. At the undergraduate level, the major

subjects of study were rhetoric, logic and metaphysics; and the teaching was conducted according to the traditional scholastic pattern.

Theology received major attention. Theological controversy divided the students, and Cambridge became the centre of such controversy. Puritan influence did not penetrate Oxford.

Donne was both at Oxford and Cambridge, and nurtured as he was on the principles of Roman Catholicism, he went through a spiritual crisis.

At Oxford, he remained little perturbed, feeding his innate mysticism there.

But, at Cambridge, his close and ingenious logic, which his early Jesuitical leaning had developed proved the undoing of his old faith. He was determined to renounce Catholicism. And the revolt turned into a fact when he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn. The immediate reaction was violent. He broke all bound, and led a dissipated life in London.

In the words of John Donne himself "his age was an age of rusty iron." The period saw colonial expansion. The price-rise continued. Society did not change much. City men invested in land and landowners took to industrial and commercial enterprise. In politics, the climax was the Civil War, followed by the restoration of a monarchy.

London was expanding westwards. Humanism was the most important movement in this period. Besides Humanism, Platonism, Stoicism and Protestant Christianity constituted the basic elements of the intellectual life.

Science began its career in the early 17th century. Medieval scholasticism was being replaced by the exercise of reason. A new philosophy was emerging. Rational spirit was getting stronger. New Philosophy was trying to bring a cultural and intellectual revolution. Out of this medley of scholasticism and the New Philosophy of religious controversies emerged a peculiar metaphysical world.

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## 2.4 Donne and the Metaphysical School of Poetry

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John Donne (1573-1631), a devout churchman and a great preacher of sermons rose to be the Dean of St. Paul's. His early poems are outspokenly erotic and sensual and were published only after his death. His divine poems are equally passionate in expressing his complex and deep religious emotion. Donne is generally considered a rebel in poetry. Impatient of conventions, Donne revolted against the Spenserian tradition both in matter and manner. He did not like its allegory, pastoralism, romantic, chivalric over-rich style and smooth versification. He regarded Spenser's Platonic love a humbug and decided to treat love as a physical appetite honestly and realistically.

Notes

Against Spenser's "heavily brocaded language and the monotonous music of his stanza", Donne deliberately adopted a colloquial language.

Donne's habit of philosophizing, of leading a subject into strange, dim and unexpected vistas of thought earned him the title of 'metaphysical poetry. The ecstasy of union of two souls in love is a simple idea but it is treated in such a way that only a reader gifted with a special sixth sense can grasp it.

Donne was intensely, even violently passionate, and at the same time given to intensive and melancholy meditation. This blend of passion and thought, this integrated sensibility is the distinguishing quality of Donne's poems in which he shows real tenderness are those addressed to his wife.

He employs hyperboles, fanaticism, transition from one extreme to the other, juxtaposition of the trivial and the sublime, of the colloquial and the grandiloquent to arrest attention.

His divine poems show his religious exaltation. The newness of Donne's poetry had a strong appeal to the taste of the time, and was widely practiced from 1630 to 1660. Besides Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and Traherne were the important Metaphysical poets. Before taking our leave of the Metaphysical school of poetry, a word must be said about the term itself. The term 'metaphysical' was first used for Donne by Dryden and was later applied to him and his school by Dr. Johnson in his discussion of Cowley. The term refers to the hair splitting subtlety of Donne's philosophical reasoning. Explaining the term metaphysical, Dr. Johnson writes "The Metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their whole endeavour ... They copied neither nature nor life. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural, they he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perversity of industry they were ever found."

Donne's numerous illnesses, financial strain, and the deaths of his friends all contributed to the development of a more somber and pious tone in his later poems. The change can be clearly seen in 'an Anatomy of the World,' (1611), poem that Donne wrote in memory of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of his patron, Sir Robert Drury.

This poem treats the death of the girl in an extremely morose mood, expanding her death to the Fall of Man and the destruction of the universe.

This change may also be observed in the religious works that Donne began writing during the same period. His early belief in the value of skepticism now gave way to a firm faith in the traditional teachings of the Bible. Having converted to the Anglican Church, Donne focused his literary career on religious poems. The passionate lines of these sermons would come to influence future works of English literature, such as Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls, which took

its title from a passage in Meditation XVII, and Thomas Merton's No man is an Island, which took its title from the same source.

Towards the end of his life Donne wrote works that challenged death, and the fear that it inspired in many men, on the grounds of his belief that those who die are sent to Heaven to live eternally. One example of this challenge is his Holy Sonnet X, from which come the famous lines "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mightily and dreadful, for thou art not so." Even as he lay dying on Lent in 1631, he rose from his sickbed and delivered the Death's Duel sermon, which was later described as his own funeral sermon. Death's Duel portrays life as a steady descent to suffering and death, yet sees hope in salvation and immortality through an embrace of God, Christ and the Resurrection.

**Some characteristics of metaphysical poetry include:**

a tendency to psychological analysis of emotion of love and religion

a penchant for imagery that is novel, "unpoetical" and sometimes shocking, drawn from the commonplace (actual life) or remote (erudite sources), including the extended metaphor of the life "metaphysical conceit" simple diction (compared to Elizabethan poetry) which echoes the cadences of everyday speech. from: frequently an argument (with the poet's lover; with God; with oneself)

meter: often rugged, not "sweet" or smooth like Elizabethan verse. This ruggedness goes naturally with the Metaphysical poets' attitude and purpose: a belief in the perplexity of life, spirit of revolt, and the putting of an argument in speech rather than song.

The best metaphysical poetry is honest, unconventional, and reveals the poet's sense of the complexities and contradictions of life. It is intellectual, analytical, psychological, and bold; frequently it is absorbed in thoughts of death, physical love, and religious devotion.

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## 2.5 John Donne

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Poems so vividly individuated invite attention to the circumstances that shaped them. Yet we have no warrant to read Donne's poetry as a precise record of his life. Donne's career and personality are nonetheless arresting in themselves, and they cannot be kept wholly separate from the general thrust of his writing, for which they at least provide a living context. Donne was born in London between January 24 and June 19, 1572 into the precarious world of English recusant Catholicism, whose perils his family well knew. His father, John Donne, was a Welsh ironmonger. His mother, Elizabeth (Heywood) Donne, a lifelong Catholic, was the great-niece of the martyred Sir Thomas More. His uncle Jasper Heywood headed an underground Jesuit mission in England and,

*John Donne*

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when he was caught, was imprisoned and then exiled; Donne's younger brother, Henry, died from the plague in 1593 while being held in Newgate Prison for harboring a seminary priest. Yet at some time in his young manhood Donne himself converted to Anglicanism and never went back on that reasoned decision.

Donne's father died in January 1576, when young John was only four, and within six months Elizabeth Donne had married John Syminges, an Oxford-educated physician with a practice in London. In October 1584 Donne entered Hart Hall, Oxford, where he remained for about three years. Though no records of his attendance at Cambridge are extant, he may have gone on to study there as well and may have accompanied his uncle Jasper Heywood on a trip to Paris and Antwerp during this time. It is known that he entered Lincoln's Inn in May 1592, after at least a year of preliminary study at Thavies Inn, and was at least nominally a student of English law for two or more years. After sailing as a gentleman adventurer with the English expeditions to Cadiz and the Azores in 1596 and 1597, he entered the service of Sir Thomas Egerton, the lord keeper of England. As Egerton's highly valued secretary he developed the keen interest in statecraft and foreign affairs that he retained throughout his life.

His place in the Egerton household also brought him into acquaintance with Egerton's domestic circle. Egerton's brother-in-law was Sir George More, parliamentary representative for Surrey. More came up to London for an autumn sitting of Parliament in 1601, bringing with him his daughter Ann, then 17. Ann More and Donne may well have met and fallen in love during some earlier visit to the Egerton household; they were clandestinely married in December 1601 in a ceremony arranged with the help of a small group of Donne's friends. Some months elapsed before Donne dared to break the news to the girl's father, by letter, provoking a violent response. Donne and his helpful friends were briefly imprisoned, and More set out to get the marriage annulled, demanding that Egerton dismiss his amorous secretary.

The marriage was eventually upheld; indeed, More became reconciled to it and to his son-in-law, but Donne lost his job in 1602 and did not find regular employment again until he took holy orders more than 12 years later. Throughout his middle years he and his wife brought up an ever-increasing family with the aid of relatives, friends, and patrons, and on the uncertain income he could bring in by polemical hackwork and the like. His anxious attempts to gain secular employment in the queen's household in Ireland, or with the Virginia Company, all came to nothing, and he seized the opportunity to accompany Sir Robert Drury on a diplomatic mission in France in 1612. From these frustrated years

came most of the verse letters, funeral poems, epithalamiums, and holy sonnets, as well as the prose treatises *Biathanatos* (1647), *Pseudo-Martyr*, (1610), and *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611).

In the writing of Donne's middle years, skepticism darkened into a foreboding of imminent ruin. Such poems as the two memorial Anniversaries and "To the Countess of Salisbury" register an accelerating decline of our nature and condition in a cosmos that is itself disintegrating. In "The First Anniversary" the poet declares, "mankind decays so soon, / We are scarce our fathers' shadows cast at noon." Yet Donne is not counseling despair here. On the contrary, the Anniversaries offer a sure way out of spiritual dilemma: "thou hast but one way, not to admit / The world's infection, to be none of it" ("The First Anniversary").

Moreover, the poems propose that a countering force is at work that resists the world's frantic rush toward its own ruin. Such amendment of corruption is the true purpose of our worldly being: "our business is, to rectify / Nature, to what she was" ("To Sir Edward Herbert, at Juliers"). But in the present state of the world, and ourselves, the task becomes heroic and calls for a singular resolution. The verse letters and funeral poems celebrate those qualities of their subjects that stand against the general lapse toward chaos: "Be more than man, or thou'art less than an ant" ("The First Anniversary").

These poems of Donne's middle years are less frequently read than the rest of his work, and they have struck readers as perversely obscure and odd. The poems flaunt their creator's unconcern with decorum to the point of shocking their readers. In his funeral poems Donne harps on decay and maggots, even venturing satiric asides as he contemplates bodily corruption: "Think thee a prince, who of themselves create / Worms which insensibly devour their state" ("The Second Anniversary"). He shows by the analogy of a beheaded man how it is that our dead world still appears to have life and movement ("The Second Anniversary"); he compares the soul in the newborn infant body with a "stubborn sullen anchorite" who sits "fixed to a pillar, or a grave / ... / Bedded, and bathed in all his ordures" ("The Second Anniversary"); he develops in curious detail the conceit that virtuous men are clocks and that the late John Harrington, second Lord of The Good Morrow, *Avalediction Forbidding Mourning, Death Bnot Proud John Donne Exton*, was a public clock ("Obsequies to the Lord Harrington"). Such unsettling idiosyncrasy is too persistent to be merely wanton or sensational. It subverts our conventional proprieties in the interest of a radical order of truth. Donne's reluctance to become a priest, as he was several times urged to do, does not argue a lack of faith. The religious poems he wrote years before he took orders dramatically suggest that his doubts concerned his own unworthiness, his

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sense that he could not possibly merit God's grace, as seen in these lines from Divine Meditations 4:

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack; But who shall give thee that grace to begin? Oh make thyself with holy mourning black, And red with blushing, as thou art with sin.

These Divine Meditations, or Holy Sonnets, make a universal drama of religious life, in which every moment may confront us with the final annulment of time: "What if this present were the world's last night?" (Divine Meditations 13). In Divine Meditations 10 the prospect of a present entry upon eternity also calls for a showdown with ourselves and with the exemplary events that bring time and the timeless together in one order:

Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell, The picture of Christ crucified, and tell Whether that countenance can thee affright.

The Divine Meditations make self-recognition a necessary means to grace. They dramatize the spiritual dilemma of errant creatures who need God's grace in order that they may deserve it; for we must fall into sin and merit death even though our redemption is at hand; yet we cannot even begin to repent without grace. The poems open the sinner to God, imploring God's forceful intervention by the sinner's willing acknowledgment of the need for a drastic onslaught upon his present hardened state, as in Divine Meditations 14:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you

As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend; That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

The force of the petition measures the dire extremity of his struggle with himself and with God's adversary. Donne pleads with God that he too has an interest in this contention for the sinner's soul: "Lest the world, flesh, yea Devil put thee out" (Divine Meditations 17). The drama brings home to the poet the enormity of his ingratitude to his Redeemer, confronting him bodily with the irony of Christ's self-humiliation for us. In Divine Meditations 11 Donne wonders why the sinner should not suffer Christ's injuries in his own person:

Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side, Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,

For I have sinned, and sinned, and only he, Who could do no iniquity, hath died.

Donne's religious poems turn upon a paradox that is central to the hope for eternal life: Christ's sacrificing himself to save mankind. God's regimen is paradoxical, and in Divine Meditations 13 Donne sees no impropriety in entreating Christ with the casuistry he had used on his "profane mistresses" when he assured them that only the ugly lack compassion: so I say to thee,

To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned, This beauteous form assures a piteous mind.

In *Divine Meditations* 18 he resolves his search for the true Church in a still bolder sexual paradox, petitioning Christ as a “kind husband” to betray his spouse to our view so that the poet’s amorous soul may “court thy mild dove”: “Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then / When she is embraced and open to most men.” The apparent indecorum of making the true Church a whore and Christ her complaisant husband at least startles us into recognizing Christ’s own catholicity. The paradox brings out a truth about Christ’s Church that may well be shocking to those who uphold a sectarian exclusiveness.

Wit becomes the means by which the poet discovers the working of Providence in the casual traffic of the world. A journey westward from one friend’s house to another over Easter 1613 brings home to Donne the general aberration of nature that prompts us to put pleasure before our due devotion to Christ. We ought to be heading east at Easter so as to contemplate and share Christ’s suffering; and in summoning up that event to his mind’s eye, he recognizes the shocking paradox of the ignominious death of God upon a Cross: “Could I behold those hands, which span the poles, / And turn all spheres at once, pierced with those holes?” (“*Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward*”). An image of Christ’s degradation is directly imposed upon an image of God’s omnipotence. We see that the event itself has a double force, being at once the catastrophic consequence of our sin and the ultimate assurance of God’s saving love. The poet’s very journey west may be providential if it brings him to a penitent recognition of his present unworthiness to gaze directly upon Christ:

O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree; I turn my back to thee, but to receive Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave. O think me worth thine anger, punish me, Burn off my rusts, and my deformity, Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace, That thou mayest know me, and I’ll turn my face.

A serious illness that Donne suffered in 1623 produced a still more startling poetic effect. In “*Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness*” the poet presents his recumbent body as a flat map over which the doctors pore like navigators to discover some passage through present dangers to tranquil waters; and he ponders his own destination as if he himself is a vessel that may reach the desirable places of the world only by negotiating some painful straits:

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem? Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar, All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them.

By this self-questioning he brings himself to understand that his suffering may itself be a blessing, since he shares the condition of a world in which our ultimate

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bliss must be won through well-endured hardship. The physical symptoms of his illness become the signs of his salvation: "So, in his purple wrapped receive me Lord, / By these his thorns give me his other crown." The images that make him one with Christ in his suffering transform those pangs into reassurance. In Donne's poetry, language may catch the presence of God in our human dealings. The pun on the poet's name in "" registers the distance that the poet's sins have put between himself and God, with new kinds of sin pressing forward as fast as God forgives those already confessed: "When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For, I have more." Then the puns on "sun" and "Donne" resolve these sinful anxieties themselves:

**I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun**

**My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;**

But swear by thy self, that at my death thy son Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore; And, having done that, thou hast done, I fear no more.

For this poet such coincidences of words and ideas are not mere accidents to be juggled with in jest. They mark precisely the working of Providence within the order of nature.

The transformation of Jack Donne the rake into the Reverend Dr. Donne, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, no longer seems bizarre. To impose such clear-cut categories upon a man's career may be to take too rigid a view of human nature. That the poet of the Elegies and Songs and Sonnets is also the author of the Devotions and the sermons need not indicate some profound spiritual upheaval. One reason for the appeal of Donne in modern times is that he confronts us with the complexity of our own natures.

Donne took holy orders in January 1615, having been persuaded by King James himself of his fitness for a ministry "to which he was, and appeared, very unwilling, apprehending it (such was his mistaking modesty) to be too weighty for his abilities." So writes his first biographer, Izaak Walton, who had known him well and often heard him preach. Once committed to the Church, Donne devoted himself to it totally, and his life thereafter becomes a record of incumbencies held and sermons preached.

Donne's wife died in childbirth in 1617. He was elected dean of St. Paul's in November 1621, and he became the most celebrated cleric of his age, preaching frequently before the king at court as well as at St. Paul's and other churches. 160 of his sermons have survived. The few religious poems he wrote after he became a priest show no falling off in imaginative power, yet the calling of his later years committed him to prose, and the artistry of his Devotions and sermons at least matches the artistry of his poems.

The publication in 1919 of Donne's *Sermons: Selected Passages*, edited by Logan Pearsall Smith, came as a revelation to its readers, not least those who had little taste for sermons. John Bailey, writing in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1920), found in these extracts "the very genius of oratory ... a masterpiece of English prose." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in *Studies in Literature* (1920), judged the sermons to include "the most magnificent prose ever uttered from an English pulpit, if not the most magnificent prose ever spoken in our tongue."

Over a literary career of some 40 years Donne moved from skeptical naturalism to a conviction of the shaping presence of the divine spirit in the natural creation. Yet his mature understanding did not contradict his earlier vision. He simply came to anticipate a Providential disposition in the restless whirl of the world. The amorous adventurer nurtured the dean of St. Paul's.

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## 2.6 Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star by John Donne

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'Song: Go and catch a falling star' by John Donne is a three stanza poem that is separated into sets of nine lines. The lines follow a consistent rhyme scheme, conforming to the pattern of ABABCCDDD. The lines also stick to a syllable pattern that changes within the different sets of rhyme. For example, the first four lines are the same, with seven syllables. The next two contain eight, then there are two syllable lines. Finally the stanza ends with a seven syllable line. This is a very unusual pattern that works best if read aloud. The fact that Donne titled this piece 'Song...' makes it clear that it was meant to be read, or sung.

Throughout the poem Donne employs a light and sometimes humorous tone. He is annoyed by the general theme of the poem, the inconstancy of women, but seems to have come to terms with it. He speaks as though this is just how things are, and one must make the best of a constantly bad situation.

While this piece does not feature the characteristics of metaphysical conceit found in other of Donne works, there is an interesting comparison presented between the stanzas. He compares the impossibility of something like catching a star to finding a honest and beautiful woman. While a clear exaggeration, it appears to be the speaker's own true belief that he'll never come upon a woman who will treat him fairly and not run off with someone else.

### Summary of Song: Go and catch a falling star

'Song: Go and catch a falling star' by John Donne tells of a speaker's belief that there are no women in the world who are to him both beautiful and faithful. In the first lines of this piece the speaker begins by giving the reader a number of impossible tasks. These include catching a "falling star" and teaching him how to "hear mermaids singing." It is not until the second stanza that one comes to

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realize that Donne is comparing these impossibilities to the locating of a beautiful and faithful woman. He believes that one is just as likely to figure how why the devil's foot is cleft as find a woman who has both of these traits.

The speaker goes on to tell the listener that if one were to venture into the strange unknown, they would come across endless wonders, but not a woman who would please him in totality. In the last stanza he explains how if he thought that such a woman did exist that he's suffer to find her. He'd go on a pilgrimage and do anything he had to. The speaker does not believe it is really possibly though. In fact, he states that one might think they've found a woman of his liking but she would eventually turn out to be "False."

John Donne enforced a tight structure on his song *Go and Catch a Falling Star* (1630), with three stanzas each containing sestets with a rhyme scheme of ababcc and concluding with a rhyming triplet. That controlled format contrasts with the light tone used throughout, appropriate to a song about romance. However, as might be expected from Donne, the lyrical approach is undercut by a cynicism regarding the constancy of women. The speaker suggests that women who can be trusted are rare in lines Donne uses ironically to mimic the serious romance poetry of his age.

The first stanza begins with an order, the imperative, *Go and catch a falling star*, an obviously impossible task but presented as if it could be accomplished. The second line, "Get with child a mandrake root," appears nonsensical, but Donne is probably referring to the mandrake root because of the mythology that surrounded it. In fables the mandrake took on human characteristics. Its three-to four-foot brown root mimicked the shape of a human, was said to scream when jerked from the ground, and in medieval times was said to be used in witchcraft. Old drawings often depicted the root as male or female, depending on the number of branches it bore. The mandrake produced flowers that developed into fruit, nicknamed "Satan's apples."

The allusion to Satan connects the plant imagery with the next two lines: "Tell me where all past years are, / Or who cleft the devil's foot." The gently taunting voice continues with mythological references, "Teach me to hear mermaids singing, / Or to keep off envy's stinging."

Because mermaids were believed to be halfwoman and half-beast and to lure sailors to their death, the theme of temptation, supported by the devil imagery, extends through those lines. Feminist critics would later find interesting the presumably male speaker's requesting that a female teach him to hear the mermaid's deadly song, "Or," conversely, teach him not to be jealous in resisting the sting of envy. That male attitude contradicts the attitude of distrust found in the remainder of the stanza.

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However, if the reader accepts that Donne's topic was the inconstancy of women, the idea of a dishonest female's tempting man may also be suggested through irony in the final rhyming triplet, "And find / What wind / Serves to advance an honest mind." Things carried on the wind proved insubstantial, suffering a fleeting existence, conditions the speaker bestows on honesty in a female.

In the second stanza, Donne continues his suggestion of the mystical as the speaker declares, *If thou be'st born to strange sights, Things invisible to see, Ride ten thousand days and nights, Till age snow white hairs on thee.* He parodies the theme of eternal love found in traditional romance poetry with the use of an enormous number to illustrate the lengths to which a true lover's dedication extends.

Appropriate to the work of the metaphysical poets and poetry, Donne inserts a surprising use of words, converting the adjective and noun phrase snow white hairs to a verbal, with "hairs" becoming a verb suggesting aging over time. The line might be paraphrased, "Until age, which is snow white, places hairs on thee." The speaker mocks his listener through repetition of the term thou in the next line, noting that when she returns, she must tell him her tale: "Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me, / All strange wonders that befell thee."

He may ironically suggest that, because of her inconstancy, she is not likely to return, and if she does, she will lie about the "strange wonders" that drew her away. Donne then makes another skillful turn as the speaker concludes, "And swear / No where / Lives a woman true and fair." He suggests that out of all the wonders his listener observed over the thousand days, one of those was not a constant woman; she does not exist, even as a curiosity.

At the beginning of the final verse, Donne keeps alive hope for the discovery of a faithful woman, which would be a highly valued goal for any long journey: "If thou find'st one, let me know, / Such a pilgrimage were sweet." By using the term pilgrimage, he evokes thoughts of religion or a spiritual creed requiring a quest. However, the speaker declares that while his listener might travel far for such a prize, he would not even step next door to meet such a woman should the traveler write to him of her existence, as she would probably have changed by the time he arrived. Thus, no news of that discovery need be sent to the speaker:

Yet do not, I would not go,  
 Though at next door we might meet,  
 Though she were true, when you met her,  
 And last, till you write your letter

The stanza ends with another simple, but this time more forceful, triplet that leaves no doubt regarding woman's inherent temperament: "Yet she / Will be /

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False, ere I come, to two, or three." Because the last stanza deals with a search for a woman, a traditional prize of classic and medieval quests, Donne may suggest the speaker addresses a man in the final stanza, rather than the woman he has addressed in the first two stanzas.

However, his sense of irony could be strengthened were a woman sent on the "pilgrimage," as the woman embarking on the search would not be a "true" one. In his song, Donne comes full circle. He began urging his listener to attempt an impossible feat, that of catching a star in the process of falling. He concludes by warning that same listener that as soon as one believes a true woman has been located, she will also fall, quicker than "one, two, three," disproving his theory that an honest woman exists.

### 2.7 Textual Analysis

**Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root,  
Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the devil's foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,  
Or to keep off envy's stinging,  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.**

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins by telling the listener to "Go and catch a falling star." It is for this line that the poem is best known and is only the first representative of the outlandish tasks the speaker sets out. The next is to "Get with child," or impregnate, a "mandrake root." Both of these statements have a magical mood about them. The mandrake root is commonly associated with witchcraft or hallucinogens.

He goes on to ask the listener to "Tell" him facts about the past, an impossibility as no one can truly know history. The next statement refers to the "cleft" in the devil's foot. He wants to know how it got there, or more simply, how it was decided which form the devil was to take.

In the next section of the first stanza he asks the listener to teach him to "hear mermaids singing" or alternatively how to "keep off envy's stinging." There is an interesting contrast in these requests between personal need and personal interest. In the final tercet of rhyming lines he adds that he wants to know what

makes people honest. What "wind" or for what reason are some people honest and some deceitful.

*John Donne*

**If thou be'st born to strange sights,  
Things invisible to see,  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age snow white hairs on thee,  
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,  
All strange wonders that befell thee,  
And swear,  
No where  
Lives a woman true, and fair.**

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In the second stanza he reveals the true purpose of this piece, to complain about the unfair way he has been treated by women. He expresses his belief that there are no women who are "true, and fair" or honest and beautiful, in the world. In the first lines he tells the listener that maybe if "thou be'st born to strange sight." Or more simply, if you are used to seeing unbelievable things, then you should "Ride ten thousand days and nights" and seek as many "strange wonders" as can be found.

He believes that anyone who attempted this would have to ride until their hair turned white and still they would not come upon a woman "true, and fair." It is interesting to consider how the speaker came to this conclusion. It is not clear why he believes this to be the case, but obviously something in his past tuned his mind in this direction. He is having trouble finding love, or perhaps he doesn't believe in love at all.

**If thou find'st one, let me know,  
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;  
Yet do not, I would not go,  
Though at next door we might meet;  
Though she were true, when you met her,  
And last, till you write your letter,  
Yet she  
Will be  
False, ere I come, to two, or three.**

In the final nine lines of 'Song: Go and catch a falling star' the speaker states that if "thou find'st" a woman who is both of these things, true and fair, then

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he will go on a "pilgrimage" to find her. He would suffer if there was a chance he could find the perfect partner. He knows that this isn't going to be the case though so he does not go.

The speaker states that there is always the possibility that a woman who seems true and fair comes to him, but he thinks more than likely that "she / Will be / False" eventually.

There might be a period of time before the realization comes to pass, but he knows that it eventually will. These lines are clearly problematic from a contemporary prospective. Donne does not explain what flaws these women have nor does he include women who are not to him beautiful. He therefore separates women into two categories, those who are beautiful and faithful and those who are ugly and not worth considering.

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## 2.8 A Valediction Forbidding Mourning

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'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' presents a unique approach of a lover to the event of his separation from his beloved. This poem by John Donne has been addressed to his wife Anne More. To pacify her before leaving for a journey, he tells her that their love is unlike that of usual lovers. He tries to convince her that separation would not affect their love for one another even a bit.

At the beginning of the poem, he presents his desire that he and his beloved should get separated very gently without marking the occasion with tears or sighs. He says that the common people could not even understand the quality of their love. So, showing their feeling to the people would be like disrespecting the feelings. He compares an earthquake to the regular movement of the heavenly bodies to show the contrast between feelings of the usual lovers to their own. He states that an earthquake causes lots of harm and fear.

The destruction it caused causes harm and the possibility that it could have caused even more destruction causes fear. Similarly, the physical love in which generally lovers get involved causes lots of feelings which torture the lovers. On the other hand, the movement of heavenly bodies takes place at much greater scale but causes no harm or fear. In the same manner, the platonic love he and his beloved experience is innocent. Their feelings provide only relief.

Donne is famous for writing metaphysical poetry. Many of us know famous example of compass, which is from "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". If Donne has gained fame in the world of metaphysical poetry then this poem is the main reason behind it. Donne summarizes the concept of spiritual love in this poem. He does not only prove that spiritual love is better but also

differentiates it from lust. Donne juxtaposes worldly love to the spiritual love and then through arguments demonstrates that there is no match of spiritual love in this world. He also elaborates experiences of his life as some biographical elements are also there in the poem. He convinces his readers to distinguish spiritual love from lust and develop passions of love. Moreover, this poem is evident that Donne is a man of letters as far as his knowledge to metaphysical poetry is concerned.

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### **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning-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:

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.

## Notes

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

'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' by John Donne describes the spiritual and transcendent love that Donne and his wife Anne shared.

The poem begins with the speaker describing the death of a virtuous man. He goes to the afterlife peacefully, so much so that his friends are not sure if he is dead or not. Donne compares this kind of peaceful parting to the way he and his wife will separate. Rather than throwing an emotional fit, as a shallow couple would, they "melt" from one another.

In a similar metaphor Donne also compares their love to the movement of the "celestial spheres." Even though these moments are invisible to those on earth, they are much more powerful than the highly visible "Moving of th' earth." The next analogy shows how their parting would be an "expansion" rather than a "breach." Their love will stretch, like gold leaf pounded thin.

The poem concludes with the well-known conceit comparing love to a drafting compass. Donne states that his wife is the leg that holds the steady, fixed point while he "roam[s]." It is due to her steadfastness that he always finds his way back.

### Themes

As was common within Donne's poetry, there are pervading themes of death, the celebration of love and spirituality in this text. In regards to love, Donne spent the majority of the text trying to define what his love is like. Donne utilizes a number of images and analogies, which will be discussed later in this analysis, that accomplish this.

By the time the speaker gets to the end, he has come to the conclusion that no matter where he is, their love will live on.

The theme of spirituality is intimately connected with that of love. Donne's speaker, who is certainly Donne himself, declares the love he shares with his partner to be spiritual in nature. It goes beyond that which ordinary people experience. This means it can overcome any mundane barrier life throws at it.

The first lines of the text bring up death. He describes a group of friends who are gathered around the death bed of a "virtuous" man. They are discussing amongst themselves when this person is going to die, and which breath might be his last. By utilizing death to later speak on life, Donne is tapping into the tradition of Carpe Diem poetry. These types of poems promote a way of living that keeps in mind the ever present prospect of death.

### Images and Conceits

One of the most important and recognizable images associated with 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' is that of a compass. It appears towards the end of the text, in line 26. It is important because it symbolizes the strength of their relationship, but also the balance that exists between the speaker and his wife.

Donne describes the compass as being "stiff" with a "fixed foot," this is his wife's part of the metaphor. She remains stationary while her husband, the speaker, "roam[s]" around. It is due to her steadfastness that he always finds his way back home. The speaker clearly sees this conceit, or comparison between two very unlike things, as a romantic. One should take note of the fact that the speaker's loyalty to his wife seems to hinge on her placidity. If she were to "roam" the entire balance would be thrown off.

Another image that is important to the text appears throughout the first half of the poem, that of natural, disastrous weather patterns. The first time one of these disasters is made clear is in the fifth line with the mention of a "flood" and a "tempest," or powerful storm. In this instance the weather is being used to show the exaggerated emotions of lesser love. The couple he is imagining cries and sighs outrageously as if hoping someone will take note of their passion.

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## 2.9 Analysis of A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

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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:

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In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins with an image of death. He is speaking on the death of a man who is "virtuous." Due to his good nature his death comes peacefully. Donne compares dying in this instance to "whisper[ing]" one's soul away. There is nothing traumatic about it.

"Whisper" is a perfect example of onomatopoeia. The word sounds or resembles the noise it represents. The dying man is not alone. There are "sad friends" around his bed who are unable to decide whether or not the man is dead. His final moments are so peaceful that there is no sign to tell the onlookers the end has come. They speak to one another asking if "The breath goes now" or not.

**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 second stanza might come as something of a surprise to readers unused to Donne's complicated use of conceit. Rather than explaining what the first stanza was all about, it adds on additional information.

The speaker is comparing the peaceful death of a virtuous man to the love he shares with the intended listener. When they separate they do so without the "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests" of the shallow. Donne's speaker sees the way other partners are around one another and knows his relationship is better.

He and his partner would never be so crass as to expose their emotions to the "laity" or common people. It is something they keep to themselves. He states that it would be a "profanation," or disgrace to their "joy" to expose it. They will "make no noise" and remain on the high ground above those involved in lesser loves.

**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 third stanza introduces another image of natural disaster, the "Moving of th' earth" or an earthquake. It is something unexpected and unexplained. Earthquakes also bring along "harms and fears." These lines have been added to emphasize the absurdity of making a big deal over the speaker's departure.

The next two lines are a bit more obscure.

They refer to the celestial spheres, or concentric circles, in which the moon, stars and planets moved. Although they are sectioned off, they still shake and vibrate in reaction to other events. Here the speaker is describing their "trepidation," or shaking.

It is a greater shaking than that which an earthquake is able to inflict but it is unseen, innocent. This is another metaphor for how the speaker sees his relationship. It is not the showy earthquake but the much more powerful shaking of the celestial spheres.

**Dull sublunary lovers' love**

**(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit**

**Absence, because it doth remove**

**Those things which elemented it.**

The speaker returns to describing the lesser love of others in the fifth stanza. It is "Dull" and it is "sublunary," meaning it exists under the moon rather than in the sky. Those who participate in these relationships are driven by their senses. The "soul" of the relationship is based on what one's senses can determine. Physical presence is of the utmost importance to these loves. They "cannot admit / Absence" because it "doth remove" the entire relationship. Everything shallow lovers have with one another is based on touch and sight.

**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.**

The fifth stanza provides a contrast to the fourth. He returns to his own relationship and speaks of himself and his wife as "we." They have a "refined" or well-tuned and highbrow relationship. Their love is so beyond the physical world that they, physical beings, have trouble understanding it. They "know not what it is."

The next two lines reiterate the fact that the love the speaker and his wife have is spiritual. It is more mental than it is physical. This means they are "Inter-assured of the mind" and do not care for the "eyes, lips, and hands." When they part these are not the elements they will miss about one another.

**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.**

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The sixth stanza begins with a fairly straightforward and recognizable declaration about marriage. They might have two separate souls but now they act as "one." It is due to this fact that when they part, they will not "endure" a "breach, but an expansion." Their love will stretch as gold does when it is beaten thin. It is the same, even when pushed to the limit.

It is also important to take note of the fact that Donne chose to use gold as a representative of their love. He recognizes the elements of his relationship in its durability and beauty.

**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.**

It is at this point in the piece that the image of the compass, as discussed in the introduction, becomes important. First, Donne goes back on his previous statement about their "oneness." He knows there might be some doubt of their "inter-assured" relationship so he makes this concession. "If they," meaning himself and his wife, are "two" then they are the two legs of a compass.

Donne speaks of his wife as being the "fixed foot" of the device. She has the steady "soul" that remains grounded and never makes a "show / To move." His wife only moves if "the other do," meaning himself.

**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.**

In the eighth stanza the movement of the fixed foot is further described. Initially it is in the centre of their world, everything revolves around it. Then, if the other leg, the one compared to Donne, decides to "roam" far into the distance, it leans. This is the only movement that his wife makes. When he needs her to she "hearkens" after him then straightens up again, or "grows erect" when he comes home or returns to the fixed point.

**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 final four lines describe the metaphor in full, just in case any part of the compass analogy was in doubt. The speaker is very much addressing his lines to his wife. He tells her that she will be to him the line that brings him back in. She has a "firmness" that makes his "circle just," or keeps it within a limited area. No matter what he does or where he roams, she will always get him back to where he began.

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### 2.10 A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning Summary

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Autobiographically, Donne was leaving for France. He was passionately in love with his wife Anne Moore; therefore, when he said final good-bye to his wife, tears came in her eyes. Donne has quoted this incident in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". Valediction means farewell. At the time of departure, many people express their love through tears. Anne Moore was also doing the same but Donne asked her not to do so. He then praises the beauty of their relationship which is not based on lust but love; that too spiritual. Due to witty subject, and examples of the poem, Grierson regards "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" "the tenderest of Donne's love poems."

Donne starts the poem while talking about pious people. When "virtuous men passe", they leave the world gently without any mourning and crying; their souls very politely leave their bodies and depart to the next world. Donne in indirect words wants to say that virtuous people has no fear of death; they face it and accept it openheartedly. As compared to them, other people fear from death and want to stay more; some of them even want to live in this world forever. Donne then draws readers' attention towards his own situation. He also wants to go away but he does not want any noise nor does he want to disclose his situation. Although, farewell is painful yet crying and shedding tears are against the law of pure love; therefore, he advises his lover not to shed tears on his departure.

Donne's scientific approach and his wit are the key factors of his poetry. In third stanza of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", he talks about the laws of universe; unexpected movement of earth is harmful for the people. It always creates fear and even when it does not damage anything. On the other hand, if earth rotates smoothly then it does not scare the people, as they do not know the hidden laws.

Donne talks about common love; "Dull sublunary lovers love". He hates the lowly love of humans. According to him, it is full of lust. Apparently, people are in love with each other but this is not what he calls love; Donne calls it lust as it is only based on adultery. There is a comparison between two love forms in fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem. In fourth stanza, the poet speaks about worldly love but in fifth stanza, he praises the beauty of spiritual love, as his

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love is also spiritual. Donne says that for lowly worldly people, separation is a difficult task but for spiritual-lovers, it is not. They remain connected even when they go away from each other. Thus, it is impossible to separate two lovers.

Donne has never appreciated physical beauty of women. When he talks about love, he always prefers spiritual love. Worldly love is just the appreciation of hairs, cheeks, lips and height of a woman. Spiritual love, on the other hand, is difficult to understand. This is why the poet says: "That ourselves know not what it is". However, he believes that his love is extraordinary; it is pure and holy and the same is spiritual. In absence of his beloved, passion of love will not decrease; rather it will increase day-by-day. Poet's passions are far away from sexuality. Physical separation, thus, does not matter in his love because it is not physical. Moreover, the poet is hopeful to meet again. It is, therefore, he suggests his beloved not to mourn on his valediction.

The poet through a simile shows the importance of his love to his beloved as well as to the readers. He, in this poem, again talks about unity; both the lovers when deeply fall in love become one instead of two; dividing them is a fruitless task. The poet says that his departure is like gold; when gold is beaten, it turns "ayery thinnesse"; therefore, he carries more space. Gold actually is a symbol of love. When the poet will leave his beloved, his presence could be felt anywhere. Thereby, instead of going away, he will come closer to his beloved. In seventh stanza, the poet adds an incredible example of a compass. He says that he and his beloved are two feet of a compass, who temporarily go away from each other but they are unable to be divided.

These stanzas are continuation of seventh stanza. Donne has presented a relationship between two lovers very beautifully. He, through examples and arguments, very easily convinces his readers. Numbers of critics have appreciated the conceit of a compass, through which John Donne has simplified the emotions of love. When he says something; readers believe in it. Donne has rightly said that the relation between two spiritual lovers is similar to a compass. No matter how far they go, ultimately, they have to return. Donne is going somewhere in France but definitely, he will return and that moment will be the happiest moment for his beloved. They started their love from a point and like a compass, they would return to the same place.

"Thy firmness makes my circle just, And makes me end, where I begunne." John Donne To conclude, Donne's whole poetry is metaphysical. This kind of poetry focuses on conceits. In this poem, variety of conceits is available. Apart from gold and virtuous men, compass is worth mentioning. Donne has also used the technique of hyperbole in this poem. He is a scholar; therefore, lines of the poem are argumentative in nature. In fact, whole poem is based on arguments. At last

but not the least, this poem proves that John Donne is best metaphysical poet in the history of English Literature.

*John Donne*

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## 2.11 Summary

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The speaker directs a listener to do a number of impossible things: to catch a falling star, to impregnate a mandrake root, to find what happens to time that has passed, to discover who divided the devil's hoof into two parts, to teach him to hear the songs of mermaids or to avoid ever feeling envy, and, finally, to discover the favorable wind that might push a truthful and faithful person onward.

If the listener was born with power to see mysterious and invisible things, the speaker continues, then he should go on an impossibly long quest of ten thousand days, until he has become an old man and his hair has gone white. When he comes back from this journey, he'll have all kinds of stories about the magical things he saw, but he'll swear that among them all, he never saw a woman who was both faithful and beautiful. If the listener does find such a woman, he should tell the speaker: it would be wonderful to journey to meet her. But no: the speaker changes his mind. He wouldn't go to meet this imaginary woman even if she lived next door. Because even if she were faithful when the listener met her, and stayed faithful long enough for the listener to write the letter describing her to the speaker, she'd inevitably have cheated on two or three lovers by the time the speaker got to her.

The speaker opens with an image of good men dying quietly, softly urging their souls to leave their bodies. These virtuous deaths are so imperceptible that the dying men's friends disagree about whether or not the men have stopped breathing yet.

The speaker argues that he and the lover he's bidding farewell to should take these deaths as a model, and part ways silently. They should not give in to the temptation to weep and sigh excessively. In fact, grieving so openly would degrade their private love by broadcasting it to ordinary people.

Natural earthly disturbances, such as earthquakes, hurt and scare human beings. Ordinary people notice these events happening and wonder what they mean. However, the movements of the heavens, while being larger and more significant, go unnoticed by most people.

Boring, commonplace people feel a kind of love that, because it depends on sensual connection, can't handle separation. Being physically apart takes away the physical bond that their love depends on.

The speaker and his lover, on the other hand, experience a more rare and special kind of bond. They can't even understand it themselves, but they are linked

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mentally, certain of one another on a non-physical plane. Because of this, it matters less to them when their bodies are apart. The souls of the lovers are unified by love. Although the speaker must leave, their souls will not be broken apart. Instead, they will expand to cover the distance between them, as fine metal expands when it is hammered. If their souls are in fact individual, they are nevertheless linked in the way the legs of a drawing compass are linked. The soul of the lover is like the stationary foot of the compass, which does not appear to move itself but actually does respond to the other foot's movement.

This stationary compass foot sits in the center of a paper. When the other compass foot moves further away, the stationary foot changes its angle to lean in that direction, as if longing to be nearer to its partner. As the moving foot returns, closing the compass, the stationary foot stands straight again, seeming alert and excited.

The speaker's lover, he argues, will be like his stationary foot, while he himself must travel a circuitous, indirect route. Her fixed position provides him with the stability to create a perfect circle, which ends exactly where it began—bringing the speaker back to his lover once again.

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### 2.12 Keywords

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valediction (n.): farewell.

mourning (n.): mourning is behavior which you show sadness about a person's death.

virtuous (adj.): if you describe someone as virtuous, you mean that they behave in a moral and correct way.

tempest (n.): violent storm.

profanation (n.): treat a sacred thing with irreverence or disregard.

laity (n.): lay people, as distinct from the clergy.

reckon (v.): consider, regard or take into account.

trepidation (n.): fear.

refine(v.): clean, pure.

obliquely (adv.): not straight, indirectly

breach (n.): breaking of or failure to observe a law.

expansion (n.): enlargement.

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### 2.13 Review Questions

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1. Critically appreciate the poem 'The Valediction Forbidding Mourning'.
2. Describe the theme of the poem 'The Valediction Forbidding Mourning'.

3. Discuss the song : Go and Catch a Falling Star.
4. Write summary of the song : Go and Catch a Falling Star.
5. Describe the theme of the song : Go and Catch a Falling Star.

*John Donne*

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## 2.14 Further Readings

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## John Milton and Andrew Marvell

### (Structure)

- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 John Milton and his Works
- 3.4 Lycidas
- 3.5 Explanation
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- 3.7 Andrew Marvel – The Garden
- 3.8 The Garden – Explanation
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- 3.10 Summary
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### 3.1 Learning Objectives

After studying the chapter, students will be able to:

- To discuss the 'Lycidas' as a pastoral elegy.
- Comment on the versification of Milton with reference to Lycidas.
- To describe "The Garden" by Andrew Marvell.

### 3.2 Introduction

John Milton, the famous English poet, is known for his epic poem Paradise Lost. He was a civil servant for the Commonwealth of England under Oliver Cromwell. However, like other English poets, he has also written sonnets. John Milton was born in London in 1608 (seven and a half years before the death of Shakespeare). His grandfather was a Roman Catholic who had disowned Milton's father when the latter turned Protestant. The boy was sent to St Paul's school, perhaps when twelve, perhaps earlier.

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From the beginning, Milton was an eager student (he tells us that from the time he was twelve, he seldom stopped reading before midnight), and he learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and began to try to write verse. In 1625 he enrolled at Christ's College, Cambridge, clashed with his tutor the following year and was suspended, returned and was given another tutor, and graduated on schedule. The University in those days still undertook to teach largely by rote memorization, and Milton thought his training was of little value. He undertook to give himself a liberal education by wide reading. His father had hoped to make a lawyer of him, but took it very well when his son announced that he intended to make the writing of poetry his life's work.

In 1629 (when he was 21 years old) he wrote a short poem, "On the morning of Christ's Nativity," his first memorable work, still widely read at Christmas. A few years later, he wrote a masque (or mask), which was presented in 1634, at Ludlow Castle, near the Welsh border, in honor of the Earl of Bridgewater. In August 1637, a classmate of Milton's, Edward King, who had written some poetry himself, was drowned, and several of his friends resolved to write poems in his memory and publish a collection of them. Milton was asked to contribute. His poem was called 'Lycidas'.

Between 1641 and 1660, Milton wrote almost no poetry. This was the time when the English Puritans were setting out to overthrow the English monarchy on the grounds that it was levying taxes unlawfully (and was, moreover, in league with the wicked English Church), and to overthrow the English Church on the grounds that, while nominally breaking with Rome, it had retained many Roman customs, such as white gowns for the clergy (instead of the black gowns worn by Puritan clergy, which were obviously more seemly) and that the English Church was therefore just as bad as the Church or Rome (and was, moreover, in league with the wicked English monarchy). Milton believed wholeheartedly in the Puritan cause, and set aside his poetry to write pamphlets in defense of various aspects of liberty as he saw it.

One work that Milton wrote but never published was a theological treatise called *De Doctrina Christina* ("On Christian Doctrine"). It is for the most part straightforward Protestant theology, but includes some departures from the mainstream position, and Milton carefully labels them as such. First, and most seriously, Milton was an Arian. That is, he believed that the Father exists eternally, and that He begot the Son and that the Son then created the physical universe. Thus, the Son is far from being a mere human. He is the second greatest of all things. But he is not co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, and is not, in the fullest sense, God. Since the publication of the *Doctrina* in 1825, critics have looked for indications of heretical beliefs in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and other

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published works. Such indications, if they are there, are few, minor, obscure, and doubtful. It is not even certain that Arianism was Milton's settled view. A man writing a paper for his own eyes, to clarify or examine his views, may very well set forth in it the case for a position that he does not hold, simply to see what can be said for it.

In 1642, at the age of 33, Milton married Mary Powell, a girl of 16 from a royalist family. Her family had been large and sociable. Milton's was small and studious. In a few months, she went home to her family. Milton reacted by writing a treatise, "On the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," in which he argued that incompatibility of temperament and personality was a sufficient reason for dissolving a marriage. Both Royalists and Puritans found the idea disgraceful, and the pamphlet had no discernible effect in Milton's day. However, it is noteworthy for the importance that Milton here attaches to friendship and companionship and the meeting of minds (as opposed to the mere meeting of bodies) as an essential ingredient in a successful marriage. In 1645 friends brought about a reconciliation, and Mary returned to her husband. In 1646, when the Civil War had gone against the Royalists and the Powells were homeless, he took the ten of them into his own home for a year. Mary bore John three daughters, and died in 1652.

In 1644, Milton published two pamphlets much admired today. The first was called "Of Education," and outlines a course of study for producing an enlightened citizenry. Studies are to include the Bible, the classics, and science. He also published in 1644 his most famous pamphlet, *Areopagetica*:

Those who have read the Book of Acts in the King James translation will remember that while in Athens, Paul is said to have preached on Mars' Hill. In fact, he spoke before the Areopagus, a council of citizens that got its name from its meeting place, a temple of Ares (or Mars), and that was responsible for censorship and the safeguarding of public morals. Milton's pamphlet was written in protest against the setting up by the Cromwell government a board of Censorship for all printed works. It is an eloquent and forceful argument for freedom of the press. Milton's dismay on finding that the new revolutionary government, undertaken in the name of liberty, could be just as intolerant of dissent as the monarchy it replaced, found expression not only in the '*Areopagetica*,' but also in poetry. He wrote a 24-line poem titled, "On the New forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament," ending with the line, "New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ Large." In February 1649, just after the beheading of King Charles I, Milton published a pamphlet called "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates," arguing that power resides in the people, who may give it to governors, but are free to withdraw it again. He was invited to become Secretary for Foreign Languages in Cromwell's

Council of State. As such, he continued to write pamphlets defending the Republic, the killing of the King, and the rule of Cromwell. He was no mere server of those in power.

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

He was still publishing a month before Charles II was brought back from exile to take the throne, at a time when it must have been obvious that the cause was lost, when every consideration of personal safety demanded that he adopt a policy of silence, if not of outright reversal of position.

After 1660, with the monarchy restored, Milton's political dreams lay in ruins under the double blow of the collapse of the Puritan Republic and the failure of the said republic to uphold freedom while it lasted.

Milton retired to private life and returned to his true vocation, the writing of poetry. He had gone blind while serving as secretary to Cromwell, and now sat composing his poems in his head, and dictating each day to his daughters the portion that he had composed. It was in this retirement that he produced his three long poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. He died on 8 November 1674.

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### **3.3 John Milton and His Works**

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#### **Paradise Lost: Milton's Long Epic**

By far his best-known poem is *Paradise Lost*, an epic in twelve books in the tradition of Virgil's *Aeneid*, recounting the story of Satan's rebellion against God, and of the disobedience and fall of Adam and Eve, led astray by Satan's lies. The story of Satan's rebellion is not found in the Bible, except in passing allusions capable of more than one interpretation. The story as it was generally accepted in Milton's day goes like this:

Satan, originally called Lucifer ("light-bearer") was one of the greatest of the angelic beings who serve God in Heaven. However, every created being with intellect and will has a choice whether to put God first or to put himself first, and Satan chose to put himself first. He was not content to be a subordinate. He proposed to be equal to the Most High.

He rebelled against God, and persuaded one third of the angels to join him. (The number is based on Revelation 12:4, where a dragon is said to draw one third of the stars out of heaven. If we take the dragon to be Satan, and the stars to be angels, we get the result. However, there are numerous references on the book of Revelation to the destruction of one third of something or other). The event that rouses Satan to rebellion is God's proclamation of His only Son as the ruler of all created things, to whom all angels and the whole universe must pay homage. God says in this connection:

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This day have I begot whom I declare, My only Son....

This is a quotation from Psalm 2:7, which in some manuscripts is quoted in connection with the Baptism of Christ. If we take "beget" as "bring into existence," this would mean that the Son is created after the angels, which is not possible, since Milton makes it explicit that it is only through the Son that the angels and all other things are created. However, the Hebrew verb "yalad", translated "beget", also has the meaning of "to publicly acknowledge as one's heir." Thus, when we are told that Joseph's greatgrandchildren were begotten on Joseph's knees it means that soon after the child was born, Joseph, in his capacity as head of the family, took the child on his knees and accepted it before witnesses as a member of the family.

So, God the Father proclaims the glory of the Son and commands all the angels to worship Him. At this Satan rebels, and leads other angels into rebellion with him. They fight against the loyal angels, led by Michael, and are defeated and cast out of Heaven. Satan, who has heard rumors that God intends to create a race of humans, then plots to obtain his revenge by destroying their happiness and their delighted obedience to God. And the rest of the story is found in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, except that these chapters make no mention of Satan, and say simply that the serpent deceived Eve. Milton tells us that the serpent was really Satan disguised as a serpent.

#### Comus: Milton's Masque

A masque is a particular kind of theatrical performance, traditionally performed before royalty or other distinguished persons, in which the characters of the drama usually wear masks and represent abstract qualities. Milton's play (to which he gave no title except "A Masque") was performed at Ludlow Castle near the Welsh border, before the lord of that castle, the Earl of Bridgewater. The roles of the humans in the play were performed by the Earl's 15-year-old daughter and her brothers, 9 and 11. (Their tutor, Mr. Lawes, was a friend of Milton's.) The play concerns a young lady who is travelling through the forest with her brothers to reach her father's castle. She meets an evil spirit called Comus (the son of Circe and Bacchus) who is disguised as a simple shepherd and offers her the hospitality of his humble cottage for the night. He thus traps her and tries to persuade her to drink from a magic chalice, which turns all who drink from it into beasts. (It probably symbolizes unchastity.) He argues that Nature has filled the world with pleasures, and that it is ungrateful to refuse the gifts of Nature. The Lady replies that gluttony and starvation are not the only options, and that the right choice is the temperate and wise use of Nature's gifts in accordance with the ends for which Nature's God created them. The evil spirit is defeated,

the Lady freed, and she and her brothers are led safely to the castle, their goal (whether Ludlow Castle, or Heaven, or both). *John Milton and Andrew Marvell*

### Lycidas: Milton's Pastoral Elegy

Edward King was a fellow student of Milton's, a Puritan youth who had written some poetry and was intending to become a preacher. He was on a ship in the Irish Sea when it sank, and he was drowned. Several of his friends decided to write poems in his memory and publish the collection. Milton's contribution, *Lycidas*, belongs to a tradition going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

It is a pastoral. That is, the poet and the persons he writes about are all treated as shepherds (or shepherdesses) living in the hillsides and pastures of ancient Greece. Edward King is renamed Lycidas, and Milton mourns his death.

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:

Who would not sing for Lycidas?

He knew himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.

He must not float upon his watery bier unwept,

and welter to the parching wind without the meed of some melodious tear....

Now thou art gone, and never must return!

Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves

with wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,

and all their echoes mourn....

The mourner goes on to ask the proper response to the knowledge that anyone can die at any time, with all his goals unachieved. Ought we to seek pleasure and forget all else? Is fame worth pursuing, and does it really convey a kind of immortality? And so through many like questions, hinted at rather than stated explicitly, so that much of the poem is not so much an examination of Milton's uncertainties as a device to bring to the forefront some of the uncertainties lurking in the mind of the reader. It is worth knowing, for example, that the site of King's drowning was overlooked (from a distance) by a mountain with a statue of the Archangel Michael—hence the reference to the “guarded mount” and the plea, “Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth.” Finally, the poet compares Lycidas to the sun, which sinks only to rise again, and then concludes on an explicitly Christian note of comfort.

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high, Through the dear might of him that walked the waves He speaks of Lycidas in Heaven, where all tears are wiped from his eyes, and closes with the image of the shepherd, his mourning for Lycidas ended, arising and going on his way comforted.

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One critic has said: "It may be the most beautiful short poem in the language." Paradise Regained: Milton's Short Epic After writing about the fall of the human race through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Milton undertook to write about the restoration of the human race through the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. His short epic, Paradise Regained, does not deal with the Crucifixion, but with the Temptation in the wilderness, and the epic features a debate between Christ and Satan, just as Paradise Lost features a debate between Abdiel and Satan, and another between Eve and Satan, and the Masque a debate between Comus and the Lady, and the twin poems L'allegro and IL Penseroso a debate between merriment and thoughtfulness, and Lycidas between competing possible responses to life and death, and Samson Agonistes debates between Samson and the Danites, Samson and Manoah, Samson and Delilah, and Samson and Harapha. The alert reader may detect a pattern here.

Christ triumphs over Satan, rejecting his temptations and refuting his arguments. When Satan withdraws defeated, the angels hail the triumph of Christ, and bid him now begin his work of reconciling and redeeming mankind. Some critics think the poem an inferior sequel to Paradise Lost. Others think that it is even better than its predecessor. It is a different kind of poem, and thus perhaps neither better nor worse.

### **Samson Agonistes: Milton's Tragedy**

While Paradise Lost is written in the manner of Virgil's epic poem, the Aeneid, the story of the events leading up to the founding of the city of Rome, Samson Agonistes is written in the manner of the Greek tragedies. The story of Samson is found in the Book of Judges, 13-16. Milton's drama covers only the last few hours of Samson's life, when, after a lifetime of being undefeatable in battle and irresistible in strength, and a lifetime of misusing and wasting the powers that God had given him for the deliverance of his people from the Philistines, he has lost everything, and is a blinded captive and slave. In his captivity, he is visited by his father Manoah, by spokesmen for his tribe, by his wife Dalila (Delilah), and by a Philistine warrior Harapha. By his dialogue with each in turn he moves slowly from self-pity and despair to renewed trust that God has accepted his repentance and has work for him to do.

Finally, acting in accordance with what he takes to be the will of God, he sacrifices his own life in destroying the chief oppressors of his people, and so achieves in death more than he had in life. Some critics think this Milton's best work. Almost all are agreed that it is by far the best English tragedy ever written on the Greek model. No other work comes close.

### 3.4 Lycidas

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

In this Monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637; and by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forc'd fingers rude  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear  
Compels me to disturb your season due;  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his wat'ry bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.  
Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well  
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;  
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
Hence with denial vain and coy excuse!  
So may some gentle muse  
With lucky words favour my destin'd urn,  
And as he passes turn  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!  
For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill,  
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;  
Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd  
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,  
We drove afield, and both together heard  
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
Oft till the star that rose at ev'ning bright  
Toward heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.

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Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
Temper'd to th'oaten flute;  
Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,  
From the glad sound would not be absent long;  
And old Damætas lov'd to hear our song.  
But O the heavy change now thou art gone,  
Now thou art gone, and never must return!  
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,  
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,  
And all their echoes mourn.  
The willows and the hazel copses green  
Shall now no more be seen  
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.  
As killing as the canker to the rose,  
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,  
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear  
When first the white thorn blows:  
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.  
Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep  
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?  
For neither were ye playing on the steep  
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,  
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,  
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.  
Ay me! I fondly dream  
'Had ye bin there'—for what could that have done?  
What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,  
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,  
Whom universal nature did lament,  
When by the rout that made the hideous roar  
His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?  
Alas! what boots it with incessant care  
To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?

Were it not better done, as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?  
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,  
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,  
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
Phoebus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears;  
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistening foil  
Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumour lies,  
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."  
O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood,  
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,  
That strain I heard was of a higher mood.  
But now my oar proceeds,  
And listens to the Herald of the Sea,  
That came in Neptune's plea.  
He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,  
"What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?"  
And question'd every gust of rugged wings  
That blows from off each beaked promontory.  
They knew not of his story;  
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,  
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd;  
The air was calm, and on the level brine  
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.  
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,  
Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,

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That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.  
Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,  
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,  
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge  
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.  
"Ah! who hath reft," quoth he, "my dearest pledge?"  
Last came, and last did go,  
The Pilot of the Galilean lake;  
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain  
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).  
He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake:  
"How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,  
Enow of such as for their bellies' sake  
Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?  
Of other care they little reck'ning make  
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast  
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least  
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!  
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
And when they list their lean and flashy songs  
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,  
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,  
But, swoll'n with wind and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;  
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw  
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,  
But that two-handed engine at the door  
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more".  
Return, Alpheus: the dread voice is past  
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,  
And call the vales and bid them hither cast  
Their bells and flow'rets of a thousand hues.  
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use

Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,  
Throw hither all your quaint enamel'd eyes,  
That on the green turf suck the honied showers  
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,  
The glowing violet,  
The musk-rose, and the well attir'd woodbine,  
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
And every flower that sad embroidery wears;  
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.  
For so to interpose a little ease,  
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.  
Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas  
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd;  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world

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### 3.5 Explanation

The name "Lycidas" is fairly common in pastoral poetry (e.g., in Theocritus, *Idyl* I, Virgil, *Eclogues* VII and IX). The note under the title was added in *Poems*, 1645. By plucking laurel, myrtle, and ivy, constituents of the poet's crowning, is symbolized Milton's return to the writing of verse (after the interval of four years since *Comus*); the reference to this enforced and premature action indicates Milton's unwillingness to write poetry at this time while still preparing himself for his magnum opus.

**Lycidas.** The name Lycidas is common in ancient Greek pastorals, establishing the style Milton imitates for this poem. William Collins Watterson notes that in Theocritus' pastoral, Lycidas loses a singing competition. Watterson asserts that Milton is aligning King with Lycidas in an attempt to portray himself as victorious over King. Virgil's ninth *Eclogue* is spoken in part by the shepherd

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Lycidas, a scene that includes, as Balachandra Rajan points out, a reference to social injustice. Lucan's Civil Wars 3.657-58 also tells the story of a Lycidas pulled to pieces during a sea battle by a grappling hook.

Height. The headnote – "In this Monody ... height." – does not appear in 1638 (Justa Edouardo

King). This addition might be due to the less strict laws regarding published texts. The Trinity MS has the headnote but without the final sentence. "And by occasion height." The clergy Milton refers to is the clergy of the English Church as ruled by William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury. A champion of traditional liturgy and the bane of reformist Puritans. Bishops fell out of power in 1642, between the two editions.

Friend. Edward King, a schoolmate of Melton's at Cambridge who drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Wales in August, 1637. King entered Christ's College in 1626 when he was 14 years old. Upon finishing his studies, King was made a Fellow of Christ's thanks to his patron King Charles I. The Trinity MS of Lycidas is dated Nov. 1637, three months after King's death.

Never-sear. Never withered. 1638 has "never-sere". Laurel was considered the emblem of Apollo, myrtle of Venus, and ivy of Bacchus.

crude : unripe.

shatter : scatter.

dear : grievous, but with overtones from other meanings of the word.

Milton treats Edward King as at once priest and poet. Like others with a humanistic education,

King could, and on occasion did, write Latin verses.

welter: roll about.

meed: token of honour; tear: commonly used as a poetic synonym for elegy (as in Spenser's Teares of the Muses).

One of the haunts sacred to the Muses was the spring Aganippe on Mount Helicon, near which was a temple to Zeus. my destin'd urn. The urn, used by the ancients for burial (cf. Sir Thomas Brown, Urn Burial), here stands for the poet's death. Say, Requiescat in pace; shroud (burial cloth) here stands for the dead.

lawns: grass lands.

gray-fly: so called from its colour, and also the trumpet-cry from the noise it makes.

battening: making fat.

Though some inexactness in the description has been noticed, Milton probably intends the Evening Star (Hesperus). Satyr's in Greek myth were human figures, but with pointed ears and clad in skins' beasts. By the Romans they were identified with their fauns and represented with goat's horn, tail, and cloven hoof (hence

cloven heel). Here they stand for Milton and King's fellow students.

Damocetas: presumably standing for some fellow of the college.

gadding: wandering, that is, growing naturally, not subjected to control.

canker: canker-worm, which by feeding on it produces canker in the blossom.

taint-worm: a worm thought to taint or infect cattle.

white thorn: the common hawthorn.

An appeal to the nymphs was one of the conventions of pastoral elegy. The places named in Greek and Latin pastoral belonged to the ancient world and were selected with some reference to the subject. As is appropriate in Eclogue X, the lament for Gallus, a poet, Virgil appeals to the Naiads in association with places sacred to the Muses, and may suggest that by Naiads he really means the Muses. Milton appropriately substitutes British places in the vicinity of King's fatal journey; and by Nymphs he probably means the Muses, since he associates them with bards, and the Bards formed a division of the Druids, the priests of the Britons, while traditions accessible to Milton traced a connection between ancient Greek and ancient British religion and culture. His first allusion refers vaguely to some burial place of the Druids in the Welsh mountains (the steep); the second, and more specific, is to the island of Anglesey, which the Romans called Mona; the third is to the river Dee, marking the border of England and Wales and supposed to possess magic powers by which it predicted the fortunes of the hostile nations; over the Dee stood Chester, whence travellers took ship for Ireland.

Orpheus, the mythical originator of poetry and song, was reputed to be the son of the Muse Calliope, and gifted with the power of charming by his music all animate and inanimate things, which subsequently united in lamenting his death. After his final loss of his wife, Eurydice, he wandered through Thrace mourning for her, where he was encountered by the wild female worshippers of Bacchus. Enraged by his repelling of their advances, they hurled their spears at him, but these, charmed by his music, fell harmless to the ground, whereupon the women set up a loud cry, drowning the music, and the spears took effect. They cast the head of Orpheus and his lyre into the river Hebrus which bore them out to sea and cast them up on the island of Lesbos.

Amaryllis and Neaera are names which occur in erotic pastoral poetry. Milton is perhaps thinking of the amatory court poets of his own day.

clear: noble (Lat. clarus).

Alluding to the saying of Tacitus, *Histories*, IV, VI, that "for even the wise man the desire of glory is the last to be put aside."

Milton alludes to Atropos, the one of the three Fates who cut the thread of life.

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Thinking of her inexorable character and the fear she inspires, Milton deliberately calls her not a Fate, but a Fury. Phoebus, god of poetry, intervenes with the counterstatement that praise is not ended by death. It can be shown from the Latin poets that touching the ear was a way of reminding one of something forgotten (Virgil, Eclogue, VI, 3); trembling here is a transferred epithet, signifying: "touch'd my ears, I trembling the while."

foil: a thin leaf of metal placed behind a gem to enhance its brightness.

True fame depends on merit in the sight of God and will be enjoyed in heaven. (Jove here stands for God, as often in Christian humanist poetry.)

Arethusa, the spring Arethusa, in the island of Ortygia, off the coast of Sicily, here symbolizes Greek pastoral poetry, and especially the Idyls of Theocritus, born in nearby Syracuse. Mincius, the river flowing round Mantua, claimed by Virgil as his birth, symbolizes Latin pastoral poetry, and especially the Eclogues of Virgil. The vocal reeds are the stems used for making the shepherd's pipes.

The words of the preceding paragraph were of a higher order and transcended the pastoral mood, to which the poet returns, as suggested in Now my oat [another synonym for the shepherd's pipes] proceeds.

herald of the sea: Triton.

in Neptune's plea: that is, to exonerate Neptune (the sea) from blame for the death of Lycidas, by calling witnesses to the calm weather.

Hippotades: Aeolus, son of Hippotes and guardian of the winds.

Panope: one of the Nereids or sea-nymphs, who was associated with calm weather and invoked by Roman sailors.

An eclipse was proverbially of evil omen.

Camus, thought of as the genius of the Cam, and the representative here of Cambridge University,

built on its banks. His appearance suggests the slow-flowing, weed-grown river.

The sanguine flower

inscribed with woe is the hyacinth as it is accounted for in the myth of Hyacinthus (Ovid, Metamorphoses, X, 174-217) accidentally slain while at play with Apollo: his blood fell on a lily, staining it purple, and on the petals the god wrote ai, ai (ahs, ahs). The implication is that the sedge of the Cam bears a like sign of woe. pledge: child (Lat. pignus).

As a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, and leader of the Disciples, St. Peter is here called the Pilot of the Galilean lake.

The starting point of these lines is Christ's words to St. Peter, "And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19), read perhaps in the light of, "he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall

open" (Isaiah 22:22). mitred, referring to the crown of the bishop, St. Peter being presented in the role of ideal bishop.

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

Commencing with an indictment of the clergy as entering the ministry from worldly motives and excluding those with a true vocation, Milton describes their neglect of their duties and the consequences to the flock. Lines 123-25 are usually explained as an allusion to their infrequent and valueless sermons which do nothing to nourish the flock; but quite possibly it is a reference (couched in the language of shepherd life) to their neglect of their duty while they give themselves to song and other secular recreations.

## Notes

sped: provided for.

flashy: destitute of meaning, trifling.

scrannel pipes. Virgil has the phrase *stridenti stipula* (*Eclogues*, III, 27). Milton's scrannel appears to be his invention, though possibly based on some dialect word meaning thin; its sound suits well with his verb *Grate*.

allude to the corrupting effect of the false doctrines taught them.

allude to conversions to the Roman Catholic Church (here symbolized by the wolf), at which, as the Puritans erroneously believed, Archbishop Laud connived.

This is the most disputed passage in Milton's poetry. It seems evident from the context that the two-handed engine is some heavy weapon, ready at the door of the sheepfold, to be used against the wolf. This must be the starting point for any interpretation of meaning.

Alpheus, a river god in Arcadia, pursued the nymph Arethusa (see above, lines 85-87 n.) and when she, to escape his pursuit, was transformed to a spring by Diana and passed beneath the sea to Ortygia, the river Alpheus followed her and reached the same island. Here the association with Arethusa makes Alpheus likewise a symbol for Sicily and pastoral poetry. To ensure that the meaning is not missed, Milton adds an invocation to the muse of pastoral verse, "Return Sicilian Muse."

use: are accustomed (to dwell).

swart star: Sirius, the star whose rising in August was said to burn the fields swart or dark.

rathe: early.

freakt: spotted or streaked.

amaranthus: an imaginary everlasting flower.

laureate hearse. The hearse, or frame supporting the bier, here stands for the bier itself; laureate (by its association with the laurel of the poet's crown) signifies that the bier is a poet's.

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stormy Hebrides: islands off the northwest coast of Scotland subject to Atlantic storms.

Reference is to the monsters of the deep.

moist vows: tearful prayers.

Bellerus old. Milton appears to have invented the person from Bellerium, the Roman name for Cornwall.

Milton appears to refer to a tradition that on St. Michael's Mount, a rock off the south coast of Cornwall, the archangel Michael, one of England's two patron saints, had been seen standing on guard against the traditional enemy Spain, here represented by the district of Namancos and the castle of Bayona.

Angel: i.e., St. Michael.

A reference either to the rescue of the poet Arion by a dolphin, which bore him safely ashore, or to Melicertes, whose body was brought to shore by a dolphin, and who was deified as the god of harbours (as Lycidas was to become "the Genius of the shore" below line 183).

day-star: probably the sun.

ore: i.e., gold.

"And ... Jesus went unto them walking on the sea" (Matthew 14:25).

nectar: in classical mythology, the drink of the gods.

The saints may refer either to the blessed dead in heaven, and entertain mean receive into their company, or to the angelic host, and entertain mean receive as a guest. The unexpressive (i.e., inexpressible) nuptial song may refer either to the song of rejoicing of the former group (Revelation 14:1-4) or to that of the latter group (Revelation 19:6-7).

Genius of the shore. Among its various meanings in Latin, genius betokened a local deity or guardian spirit.

The song proper ends at 185, and is followed by this brief narrative passage. The uncouth swain is Milton in his guise of shepherd poet. The quills are the shepherd's pipe. Doric, the dialect used by Theocritus, hence denotes the simple language of pastoral poetry.

### Background and Text.

Lycidas first appeared in a 1638 collection of elegies entitled *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago*. This collection commemorated the death of Edward King, a collegemate of Milton's at Cambridge who drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Wales in August, 1637. Milton volunteered or was asked to make a contribution to the collection. The present edition follows the copy of *Poems of Mr. Jhon Milton* (1645) in the Rauner Collection at Dartmouth College, known

as Hickmott 172. Milton made a few significant revision to Lycidas after 1638. *John Milton and Andrew Marvell*  
These revisions are noted as they occur.

**Form and Structure** – The Structure of Lycidas remains somewhat mysterious. J. Martin Evans argues that there are two movements with six sections each that seem to mirror each other. Arthur Barker believes that the body of Lycidas is composed of three movements that run parallel in pattern. That is, each movement begins with an invocation, then explores the conventions of the pastoral, and ends with a conclusion to Milton's "emotional problem" (quoted in Womack). Voice Milton's epigram labels Lycidas a "monody": a lyrical lament for one voice. But the poem has several voices or personae. Including the "uncouth swain" (the main narrator who is "interrupted" first by Phoebus (Apollo), then Camus (the river Cam. And thus Cambridge University personified), and the "Pilot of the Galilean lake" (St. Peter). Finally, a second narrator appears for only the last eight lines to bring a conclusion in ottava rima ( see F.T. Prince). Before the second narrator enters, the poem contains the irregular rhyme and meter characteristic of the Italian canzone form. Canzone is essentially a polyphonic lyrical form, hence creating a serious conflict with the "monody." Milton may have meant "monody" in the sense that the poem should be regarded more as a story told completely by one person as opposed to a chorus. This person would presumably be the final narrator, who seemingly masks himself as the "uncouth swain." This concept of story-telling ties Lycidas closer to the genre of pastoral elegy.

**Genre.** Lycidas is a pastoral elegy, a genre initiated by Theocritus, also put famous use by Virgil and Spenser. Christopher Kendrick asserts that one's reading of Lycidas would be improved by treating the poem anachronistically, that is, as if it was one of the most original pastoral elegies. Also, as already stated, it employees the irregular rhyme and meter of an Italian canzone. Stella Revard suggests arrangement in verse paragraphs and its introduction of various voices and personae are also features that anticipate epic structures. Like the form, structure, and voice of Lycidas, its genre is deeply complex. James Sitar.

Monody. A lyrical lament for one voice.

Lycidas? An echo of Virgil; "Who would not sing for gallus? (Eclogue 10.5)

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### 3.6 Critical Essays

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#### 'Lycidas' as a Pastoral Elgy

Lycidas is a pastoral elegy and, as John Bailey stresses, it out distances all previous English elegies almost as easily as Comus out instances all previous English masques. The word 'pastrol' is derived from the Greek word 'pastor' which means to "gaze". Hence pastoral poetry is a poetry which deals with the

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life and doings, loves, joys and sorrows of shepherds and shepherdesses and other humble dwellers of the country side. In a pastoral elegy the poet mourns the death of some friend or relative in the guise of a shepherd mourning the death of another shepherd. Theodritus, Bion, Moschus and Virgil were the great writers of pastoral elegies among the ancients. Their pastorals are characterized by a rare freshness and first hand observation of Nature. They capture the real beauty and charm of rural life. With the Renaissance, the pastoral was widely practiced in Italy and other European countries, and from Europe the vogue of the pastoral reached England. Spenser and Sidney were the pioneers of this tradition in England. In their hands, the pastoral has much of the freshness of the early Greek masters, but in the hands of the imitators of Spenser and Sidney, pastoralism became a mere convention, something merely bookish and artificial.

In *Lycidas*, Milton has followed the pastoral tradition. It is a pastoral elegy. The very name 'Lycidas' is the conventional name for a shepherd and it frequently occurs in the pastoral elegies of Theocritus and Bion. The pastoral machinery has been made full use of by the poet. He speaks of himself as a shepherd and of Edward King as another shepherd both of whom were nursed together and who fed their flocks together :

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,  
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill :  
Together both, ere the high lawns appeared  
Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,  
We drove a-field, and both together heard  
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
Battering our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
Oft till the star that rose at evening bright  
Toward Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel  
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
Tempered to the oaten flute;  
Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel  
From the glad sound would not be absent long;  
And old Damoetas loved to hear our song.

Further, in the pastoral tradition there are charming descriptions of the idyllic beauty of the countryside. A thousand flowers bloom and beautify the landscape:  
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
The tufted crow-toe, and pale Jessamine,  
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,

The glowing violent,  
The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,  
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
And every flower that sad embroidery wears;  
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And daffodillies full their cups with tears,  
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.

The passage is characterized by first hand observation and its freshness and charm are beyond question.

Again true to the convention of the pastoral elegy, Milton introduces a procession of mourners mourning the death of their beloved Lycidas. All Nature—the woods, the caves, the echoes—mourns the death of Lycidas. Triton, “the herald of the sea”, Camus, ‘reverend Sire’, St. Peter, ‘the Pilot of the Galilean Lake’, are other mourners introduced by the poet. The introduction of St. Peter, also provides the poet with an occasion for a fierce invective against the corruption and degeneration of contemporary Church. Such denunciation is also a part of the usual machinery of the pastoral elegy. We find such denunciations in Spenser’s Shepherd’s Calender and in the elegies of a number of Italian poets.

The elegy ends according to accepted tradition on a note of hope and consolation. For Lycidas is not really dead, and “the woeful shepherds” should weep no more. Like the sun, he would rise out of the sea in which he has been drowned, and having reached in the blessed kingdom of Heaven would be entertained by all the saints. Or he would become the, “Genius of the shore”, near which he was drowned: Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more; Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore, In thy large recompense, and shalt be good; To all that wander in that perilous flood.

In short, Milton in Lycidas has followed the pastoral tradition in its entirety. It is a pastoral dedicated to the purposes of elegy and lament. Milton might have owed much to the pastorals of Spenser and other writers, but by his lament he revived and enriched the pastoral tradition. A number of modern works have been inspired by Milton’s elegy. The authors of Adonais and Thyrasis “fed on the self-same hill” as the author of Lycidas; they too revive echoes of the Sicilian shepherd-music; and apart from such general similarities as we should expect where writers have chosen the same vehicle of expression, each has at least one point of contact with Milton. Thyrasis, like Lycidas, presents an idealized picture of university-life, and perhaps of sincerity and true feeling begotten of love for the scenes described, the advantage rests with Arnold. In Adonais, Shelley’s invective against the enemies of Keats recalls Milton’s onslaught on the church;

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a subsidiary theme has kindled the fire of personal feeling in each poem, and neither can be regarded as the consecration of perfect friendship. – (Verity).

**Nature of Grief in 'Lycidas' – Edward King as the Nominal Subject**

As regards the charge of artificiality, it is mistake to suppose that Lycidas in an expression of intense personal grief on the death of a close friend. Milton and Edward King were never very intimate friends, and Milton was not deeply grieved at King's death. Says John Bailey in this connection, "Milton had liked and respected him, no doubt, but had certainly not been so intimate with him as with young Charles Diodati who died almost exactly a year later, and was lamented by his great friend in the Epitaphium Damonis which is the finest of the Latin poems. Those who read Latin will enjoy its close parallelism with Lycidas and its touches of a still closer bond of affection and its expression of intense personal sorrow. But if the death of Diodate aroused the deeper sorrow in Milton, that of King produced unquestionably the greater poem. It is a common mistake to think that to write a great elegy, a man must have suffered a great sorrow. That is not the case. The poet's real subject is not the death of King; it is the death of all who have been or will be loved in all the world, and the sorrow of all the survivors, the tragic destiny of youth and hope and fame, the doom of frailty and transience which has been eternally pronounced on so many of the fairest gifts of nature and all the noblest works of man.

The death of Lycidas is not merely a personal loss, it is a loss to the universe and to religion. As both Dr. Tillyard and Cazamian agree, Edward King is not the real subject but merely the nominal subject of Lycidas. "Fundamentally "Lycidas" concerns Milton himself. King is but the excuse for one of Milton's most personal poems." It does contain deep feeling, but the deep feeling is not about King, but about his own possible fate. A brief critical review of the poem would fully bring out the truth of the assertion that Milton and not King is the real subject of the Elegy.

**The Autobiographical Element**

Lycidas can fittingly be divided into six parts – the introduction, the Epilogue and four main sections. The introduction, lines 1-25, does not concern Lycidas at all, but is concerned with Milton's own reluctance to write a poem before his powers have matured. But he must write, for Lycidas died prematurely and for a premature death he must be willing to risk premature poetry. Moreover, if he writes an elegy for Lycidas, some other poet may honour him, when he dies, with an elegy :

So may soon gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,  
And as he passes turn,

And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud,  
For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,  
Fed the some flock, by fountain, shade, and vill.

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

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Why should Milton think of the possibility of his own death, even though at the time he was young and in the fullness of health? As Dr. Tillyard points out for one thing during the years 1636-37, plague was bad in England and many people had died of it in Horton itself. Naturally, Milton's thoughts turn to the possibility of his own death. Secondly, when Milton wrote *Lycidas* in 1637 he was twenty-nine years of age, and early in the next year he set out for Italy with perhaps the intention of going on to Greece. The last line of the poem, To morrow to fresh Wood, and pasture new, might well refers to this intended journey. "Anyhow at the time of writing *Lycidas* Milton must have had the Italian and possibly the Greek journey in is mind. When he heard of King's death, and still more when by consenting to write the elegy he had to make his mind dwell on it, he could not but have felt the analogy between King and himself. Milton and King had been at the same college in the same University. Their careers and interests had been similar there. Milton was a poet, King had written verse too. King had made a voyage on the sea, Milton was about to make voyages. How could Milton have missed the idea that he might make the analogy complete by getting drowned, like King, also ?

At a time when, through plagues and what no, life was less secure than in modern times of peace, Milton, having sacrificed so much to his great ambition, must anyhow, at the time of preparation drew to an end, have dwelt on the thought that it might be all for nothing. Not that he was a coward : but the fear that his ambitions might be ruined at the last moment must have been at times difficult to endure."

The first main section, beginning 'Together both, ere the high Lawns appear 'd', consists of line 25 to 84. It contains a lament for the death of *Lycidas*, regret that the muse could not protect her son, and leads up to the first great cause of pain in Milton's own mind : the risk of death before his great work is completed. What has been the use of all his laborious preparation, his careful chastity (for doubtless he means this by his reference to *Amaryllis* and *Neaera*), if fame, for whose sake he has denied himself, is to escape him, anticipated by death ? Earthly fame, he replies to himself in the person of *Phoebus*, has nothing to do with heavenly fame : it depends on deeds, not on what those deeds effect. "So he argues, but one does not get the impression of emotional conviction yet: the final impression of the first section is that it would be a cruel shame and a wicked waste, if he were to die.

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It should be noted with what consummate skill Milton in this section works the subject from King to its climax in himself." - (Tillyard)

In the second main section, lines 85 to 131, beginning 'O Fountain Arethus', he does the same thing. In the elegiac tradition various mourners come to visit the dead body of Edward King. It is perfectly natural that St. Peter should come to visit a priest, and equally natural that he should proceed from lamenting the death of a good priest to denouncing the bad. "but this denunciation reveals the second great cause of mental pain in Milton : his quarrel with contemporary England, typified the rottenness of the clergy. Thus St. Peter's outburst is not an irrelevant digression but strictly parallel with Milton earlier outburst about the blind Fury. One can even see a close connection of ideas between the two grievances. One grievance is that 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed'; England has bad or useless teachers: the other is that he, Milton, whose ambition was to teach by writing a great epic, to feed the hungry sheep of England, may easily be cut off before it can be realized. It should be noted, too, that the second grievance, like the first, is answered at the end of the second movement.

Punishment is waiting; the two-handed engine stands ready to smite. But even less than at the end of the first section has mental calm been attained. The end of the second section marks the climax of the poem. Milton has stated his quarrel with Life: we await the conclusion." - (Tillyard).

The third section, lines 132 to 164, beginning Return 'Alpheus' forms a kind of transition to the final note of hope and consolation. "Some quieter interlude is clearly necessary between St. Peter's bitter outburst and the heavenly triumph of the final movement. The sudden change from the terror of the two-handed engine to the incredible beauty of the description of the flowers contains an implication that somehow the 'dorique delicay', of which the description of the flowers is the highest example in

Milton, is not irreconcilable with the sterner mood, and hence is able to insinuate some comfort. So too from the dallying with a false surmise, the escape into a region of pure romance, Where the great vision of the Guarded Mount Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold, Some comfort is allowed." - (Tillyard) these sources of minor comfort, lead up to the greater comfort at the end.

The fourth section describes the resurrection of Lycidas and his entry into heaven "More truly it solves the whole poem by describing the resurrection into a new kind of life of Milton's hopes, should they be ruined by premature death or by the moral collapses of his country.

The loss or possible loss of human fame is made good by fame in heaven; the corrupt clergy are balanced by, All the saints above

In solemn troops and sweet Societies, and the harsh forebodings of Peter, "the pilot of the Galilean lake", are forgotten, Through the dear might of him who walk'd the waves But above all the fourth section describes the renunciation of earthly fame, the abnegation of self by the great egotist, and the spiritual purgation of gaining one's life after losing it. As Dr. Tillyard stresses, "death or the fear of death is not the whole subject of the elegy. The real subject is the resolving of those fears (and of his bitter scorn of the clergy) into an exalted state of mental calm. The apotheosis of Lycidas in the penultimate paragraph has a deeper meaning: It symbolizes Milton's own balanced state of mind to which he won after the strength of Lycidas and the reason why it is a greater poem than Comus : in the one calm after struggle, in the other calm of a kind but without the preliminary struggle.

If the above idea is accepted, it is possible to see in Lycidas a unity of purpose which cannot be seen in it if the death of King is taken as the real subject of the poem. In particular the less elegiac significance of the whole."

In the Epilogue consisting of the last eight lines of the poem, Milton "speaks directly, criticizes what he has just written in his imaginary character, and intimate that he has stepped out of that character, and is about to turn to other occupations. Still the close is ideal, and studied from other pastoral poems:"

To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new As pointed out above, this might be a hint of Milton's intended voyage to Italy and Greece.

### **Lycidas as a Work of Art-Diction and Versification**

As a work of art, Lycidas, in spite of the disparagement of Johnson, who was offended by its pastoralism, has received almost universal praise. Mark Pattison says that it is the high-water mark of English poetry and its full enjoyment a final fruit of consummate scholarship. 'Lycidas' is the finest of the early poems of Milton and so it illustrates some of the best features of his early poetry as well as gives an indication of Milton's maturer style, the style of the great epics. According to Legouis and Cazamain, it is, "an example of supreme perfection of style, imagery and versification."

Milton's learning is revealed at every step and the elegy is heavy with a host of allusions, both classical and Biblical. For example there are references to 'the seat of Jove' 'Sister of the sacred well' and, 'rough Satyres and Fawns', Milton alludes to the 'nuptial song' at the marriage of the Lamb as given in 'Revelation'. References to 'the stormy Hebrides', Alpheus, and 'fountain Arethuse' all reflect the learning of the poet.

Milton has a rich evocative imagination and with the help of melody and magic of words he can make things vivid and appealing. He makes skilful use of poetic

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devices like alliteration, personification, similes and metaphors. Alliteration can be noted in expression like, 'Swart star sparly looks' and 'flames in the forehead', The Cowslips are personified and described as flowers drooping their heads in a pensive mood. A living pictorial image is to be noted in the lines:

The air was calm and on the level brine

Sleek Penope with all her sister played,

Lycidas being a pastoral poem provides Milton enough scope for the use of evocative images. The poem presents throughout a number of images of water. Cambridge is represented by the river Camus. St. Peter is the 'Pilot of the Galilean lake'; Christ is one who walked the waves. The apt use of sonorous prope names not only imparts music and melody but also dignity and stateliness to the style as in the following;

Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold

Latin construction and words in their origin Latin sense are frequently used and this imparts epigrammatic terseness, brevity and density to Milton's diction. A number of fine memorable paspages are scattered all up and down the poem, as, for example,

(1) Without the meed of some melodious tear.

(2) Ready to smite once, and smite no more.

(3) Tomarrow to fresh woods and pastures new.

The style is skillfully varied in keeping with the requirements of thought and emotion. It has a poetical ness of manner that fits its pastrol mode, but it is also bitingly satiric, especially in stanzas where the poet criticizes the contemporary clergy. It is passionately exultant. The style varies with the variety of poem's themes and the poet's moods. The harshly satiric St. Peter passage, the lyrical flower passage, the tragic vision of the drowned man in the sea, the severely assured close, are all skillfully varied in style and all together make up a varied and dramatic pattern. The style varies, rises and falls, in accordance with the fluctuations in Milton's moods.

As regards the versification of Lycidas, we can do no better than quote the views of Hendord; "Meterically Lycidas is a combination of regularity and freedom. The verse is prevailingly iambic pentameter varied occasionally by the introduction of three-foot lines. The rhyme varies from the couplet from to intricate stanzaic arrangements, with a sprinkling of unrymed lines. The poem closes with a stanza in ottava rima. In general Milton's formal models here are to be found in the metrical practice of contemporary Italian poetry. A more essential feature than the rhymescheme, however, is Milton's handling of the metrical pauses and his tendency to prolong his cadence through a succession of lines in what Masson

calls a series of free rhythmic paragraphs. It is in *Lycidas* that Milton's verse first takes on the characteristic qualities of rich and sonorous harmony for which we have no other word than Miltonic." *John Milton and Andrew Marvell*

### 3.7 Andrew Marvell – The Garden

The real objective of Andrew Marvell in writing 'The Garden' seems to have been to establish the superiority of a contemplative life over a life of action. True contemplation, according to the poet, is possible only in the green shade of a tree in a garden. A garden offers quiet and repose; and here one can enjoy the pleasures of the mind and soul as well as the pleasures of the sense. A life of action, on the other hand, is futile, and men make a mistake in spending their time in feverish endeavors in order to win honors in different fields of life.

#### Andrew Marvell and his Works

Andrew Marvell was a British politician who also belongs to the Metaphysical school of poets; but he was not known like Donne, as a poet during his lifetime. Marvell also belongs to a later age when the classical type of poetry had begun to be written; but he wrote romantic poems of personal experience and feelings. He was well read in the classical languages and literature (of Latin and Greek). Marvell was a strange type of man and poet-who was not regarded as a major poet until the twentieth century. He was a politician but he wrote poetry supporting pastoral life, loneliness and spirituality; he was a strictly religious person but he wrote sexual poems like 'To His Coy Mistress'; he mixed up the unconventional metaphysical poetry with classical conventions; and he is also at the same time one of the earliest 'romantic' poets in one sense.

Marvell was perhaps the finest of England's metaphysical poet of the mid - 1600's. In addition to the influence of John Donne, Marvell also showed the influence of the English classical poet Ben Johnson. Marvell's verse blends argumentative vigor with classical smoothness and control, a blend that critic and poet T. S. Eliot described as "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace". Marvell's best poems are a series of lyrics written about 1650. They include 'The Garden' and 'To His Coy Mistress'.

His best poetry combines true metaphysical wit with perfect classical grace and poise to a greater degree than any other poet of the century. His best and most characteristic poems are those in which an adventurous wit is perfectly subdued to the quiet texture of his verse to produce a poetry, at once contemplative and exciting, gravely formal and mysteriously suggestive. His poetry possesses the quality of a precise and loving observation of nature, an ethical gravity, and ability

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to put intellectual play to serious usage. The wit is intergral to his poems and bound up both with its accuracy of observation and its moral feeling.

Marvell was born near Hall in Yorkshire. During the Puritan revolution, he supported Oliver Cromwell and assisted John Milton when Milton was a high government official. Like Milton, Marvall was a Christian Humanist and unlike him, Marvell could never commit himself wholeheartedly to the commonwealth cause. In his best poetry as in his character, he combined the best of Cavalier wit and courtesy with the quiet gravity of humane Puritan. But his combination was too individual and too subtle to provide a pattern for future poets. Marvell served in Parliament from 1659 until his death. During his later years, he wrote political satire against the king and court.

**The Garden**

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

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

No white nor red was ever seen  
So am'rous as this lovely green.  
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;  
Little, alas, they know or heed  
How far these beauties hers exceed!

Fair trees! wheres' e'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

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

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What wond'rous life in this I lead!  
Ripe apples drop about my head;  
The luscious clusters of the vine  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
The nectarine and curious peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on melons as I pass,  
Ensnar'd with flow'rs, I fall on grass.  
Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find,  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,  
Casting the body's vest aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide;  
There like a bird it sits and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver wings;

And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.

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

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

### Themes in The Garden

'The Garden' by Andrew Marvell captures the themes of natural beauty, poetic imagination, and spirituality. Here in this poem, Marvell seems to be a priest of nature. He finds himself in an ambiance that gives a soothing sensation to his soul. He cherishes each moment in the slow journey through the garden. It is not that the subject matter of the poem only revolves around the garden. The poet captures nature as a whole and the garden is a part of it.

By using his poetic imagination, Marvell simply mesmerizes the readers. His illustration is a sculpture of his poetic imagination and genius. He goes beyond the stock metaphors and imagery. The metaphysical elements come along as he weaves his verse. He presents the worldly garden in a way that seems it is one of the heavens in the earth. As there are many such gardens, there are several other abodes on the earth too. Last but not the least, the theme of spirituality comes knocking at the mind's door. The beauty of the garden helps the poet to attain a state of trance. The poem is nothing but a spiritual contemplation on the grace of the garden.

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### 3.8 The Garden – Explanation

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*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

#### Stanza One

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

How futile are the endeavors of men by means of which they simply go crazy in order to win a crown of the leaves of a palm-tree or an oak-tree or a laurel tree for their military, or civic, or poetic achievements. They perform unceasing (or endless) labors in order to obtain a crown of leaves from a single tree or herb. The short and ever-narrowing shades of these trees wisely rebuke such men for their hard labors; while all flowers and all trees act unitedly to weave garlands with their shades, these garlands being the garlands of rest and tranquillity and therefore far superior to the garlands or crowns of leaves which those men seek.

#### Stanza Two

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

Fair Quiet, I have found you here in this garden; and I have found here your dear sister, Innocence, also. For a long time I made the mistake of seeking you both in the company of busy men. But, if at all your sacred plants grow here on the earth, they grow only among the plants of a garden and not in places crowded with human beings. The company of human beings is nothing but barbarous as compared with this enjoyable solitude in the garden.

#### Stanza Three

No white nor red was ever seen

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So am'rous as this lovely green.  
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;

Little, alas, they know or heed  
How far these beauties hers exceed!  
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.

Neither the whiteness of the complexion nor the redness of the lips of ladies has ever been known to be so loving as the lovely green color of the plants and leaves in a garden. Doting lovers, who are as cruel in their actions as the flame of love which torments them, show their cruelty by carving the names of their sweethearts with knives on the barks of trees. It is regrettable that either these lovers are not quite aware of, or they do not pay enough attention to, the fact that the beauties of a garden are far more attractive than the beauties of their ladies. So far as I am concerned, O fair trees, wherever I happen to make use of a knife to cut into your barks, I shall carve no woman's name there but only your own names.

**Stanza Four**

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

When our love has run its course, and our passion has been exhausted, we can withdraw into a garden for rest and refreshment. Or, when Cupid, the god of love, is not actively at work to people fall in love, he withdraws into a garden for relaxation. The gods who run after earthly women, whom they think beautiful, find that their chase has ended in their getting hold of trees instead of women. For instance, god Apollo ran after the nymph, Daphne, not in order that he should hold the laurel tree into which Daphne was to be transferred. Similarly, god Pan hotly pursued the nymph Syrinx not in order to satisfy his lust but because he wanted to get hold of a reed into which that nymph was to be metamorphosed.

**Stanza Five**

What wond'rous life in this I lead!

Ripe apples drop about my head;  
The luscious clusters of the vine  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
The nectarine and curious peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on melons as I pass,  
Ensnar'd with flow'rs, I fall on grass.

What a wonderful time I am having in this garden! Ripe apples hang downwards from the trees so as to touch my head. The delicious bunches of grapes growing on the vines come into such close contact with my lips, I walk, that their juice enters my mouth. The nectarines and the exquisitely-formed peaches come into my hands of their own accord, without my making any effort whatsoever. The melons grow on the ground in such plenty that, as I walk on, my feet strike against them and my walking is obstructed; and, entangled among the flowers, I fall down on the grass.

#### Stanza Six

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find,  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.

While my body remains on the grass, my mind withdraws itself from the body because it is not interested in the lesser or inferior pleasures offered by the fruits. My mind seeks the happiness of a different kind which originates from the mind itself. The mind is like an ocean where each creature living on the land has a counterpart in water. However, the mind can also create altogether different lands and different oceans which quite surpass the real lands and real oceans. The mind reduces everything that has been created to nothingness, giving rise to fresh and vigorous thoughts in the shade of a green tree.

#### Stanza Seven

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,  
Casting the body's vest aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide;

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There like a bird it sits and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver wings;  
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.

Here in 'The Garden', close to fountains, where my feet slip on account of the wetness of the ground, or, close to some fruit trees the lower parts of the trunk of which are covered with moss, my Soul discards the outer garment of the body and goes noiselessly into the branches of the trees. There, on the branches, my Soul sits like a bird and sings; then my Soul preens and combs its bright wings as a bird does; and finally, having prepared itself for a longer flight waves the manifold light in its wings.

**Stanza Eight**

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

Here I find myself in the same happy state in which Adam was when in the Garden of Eden he walked alone, without a companion. When he found himself in such a pure and sweet place, no comparison could have been appropriate for him. Or, finding himself in such a pure and sweet place as the Garden of Eden, Adam could not have wished for any companion, and no companion could have suited him. But it was not the happy lot of a mortal to be allowed to roam about along in that place. Had he continued to live alone in the Gardens of Eden, he would have enjoyed the happiness of two Paradises – one, the Paradise which was the Garden of Eden, and second, the Paradise of being alone.

**Stanza Nine**

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

Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!

*John Milton and Andrew  
Marvell*

How skillful was the gardener who made the flowers and plants grow here in such a manner and according to such a pattern that they collectively serve as a sun-dial. The rays of the sun fall on this sun-dial with diminished heat after passing through the green leaves which may be compared to the Signs of the Zodiac—Zodiac is the name given to that belt of the heavens, which includes all the apparent positions of the sun and planets. And the hard-working bee, while at work, is able to calculate the passing of time as correctly as we human beings can, by consulting this sundial. After all, how the passing of such sweet and refreshing hours could be calculated in the garden except by means of the sun-dial formed by plants and flowers.

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### 3.9 Summary – The Garden

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The Garden by Andrew Marvell is a unique poem which is romantic in its expression, metaphysical in its word-game, and classical in its music. It is romantic because it is about the nature in subject and theme, and it is the expression of the poet's personal and emotional feelings about life in the nature (and society).

Its style is metaphysical because it uses the conceit, forceful argument, allusions (references) from sources like the Bible, myths and metaphysical philosophies. And it is a classical poem in its form because the stanzas, rhythm, rhyme and word-choice is like in classical poetry (carefully perfected form, and a language different from the ordinary). The theme is that the garden (which is the symbol of life in nature) is the perfect place for physical, mental and spiritual comfort and satisfaction, unlike the society where pleasure is false and temporary.

The poet has finally found the nature and realized its value; he claims that the nature is the only true place for complete luxury. 'The Garden' is a unique metaphysical poem which is Romantic in its subject matter and also contains classical elements in its diction, meter and structure. The poem is written in heroic couplet, which deals with the poet's experience of feelings and ideas about the garden that represents the nature. The poet begins by comparing the nature with society and social life and criticizing the society and 'busy' worldly life.

In the first stanza, the speaker criticizes men who "vainly amaze" themselves by putting a garland of a few leaves and believing they have achieved victory, prestige and reward for all their endless labors. But in fact, the true and complete pleasure lies in the complete "garland of repose" in the nature. In the second stanza, he personifies the quietness and innocence in the nature and speaks to them saying that he has at last found them after losing his time in men's company. Then, he calls the trees "amorous" (sexually playful or powerful). Expressing such an odd emotion and attachment with trees, he criticizes lovers for cutting

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trees to write their beloveds' names. In the fourth stanza, he claims that **when** men's "heart" of love and youth is finished, they turn to the nature. According to the speaker, even the gods did this, when for example, Apollo and Pan **changed** their lovers into trees.

In the second part of the poem (stanza 3-7), the speaker develops his arguments and opinions about the nature. In the fifth stanza, he gives a very **sensuous** description about his physical pleasure. In the sixth, he argues that this **pleasure** is moreover mental. Here he uses an odd metaphysical philosophical idea that **the** mind contains another world and garden as well inside it. In the seventh **stanza**, he further claims that this pleasure has a spiritual aspect. He romanticizes **how** he feels; he feels as if his soul is singing and gliding from tree to tree as a **bird**, combing its feathers, and preparing for the eternal flight of salvation. Here **is** also an indirect allusion of the Holy Spirit of the Bible.

The third and last part of the poem is the conclusion (stanza 8 and 9). Before making the concluding remark that there can be no question of genuine **pleasure** without the nature, the speaker compares himself with the lonely Adam in **Eden**; he also argues that being lonely was a second paradise (heavenly state) for **Adam**, before Eve brought about the fall. In the ninth stanza, the speaker thanks God **for** creating a unique world of its own that is the garden. The garden or the nature **in** general, has its own time: the rush and hurry of the society doesn't apply **here**. Even the sun seems to have its own 'sweet' course. The garden is therefore **the** only source of true physical, mental as well as spiritual satisfaction and 'repose'. As a metaphysical poem 'The Garden' uses conceit, wit, far-fetched images and allusions, and a dramatic situation. The balance of emotion and intellect **is** also another metaphysical feature. The romantic myths about god Apollo and Pan is changing girls and enjoying the nature, the Biblical allusion of Adam's "lonely" happiness are "heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together" **within** the context of the argument. The trees and peace of the garden are personified and even sexualized! The argument about physical pleasure is twisted into the argument about mental pleasure. At that point, the poet brings a truly metaphysical idea about the mind. He argues – according to a medieval philosophy – that his mind is an ocean of all the things and images of the real world. He further extends the idea of pleasurable experience by arguing that his pleasure is actually spiritual. There he goes on to create the imagery of his soul flying like a dove and preparing for the eternal flight of salvation. The same idea of spiritual pleasure is also related to the comparison with Adam in Eden. The last stanza also contains another metaphysical element: the idea of the garden as a separate sun-dial. The poem is also a dramatic and emotional expression of personal feelings, which is at the same time balanced with witty and intellectual ideas and allusions. This 'unified sensibility' also gives the poem another feature of metaphysical poetry.

As a classical poem, the poem exhibits the qualities like the use of a different poetic diction, heroic couplet, careful rhythm and design, classical and educated allusions, and so on. The poem's main line of argument is not difficult to summarize. But, there are so many difficult words and even 'ordinary' words used in 'unusual' sense. Many sentences have a Latin-like word order, with the verb at the end, and so on. There is a classical perfection in its meter and design and structure as a whole.

The main theme of the poem is that peaceful life in the nature is more satisfying than social life and human company. The poem is striking in its sensuous imagery, witty ideas and a balance between romantic and classical elements, as well as its metaphysical qualities.

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### 3.10 Summary

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In this unit we have tried to gloss the poem *Lycidas* for you with copious notes, annotations and explanation of the devices used in the poem. We have also tried to briefly sum up Milton's life and works so that you are able to assess the writer as a whole. Andrew Marvell's *The Garden* (1681) remains a favorite among critics of poetry by Andrew Marvell. Although he most probably wrote it during retirement between 1650 and 1652, some critics have argued convincingly it may have been produced earlier in his career. Because of Marvell's lack of comment regarding his work, questions linger as to the dates of origin of his various poems. Most appeared in print for the first time in the posthumous 1681 collection titled *Miscellaneous Poems*.

Marvell drew on a rich tradition of garden writing for this work, including that by classical poets. One of the poets most imitated by Marvell was Horace, who associated gardens with epicurean delights and the contemplative life. In addition, Virgil's ideas of the garden as a source of themes of wisdom and philosophy in poetry, rather than of public virtue, surface in *The Garden*.

As a metaphysical poem 'The Garden' uses conceit, wit, far-fetched images and allusions, and a dramatic situation. The balance of emotion and intellect is also another metaphysical feature. The romantic myths about god Apollo and Pan is changing girls and enjoying the nature, the Biblical allusion of Adam's "lonely" happiness are "heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together" within the context of the argument. The trees and peace of the garden are personified and even sexualized! The argument about physical pleasure is twisted into the argument about mental pleasure. At that point, the poet brings a truly metaphysical idea about the mind. He argues – according to a medieval philosophy – that his mind is an ocean of all the things and images of the real world. He further extends the idea of pleasurable experience by arguing that his pleasure is actually

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spiritual. There he goes on to create the imagery of his soul flying like a dove and preparing for the eternal flight of salvation. The same idea of spiritual pleasure is also related to the comparison with Adam in Eden. The last stanza also contains another metaphysical element: the idea of the garden as a separate sun-dial. The poem is also a dramatic and emotional expression of personal feelings, which is at the same time balanced with witty and intellectual ideas and allusions. This 'unified sensibility' also gives the poem another feature of metaphysical poetry.

### 3.11 Review Questions

1. Write an essay on 'Lycidas' as a pastoral elegy.
2. Comment on the versification of Milton with reference to Lycidas.
3. How would the speaker of "The Mower Against the Garden" compare with the speaker of "The Garden"?
4. What is "The Garden" by Andrew Marvell about?
5. How does Andrew Marvell use form and structure to shape meaning in "The Garden"?
6. How to emphasize the sense of displacement in "The Garden"?
7. In what way does Marvell relate classical myth to the creation in "The Garden"?

### 3.12 Further Readings

- Johnson, Samuel : *Life of Milton*
- Tillyard, E.M.W. : *Studies in Milton*
- W. Bell (ed.) : *Milton's Nativity Ode, Lycidas, Sonnets etc.*
- Tillyard (ed.) : *Comus and other Shorter Poems of Milton*

# George Herbert and Alexander Pope

Notes

## (Structure)

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
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- 4.10 Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man: Epistle I-IV
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## 4.1 Learning Objectives

After studying the chapter, students will be able to:

- To discuss "The Collar" by George Herbert
- To describe the critical analysis of the poem "Essay On Man".

## 4.2 Introduction

The purpose of this Unit is to give an idea about how the poet expresses his thoughts and philosophy in an artistic and compelling style. In order to help you understand how good poetry is a powerful combination of matter and manner, an extract from Alexander Pope's best-known Essay on Man is chosen for detailed discussion. The text of the poem is followed by a critical analysis of the theme and style of the poem.

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After reading and understanding the poem thus, you are required to answer the questions, which will test you on your reading comprehension skills. A section has been designed to help you understand and use new words, phrases and expression that you may come across in this poem. A few words are given for the purpose of giving you practice in correct pronunciation and stress patterns in the language. Now read the poem carefully. Pay attention to the theme and also try to find out the salient features of the style in which the poet expresses ideas and vision. Read this poem for the beautiful couplets for which Pope is known and admired all over the world. Also try to appreciate the depth in thought and expression which makes this poem so meaningful and thoughts provoking. In order to help you analyze the poem better, notes are provided in the "About the Poem" section which follows immediately the text.

### 4.3 George Herbert and His Work

George Herbert was a very religious man whose poetry was not appreciated until long after his death. His best-known poems, such as 'The Collar,' employ a specific shape in the arrangement of their text, something known as shape poetry. He wrote for everyday people as well as for the clergy to whom he offered advice.

#### Life Facts

George Herbert was born in Montgomery, Powys, Wales in April of 1593. Herbert's first work, 'Qua auspiciatissimum Serenissimi Principis Caroli', was published in 1623. In 1653, Herbert's only prose work 'A Priest to the Temple' was published. In 1633 he took ill and died of consumption. After Herbert's death, a book of proverbs was published in 1640, titled, 'His Outlandish Proverbs.'

His poetry was not appreciated until decades after his death. King James I enjoyed his poetry and his piety. He studied Latin and Greek. He has a short career in Parliament. George Herbert could play the lute.

#### Famous Poems by George Herbert

'The Altar' is a devotional poem that depicts the speaker's desire to make a sacrifice similar to Christ's. This poem is one of several that Herbert wrote that depicts an image in the arrangement of the text. In this case, an altar. The poem describes the metaphorical process of building an altar out of one's heart. The speaker depicts how one move at a time he's going to create an altar to God, built from his own body.

'The Flower' focuses on the seasons and how transitions change how the speaker experiences religion and God. Spring is a time of year that brings with it great

emotional peace and happiness. But, as winter approaches, the speaker like a flower, withers up and has to work harder to maintain his faith.

*George Herbert and  
Alexander Pope*

'The Collar' is an interesting poem that suggests that life as a religious man was not as easy for Herbert as other poems suggest. In it, the priest's collar is presented as a symbol of restraint. He is living in a prison of his own belief and wants to find a way out of it. Eventually, God speaks to him and calms him down.

'The Pulley' describes the story of creation and the moment in which God chose to give humankind knowledge, as well as wisdom and beauty. These things came to humanity easily and now their defining features of the species. But, there is one blessing the God did not release—rest. He chose to keep it close so that when human beings get weary they turn to God.

'Easter Wings' is another religious poem in which the speaker discusses the fall of man and his own desire to do better. The poem is laid out in the shape of a bird's wings, a technique that Herbert enjoyed employing. In the text, the speaker describes man's foolishness in the Garden of Eden and how he doesn't like being stuck in the darkness. He asks God that he be able to rise up and into the light.

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### **Early Life**

George Herbert was born in Montgomery, Powys, Wales in April of 1593. His parents were Richard Herbert and Magdalen Herbert and he was one of ten children born to the couple. He grew up in a very affluent household that was close to both the national and local governments. At one point his father was a member of parliament as well as a justice of the peace. For a time Richard Herbert served as a high sheriff and *custos rotulorum*, or keeper of the rolls, in Montgomeryshire.

Herbert's mother was inclined to a more artistic life. She was a patron and close friend of the poet John Donne, as well as a number of other poets, writers, and artists. Donne was made Herbert's godfather after the death of Richard Herbert. The children were primarily raised by their mother who spent a great deal of time worrying about their education.

When he was twelve years old Herbert entered Westminster School as a day pupil. He later became a residential scholar and was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1609. It was from here that he graduated with a Bachelor's and Master's degree. He graduated in 1616 at the age of 23. After his time at university, he was elected a major fellow of the college and was appointed Reader in Rhetoric. Throughout his years of education, he devoted a great deal of time studying Latin and Greek. These skills allowed him to attain the post of the University's Public Orator. He remained in this role until 1627.

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### Literary Career

Herbert's first work, *Qua auspiciatissimum Serenissimi Principis Caroli*, was published in 1623. He is known today for writing in English, Latin, and Greek. It was in 1624 that Herbert became a member of parliament, representing Montgomery. He gained favor with King James I during this time period but the king died in 1625, as well as two patrons who were helping to fund the young man's career. Herbert's short career in parliament was over but he quickly moved from politics to the church.

In 1626, he was presented with the Prebendary of Leighton Bromswold in the Diocese of Lincoln, a high-level position that was in the upper levels of the clergy. During this same time period, he was a don at Trinity College, Cambridge. It was not until 1629 that Herbert decided to enter the priesthood. He became the rector of Fugglestone St Peter with Bemerton, near Salisbury in Wiltshire. Herbert lived in this town for the rest of his life, writing, and preaching. In 1633 he published, *The Temple, Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, which was printed in eight different editions before 1690. Like most of Herbert's poems, these are on a religious theme. He proceeds through the book from the front of the church, to 'The Altar,' to 'The Sacrifice.' Of his work, it has been said that there is a true closeness to God: Herbert's devotion was clear through the text. Herbert's life in Bemerton was not long. In 1633 he took ill and died of consumption.

### Legacy and Posthumous Publication

After Herbert's death, a book of proverbs was published in 1640, titled, *His Outlandish Provers*. It listed over 1,000 aphorisms in English which had been gathered from a number of different countries. These proverbs, as well as another 150, were re-published posthumously in the collection, *Herbert's Remains*.

A reader of Herbert's text will also take note of the ways in which many of the poems are printed. Often the text was varied on the page, such as appearing sideways, in an effort to enhance the meaning of the piece. One example of this technique can be seen in the poem, 'The Altar,' in which the shorter and longer lines are arranged so they form the image of an altar.

In 1653, Herbert's only prose work *A Priest to the Temple* (usually known as *The Country Parson*) was published. It offered practical advice to rural members of the clergy and explained that what may seem to be worldly objects, such as plows, could be made to serve God's truth. In addition to Herbert's skill with the written word, he was known for his ability to play the lute. He often set his own verses and since his death over ninety of his poems have been set to music. It was not for many centuries after his death that Herbert was appreciated for more than just his piety. His poetic works were not truly admired until a great deal of time had passed.

## **Influence from other Poets**

George Herbert was notably influenced by religious writers and thinkers, as well as Shakespeare and Milton. His work eventually influenced other well-known poets such as Henry Vaughan, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and even Emily Dickinson.

*George Herbert and  
Alexander Pope*

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### **4.4 The Collar by George Herbert**

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Of all George Herbert's poems, this is probably the one that most needs to be read aloud to do it justice. The dramatic opening line demands attention (a trick he may well have learned from John Donne) and makes it clear from the outset that this is no run-of-the-mill verse. And the use of such a loose rhyme structure, bordering on free verse, heightens the sense of frustration and bewilderment in the speaker. But ever the master craftsman, Herbert is in control and knows precisely what he is doing, and where he is going with his argument.

As is so often the case with Herbert, there are strong autobiographical overtones and perhaps in this poem he is questioning why the impressive academic achievements of his twenties did not deliver tangible recognition in the form of high public office. Possibly he is also reflecting on the conflicting expectations or constraints others had placed on him, notably his mother Magdalen who had wanted him to enter the priesthood, his Cambridge college fellowship which had required him to be ordained, and his influential kinsman the 3rd Earl of Pembroke who had expected his support in the wider secular worlds of politics and commerce.

The poem's title 'The Collar' makes it plain that this poem is all about constraint - having struggled to conform with his or her own ideals, the speaker feels keenly a sense of lost opportunities and resolves to break free. The conceit Herbert employs here is the iron or leather circlet placed around the neck of animals, so that their freedom of movement can be constrained by an attached chain or leash. Critics have also suggested that the title is a typical Herbertian pun on the word 'choler', a term much in use at that time to describe anger or intemperance and which the poem exemplifies.

In this poem we have yet another example of the way Herbert likes to structure his poetry around a conversation, very often with God but in this case essentially with himself. It starts with a reflection of the sentiment found in one of his earlier verses, 'Affliction (I)' - 'I will change the service, and go seek/ Some other master out'. From there, Herbert's speaker launches into a series of rhetorical questions, which occupy almost half the poem. Perhaps they can be summarised as "Why should I have to put up with this?". As the speaker complains, there were good times in the past, and only internal doubts and agonies stand in the way of achieving his or her potential ('no bays to crown it').

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In the next part of the poem, a little voice inside the speaker's head points out that there is still time to change course and return to former glories ('Recover all thy sigh-blown age') if only he or she will stop fretting and worrying about the situation, and indulging in incessant inner debate about its rights and wrongs. The fault, says the voice, lies in trying to conform to self-imposed constraints - constraints that are entirely artificial ('rope of sands'). In modern parlance, this little tempting voice is urging "What's the problem? Go for it!" And for a moment it seems that the speaker is persuaded, and is resolved to take action to break free. But then in the last couple of lines another voice is heard. Herbert often brings his poems to a surprising conclusion - in this case, it is God tugging on the leash and calling the speaker to order. Perhaps inevitably, the result is meek submission. It turns out that it is entirely his or her own personal faith and religious belief that has the speaker 'collared'.

'The Collar' by George Herbert is a thirty-six line poem about a speaker's struggle for freedom. It was written by Herbert in 1633 while he struggled with his own religious beliefs. The poem does not conform to one particular rhyme scheme but jumps from half or slant rhymes to full end rhymes.

**'The Collar'**

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more.  
I will abroad.  
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free; free as the roe,  
Loose as the winde, as large as store  
. Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn  
To let me bloud, and not restore  
What I have lost with cordiall fruit?  
Sure there was wine  
Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn  
Before my tears did drown it.  
Is the yeare onely lost to me?  
Have I no bayes to crown it?  
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?  
All wasted?  
Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.

Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
And be thy law,  
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
Away; take heed:  
I will abroad.  
Call in thy deaths head there: tie up thy fears.  
He that forbears  
To suit and serve his need,  
Deserves his load.  
But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde  
At every word,  
Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!  
And I reply'd, My Lord

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There are a few moments which are more consistent in their patterns, such as the final four lines of the poem which rhyme abab. Herbert chose this pattern, or lack of pattern, to mimic the chaos of his speaker's own thoughts. The first element of this piece a reader should take note of is the title. If one understands a bit about Herbert's religious background, the title takes on a second layer of meaning. The word "collar" has immediate connotations of submission and control but it also refers to the piece of clothing worn by a member of the clergy.

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### 4.5 Summary of the Collar

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'The Collar' by George Herbert describes a speaker's desire to escape from his religious life and turn to one of greater freedom. The poem begins with the speaker stating that he will stand for his present life no longer. It is time for him to make a change and he intends to resurrect the parts of himself the lost in his youth. He will seek out real pleasures and no longer worry about what is right and wrong. "The Collar" may be a one-stanza, free-verse poem that's widely understood to incorporate dialogue between one speaker's two inner voices, sometimes identified because of the heart and therefore the will. While the desire rebels against God and therefore the "collar" or yoke of faith, the guts wins the battle, overcoming the desire. In the first sixteen lines of the poem, the speaker

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(or "the heart") states that he's uninterested in the present state of affairs and plans to hunt out his freedom. He laments that he's "in the suit," during a lowly position, which he has not reaped greater rewards. As these lines progress, we learn that the speaker has undergone a period of pining and sadness, resulting in his present anger.

In lines 17-26, another inner voice interjects, "not so, my heart," reminding the primary speaker that there's an end to sadness in view. If only the speaker will "leave [his] cold dispute" and stop his rebellion, he is going to be ready to open his eyes and see the reality. As the poem continues, the extent of his confinement is revealed. He has crafted a prison for himself out of his own belief. The ropes will no longer keep him and he will utilize his fears to his own benefit. He will be a stronger man.

In lines 27-32, the desire reappears, commanding the opposite speaker "away!" and restating his commitment to going abroad. within the final four lines of the poem, the irregular vers libre gives thanks to an ABAB rhyme scheme. The second inner voice reveals that, even within the midst of raving, he heard someone calling "Child" and replied "My Lord." this means a return to God after a period of rebellion.

The final lines bring the speaker back to his religious reality. The voice of God penetrates through his "rav[ing]" and calms his ardour. He will not do as he said he would; he has been taken back into the fold of the church.

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#### 4.6 Analysis of the Collar

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##### Lines 1- 9

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;

I will abroad!

What? shall I ever sigh and pine?

My lines and life are free, free as the road,

Loose as the wind, as large as store.

Shall I be still in suit?

Have I no harvest but a thorn

To let me blood, and not restore

What I have lost with cordial fruit?

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker shocks his reader by crying out, seemingly without provocation, that he has had enough. He says, "No more." He will not remain in his life any longer. The speaker will "abroad." He asks in the following lines if it is necessary for him to "sigh and pine." The speaker

is becoming more and more sure that it is not his sole purpose in life to want something he cannot have. He is severely dissatisfied with the current direction of his life and is ready to make a change.

He sees himself as being able to live in "life" and write his "lines...free, free as the road." There should be no restraints on what he is allowed to do or say. He sees a future in which his life is "Loose" and resembles the "wind." He desires to live in a world as large as he wants it to be.

The following lines are used to ask if he must be "still in suit." He wants to know if it is possible for him to change his life at this time, or if he is trapped in the world he has made around himself. The next phrase proposes one type of life he could be living, one he cannot escape from. In this scenario he compares himself to a plant which produces no fruit, but only thorns on which he cuts himself. It is the blood he loses that he hopes to use to reinvigorate himself. Perhaps he can benefit off his own present suffering.

**Lines 10-18**

Sure there was wine

Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn

Before my tears did drown it.

Is the year only lost to me?

Have I no bays to crown it,

No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?

All wasted?

Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,

And thou hast hands.

In the next set of lines he tries to remember if there was a point in his life in which "there was wine." It would have had to have been before his "sighs did dry it." He thinks there is no way the suffering he is going through now has always been present in his life. There must've been days before in which one could find "corn" and "wine." These days would be before his "tears did drown it." To some extent, he feels as if his own emotional state is making his already bad situation worse.

The second half of the section is made up of a number of questions. He asks if there is any way for him to "crown" or save his year. He does not want it to be "lost to" him. The speaker searches for "flowers" or "garlands gay" which might be used to improve his remaining days.

Two short phrases follow; they inquire if the flowers have all been "blasted" or "wasted." The final two lines clarify that no, they have not. In his "heart...there is

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fruit" still. With his hands he plans to retrieve that fruit along with his happiness

**Lines 19-28**

Recover all thy sigh-blown age

On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute

Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,

Thy rope of sands,

Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,

And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.

Away! take heed;

I will abroad.

The second half of the poem begins with the speaker asking a number of different things of himself. First, he wants to recover the pleasures of his past and leave behind his "cold dispute / Of what is fit and not." He is done wasting time worrying about what is holy, proper, or good. These things will no longer interest him. It is his goal to leave behind his cage and "rope of sand."

These means of confinement that the speaker mentions were crafted by religion and by his own hands. They were made by "petty thoughts" and turned into "Good cable" which was able to "enforce and draw" and turn into the "law" which he obeyed.

He is no longer going to be a part of this lifestyle. He is moving on, away from his confinement and "collar." The final line repeats the declaration which appears at the beginning of the poem, "I will abroad," he will depart.

**Lines 29-36**

Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;

He that forbears

To suit and serve his need

Deserves his load."

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild

At every word,

Methought I heard one calling, Child!

And I replied My Lord.

The final section of this piece concludes the narrator's agitated speech and produces a slight twist to the narrative. He continues speaking to himself and tries to boost his confidence for the change he is trying to make. The speaker

asks that the “death’s-head” leave him alone. He does not want to be bothered by his fears. It is his intention to “tie” them up and force them to serve his purpose. The speech ends with a set of lines which utilize the rhyme scheme of abab. They are used to bring the speaker back to his known reality. He describes how his “rav[ing]” came to its climax and rather than building him up, it just brought on the voice of God. The speaker heard “Child!” And replied, “My Lord.” Like a child, he was chastised and brought back into the religious fold.

*George Herbert and  
Alexander Pope*

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### 4.7 Alexander Pope

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The English poet Alexander Pope is regarded as one of the finest poets and satirists (people who use wit or sarcasm to point out and devalue sin or silliness) of the Augustan (mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century English literature) period and one of the major influences on English literature in this time and after.

#### Early years

Alexander Pope was born on May 21, 1688, in London, England, to Alexander and Edith Pope. His Roman Catholic father was a linen merchant. His family moved out of London and settled in Binfield in Windsor Forest around 1700. Pope had little formal schooling. He educated himself through extensive studying and reading, especially poetry.

Although Pope was healthy and plump in his infancy, he became severely ill later in his childhood, which resulted in a slightly disfigured body—he never grew taller than 4 feet 6 inches. He suffered from curvature of the spine, which required him to wear a stiff canvas brace. He had constant headaches. His physical appearance, frequently ridiculed by his enemies, undoubtedly gave an edge to Pope's satire (humor aimed at human weaknesses), but he was always warmhearted and generous in his affection for his many friends.

#### Early poems

Pope was precocious (showed the characteristics of an older person at a young age) as a child and attracted the notice of a noted bookseller who published his *Pastorals* (1709). By this time Pope was already at work on his more ambitious *Essay on Criticism* (1711) designed to create a rebirth of the contemporary literary scene.

*The Rape of the Lock* (1712) immediately made Pope famous as a poet. It was a long humorous poem in the classical style (likeness to ancient Greek and Roman writing). Instead of treating the subject of heroic deeds, though, the poem was about the attempt of a young man to get a lock of hair from his beloved's head. It was based on a true event that happened to people he knew. Several other poems were published by 1717, the date of the first collected edition of Pope's works.

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Pope also engaged in poetic imitations and translations. His *Messiah* (1712) was an imitation of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.). He also did a version of Geoffrey Chaucer's (1342–1400) poetry in the English of Pope's day. But it was Pope's versions of Homer (c. 700 B.C.E.) that were his greatest achievement as a translator.

Pope undertook the translation of Homer's *Iliad* because he needed money. The interest earned from his father's annuities (money from investments) had dropped sharply. The translation occupied him until 1720. It was a great financial success, making Pope independent of the customary forms of literary patronage (support from wealthy people), and it was highly praised by critics.

From the time parts of *Iliad* began to appear, Pope became the victim of numerous pamphlet attacks on his person, politics, and religion. In 1716 an increased tax on Roman Catholics forced the Papes to sell their place at Binfield and to settle at Chiswick. The next year Pope's father died, and in 1719 the poet's increased wealth enabled him to move with his mother to Twickenham.

From 1725 to 1726 Pope was engaged in a version of *Odyssey*. He worked with two other translators, William Broome and Elijah Fenton. They completed half of the translation between them. It was Pope's name, however, that sold the work, and he naturally received the lion's share (biggest part) of the profits.

### Editorial Work

Pope also undertook several editorial projects. Parnell's *Poems* (1721) was followed by an edition of the late Duke of Buckingham's *Works* (1723). Then, in 1725, Pope's six volumes on the works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) were published. Pope's edits and explanatory notes were notoriously capricious (impulsive and not scholarly). His edition was attacked by Lewis Theobald in *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), a work that revealed a superior knowledge of editorial technique. This upset Pope, who then made Theobald the original hero of *Dunciad*.

### The Dunciad

In 1726 and 1727 the writer Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) was in England and a guest of Pope. Together they published three volumes of poetry. Renewed contact with Swift must have given a driving force to Pope's poem on "Dulness," which appeared as the three-book *Dunciad* (1728). Theobald was the prime dunce, and the next year the poem was enlarged by a burlesque (broad comedy) on commentators and textual critics.

Clearly Pope used *Dunciad* as personal satire to pay off many old scores. But it was also prompted by his distaste for that whole process by which worthless writers gained undeserved literary prominence (fame). The parody (comic

imitation) of the classical epic (heroic poem) was accompanied by further mock-heroic elements, including the intervention of a goddess, the epic games of the second book, and the visit to the underworld and the vision of future "glories." Indeed, despite its devastating satire, *Dunciad* was essentially a phantasmagoric (created by the imagination) treatment by a great comic genius. In 1742 Pope published a fourth book to *Dunciad* separately, and his last published work was the four-volume *Dunciad* in 1743.

### **An Essay on Man**

Pope's friendship with the former statesman Henry St. John Bolingbroke, who had settled a few miles from Twickenham, stimulated his interest in philosophy and led to the composition of *An Essay on Man*. Some ideas expressed in it were probably suggested by Bolingbroke. For example, the notion that earthly happiness is enough to justify the ways of God to man was consistent with Bolingbroke's thinking.

In essence, the *Essay* is not philosophy (the study of knowledge) but a poet's belief of unity despite differences, of an order embracing the whole multifaceted (many-sided) creation. Pope's sources were ideas that had a long history in Western thought. The most central of these was the doctrine of plenitude, which Pope expressed through the metaphors (a figure of speech in which words or phrases are used to find similarities in things that are not comparable) of a "chain" or "scale" of being. He also asserted that the discordant (not harmonious) parts of life are bound harmoniously together.

### **Later years**

Pope wrote *Imitations of Horace* from 1733 to 1738. (Horace was a Roman poet who lived from 65 to 8 B.C.E.) He also wrote many "epistles" (letters to friends) and defenses of his use of personal and political satire. As Pope grew older he became more ill. He described his life as a "long disease," and asthma increased his sufferings in his later years. At times during the last month of his life he became delirious. Pope died on May 30, 1744, and was buried in Twickenham Church. Alexander Pope used language with genuine inventiveness. His qualities of imagination are seen in the originality with which he handled traditional forms, in his satiric vision of the contemporary world, and in his inspired use of classical models.

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## **4.8 Introduction: The Classical Movement**

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The period in which this movement flourished is known by at least three titles: the Classical Age, with reference to the standards it preached; the Augustan Age, because it resembled that of the Emperor Augustus in the splendour of its literature

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(Dr. Johnson also said that Dryden did for English letters what Augustus did for the City of Rome, which he "found brick and left marble"); and the Age of Reason and Good Sense, based as it was on the "Good Sense" ideal of the French critic Boileau, formulated in 1673.

Factors Responsible for the Changed Outlook About the middle of the 17th century a change came over the English prophetic temperament. The Metaphysical wave had exhausted itself, and had left literary standards and values confused. Ben Jonson, with prophetic vision, had seen this danger and also shown a way out. While the older Elizabethans were drawing their inspiration from the matter of the Greek and Latin classics made available to them by the Renaissance, he found his own sustenance in their form. In other words he preferred literary order and discipline to lawless impulse and unbridled fancy. His example was ignored for a time, but it was effective later when the Metaphysical method, in its decay, began to produce more weeds than flowers. The return to a greater restraint and more rigid framework was accelerated by the powerful influence of French literary tastes, themselves derived from classical literature, on the English court as a result of Charles II's long stay in France after the execution of his father. Very soon the new, or rather ancient, spirit made itself felt in all branches of literary activity. Seneca provided the model for tragedy. Plautus and Terence for comedy, Virgil for epic and pastoral, Juvenal for satire, and Horace, with his *Ars Poetica* for literary taste and criticism.

The change involved the substitution of training for instinct, of conscious craftsmanship for erratic self-expression.

The Precursors Edmund Waller and Sir John Denham were the pioneers of the new movement. They led the reaction against Metaphysical excesses by writing charming verses on the classical model. They were not great in their own right, but as the forerunners of Dryden and Pope, who both drew inspiration from these lesser poets.

Among the comparatively small company of writers and readers in those days, a new fashion spread quickly, and the classical soon became the accepted mode. Its reign was long and remarkable.

### Characteristics of the New School

#### (a) Respect for Rules

'The literary transition from the Renaissance to the Restoration is nothing more or less than the progressive movement of a spirit of liberty, at once fanciful, brilliant, and adventurous, towards a rule and a discipline both in inspiration and in form. This rule and discipline were accepted and practiced with enthusiasm

by the new school. Classical conventions governed every variety of verse—drama, epic, satire, ode or pastoral. Nothing that violated the law of its particular kind was good art. Perfect form was the ideal; the substance was of minor importance. The contrast between this cool control and the warmth and passion of the Elizabethans was indeed extreme.

(b) *Intellectual Quality*

The leading writers of this period shrank from all extravagance and emotionalism. They were governed by a spirit of reason and “good sense,” and were, above all things, correct. Their poetry was bred more in the head than in the heart, and was addressed to the intellect, not to the feelings. Though Dryden and Pope, the masters of the school, often wrote on matters that roused deep emotions, they never burst through the bonds of their form. The drama of the day dealt with high passions, but with a chilly classicism that gave it no appeal to later generations. The classical model does not attract the modern reader, and what keeps the works of these writers alive is the quality in which they themselves delighted — wit. They had a gift for pregnant and memorable phrase, descriptive, philosophical, malicious, critical, or even pathetic. Pope is more often quoted than any other English poet but Shakespeare, and many of his sayings are so familiar that we never think of their authorship.

(c) *Insistence on a Set Poetic Style*

The preoccupation with form encouraged an artificial style. The vocabulary must be neither colloquial nor technical. It had to be selected from what Dr. Johnson called “a system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts.” Everyday turns of speech were unacceptable, and so were novel expressions. The result was that, in the work of all but the greatest masters, the language tended to be stilted and standardized.

(d) *Emergence of the Heroic Couplet*

As we have already seen, the best medium for realizing the poetic ideals of the time proved to be the heroic couplet. It was suitable for drama, epic, and satire, the three most widely practiced literary forms of the age. It had rules of its own, initiated by Waller and Denham and systematized by Dryden and Pope. It not only ousted lyrical measures for the time being but even disputed the sway of blank verse for dramatic purposes. Precise and unimpassioned, it came to seem the natural expression of the intellectual mood of the age.

(e) *Treatment of Town Life*

London was a magnet for writers, each of whom hoped to find a patron to help him with money and influence in his career. The coffee-house was the place

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where men of different professions, including authors, usually met to discuss the topics of the day. A one time there were no fewer than 3,000 coffee-houses in London, each with a flourishing trade. They served to establish contact not only between author and reader but between author and author, sometimes to the lasting benefit of mankind. Dryden and Pope, for example, first met at a coffee-house. All this had its influence on literature, which came to draw many of its subjects from town life rather than nature and the countryside. Satire came to be practiced more and more as London life and current fashions and controversies offered it almost unlimited scope. Classical and French satirical masterpieces supplied the necessary model.

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### 4.9 Summary of the Text

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The Essay on Man (1734) is considered to be Pope's most meaningful poem. However, it would be wrong to suggest that it is just a poem. It is in fact a combination of an essay and a poem. It is a poem as far as its form and style is concerned however, when we focus on the gravity of thought and the depth of philosophical ideas, it looks much like a literary essay which is more universal in appeal and approach. That is why it is rightly termed as an essay in poetic form. The purpose of this essay in Pope's own words is to "vindicate the ways of God to Man" Clearly, Pope's idea is lofty and hence a sublime poem for all of us to read and learn much from. This unique blending of essay and form is actually expressed in four poetical epistles. This epistle addressed to Henry St. John talks about man's relations to God and makes an objective and interesting analysis of the complex nature of man.

The poem starts abruptly. It straightaway challenges man's ego which he exhibits in displaying his knowledge of God. It is obvious that all of us feel that we are the chosen creatures of God. We also assume that we have been formed after God and know fully well what He is and what He wants from us. The poet however, does not believe in any such assumptions. He feels that it is beyond man to understand the ways of God. Therefore, it is more appropriate for him to concentrate on himself, that is, Pope wants man to observe his own complexities, confusions and contradictions rather than talking about God and His ways.

After giving this strong message to us, Pope gives a very appropriate description of man's complex nature, desires and actions. He finds man to be wise and great. But he is only "darkly wise" and "rudely great" Now Pope is known for his epigrams the purpose of which is to highlight the paradoxes in man's nature. Pope looks at man's nature with admirable clarity and feels that all the greatness that man possesses is ruined because he is rude and unaware of his own pursuits in life. That is why though man may be wise; his wisdom is of no use because

of his inner darkness. Moreover, a great man can never be rude and since Pope calls man great and rude together, he suggests that man cannot be great because he is by nature rude.

Continuing his precise observation of man's complex nature, Pope feels that man always tries to do things beyond his capacities. He finds him full of knowledge which does not help him. Moreover, he also finds him too weak to be successful as a stoic.

Pope then concentrates on the dilemma that man experiences as because of his complex and contradictory drives, man lives in doubt for ever. He does not know whether to act or rest. He also is always in doubt whether to see himself as a God or a beast, because he is a combination of the both. It is in this sense that Pope finds man to be dangling in between God and beast.

The poet further highlights man's sense of confusion, as he always seems to be torn between the desires of his body and instructions of his mind. Caught between these two extremes, man cannot decide what to prefer – his body or his mind. Hence though man applies reason before taking action, he fails and errs because his reasoning also his faulty and awkward. The poet further looks a man's situation with sympathetic irony. He finds man to be ignorant even if he thinks too much or too little. Obviously, Pope does not believe that those who think too much can reach a level of understanding as to what they are and what they are supposed to be doing in life. Pope finds man to be created with such complexities that he can rise but only to fall. Because of his inner contradictions man becomes a curious combination of weakness and strengths. Due to his strengths, he aspires to rise above his nature. But because of his weakness; he fails to do so. Therefore, man appears to be a lord of all things, but still he is a victim. Thus, in spite of all his greatness, he is only a riddle for he is a curious blending of difference traits, virtues and shortcomings. Because of all the confusion mixture, man is both the glory as well as the joker of the world.

### **Extract From The Poem**

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
the proper study of mankind is Man.

Placed on his isthmus of a middle state,

A being darkly wise, and rudely great:

With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,

With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,

He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,

In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;

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In doubt his mind or body to prefer,  
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;  
Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

### 4.10 Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man: Epistle I-IV

#### An Essay on Man: Epistle I

##### Summary

The subtitle of the first epistle is "Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe," and this section deals with man's place in the cosmos. Pope argues that to justify God's ways to man must necessarily be to justify His ways in relation to all other things. God rules over the whole universe and has no special favorites, not man nor any other creature. By nature, the universe is an order of "strong connexions, nice dependencies, / Gradations just" (30-1). This order is, more specifically, a hierarchy of the "Vast chain of being" in which all of God's creations have a place (237). Man's place in the chain is below the angels but above birds and beasts. Any deviation from this order would result in cosmic destruction. Because the universe is so highly ordered, chance, as man understands it, does not exist. Chance is rather "direction, which thou canst not see" (290). Those things that man sees as disparate or unrelated are all "but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body nature is, and God the soul" (267-8). Thus every element of the universe has complete perfection according to God's purpose. Pope concludes the first epistle with the statement "Whatever is, is right," meaning that all is for the best and that everything happens according to God's plan, even though man may not be able to comprehend it (294).

Here is a section-by-section explanation of the first epistle:

**Introduction (1-16):** The introduction begins with an address to Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, a friend of the poet from whose fragmentary philosophical writings Pope likely drew inspiration for *An Essay on Man*. Pope urges his friend to "leave all meaner things" and rather embark with Pope on his quest to "vindicate the ways of God to man (1, 16).

**Section I (17-34):** Section I argues that man can only understand the universe with regard to human systems and constructions because he is ignorant of the greater relationships between God's creations.

**Section II (35-76):** Section II states that man is imperfect but perfectly suited to his place within the hierarchy of creation according to the general order of things.

**Section III (77-112):** Section III demonstrates that man's happiness depends on both his ignorance of future events and on his hope for the future.

**Section IV (113-30):** Section IV claims that man's sin of pride—the attempt to gain more knowledge and pretend to greater perfection—is the root of man's error and misery. By putting himself in the place of God, judging perfection and justice, man acts impiously.

**Section V (131-72):** Section V depicts the absurdity of man's belief that he is the sole cause of the creation as well as his ridiculous expectation of perfection in the moral world that does not exist in the natural world.

**Section VI (173-206):** Section VI decries the unreasonableness of man's complaints against Providence; God is good, giving and taking equally. If man had the omniscience of God, he would be miserable:

"The bliss of man / Is, not to act or think beyond mankind" (189-90).

**Section VII (207-32):** Section VII shows that throughout the visible world, a universal order and gradation can be observed. This is particularly apparent in the hierarchy of earthly creatures and their subordination to man. Pope refers specifically to the gradations of sense, instinct, thought, reflection, and reason. Reason is superior to all.

**Section VIII (233-58):** Section VIII indicates that if God's rules of order and subordination are broken, the whole of creation must be destroyed.

**Section IX (259-80):** Section IX illustrates the madness of the desire to subvert God's order.

**Section X (281-94):** Section X calls on man to submit to God's power. Absolute submission to God will ensure that man remains "Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r" (287). After all, "Whatever is, is right" (294)

### **Analysis**

Pope's first epistle seems to endorse a sort of fatalism, in which all things are fated. Everything happens for the best, and man should not presume to question God's greater design, which he necessarily cannot understand because he is a part of it. He further does not possess the intellectual capability to comprehend God's order outside of his own experience. These arguments certainly support a fatalistic world view. According to Pope's thesis, everything that exists plays a role in the divine plan. God thus has a specific intention for every element of

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His creation, which suggests that all things are fated. Pope, however, was always greatly distressed by charges of fatalism. As a proponent of the doctrine of free will, Pope's personal opinions seem at odds with his philosophical conclusions in the first epistle. Reconciling Pope's own views with his fatalistic description of the universe represents an impossible task.

The first epistle of *An Essay on Man* is its most ambitious. Pope states that his task is to describe man's place in the "universal system" and to "vindicate the ways of God to man" (16). In the poem's prefatory address, Pope more specifically describes his intention to consider "man in the abstract, his Nature and his State, since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection of imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being." Pope's stated purpose of the poem further problematizes any critical reading of the first epistle. According to Pope's own conclusions, man's limited intellect can comprehend only a small portion of God's order and likewise can have knowledge of only half-truths. It therefore seems the height of hubris to presume to justify God's ways to man. His own philosophical conclusions make this impossible.

As a mere component part of God's design and a member of the hierarchical middle state, Pope exists within God's design and therefore cannot perceive the greater logic of God's order. To do so would bring only misery: "The bliss of man / Is, not to act or think beyond mankind" (189-90).

Though Pope's philosophical ambitions result in a rather incoherent epistle, the poem demonstrates a masterful use of the heroic couplet. Some of the most quoted lines from Pope's works actually appear in this poem. For example, the quotation "Hope springs eternal in the human breast: / Man never is, but always to be blest" appears in the problematic first epistle (95-6). Pope's skill with verse thus far outweighs his philosophical aspirations, and it is fortunate that he chose to write in verse rather than prose. Indeed, eighteenth-century critics saw *An Essay on Man* as a primarily poetic work despite its philosophical themes.

## **An Essay on Man: Epistle II**

### **Summary**

The subtitle of the second epistle is "Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Himself as an Individual" and treats on the relationship between the individual and God's greater design. Here is a section-by-section explanation of the second epistle:

**Section I (1-52):** Section I argues that man should not pry into God's affairs but rather study himself, especially his nature, powers, limits, and frailties.

**Section II (53-92):** Section II shows that the two principles of man are self-love and reason. Self-love is the stronger of the two, but their ultimate goal is the same.

**Section III (93-202):** Section III describes the modes of self-love (i.e., the passions) and their function. Pope then describes the ruling passion and its potency. The ruling passion works to provide man with direction and defines man's nature and virtue.

**Section IV (203-16):** Section IV indicates that virtue and vice are combined in man's nature and that the two, while distinct, often mix.

**Section V (217-30):** Section V illustrates the evils of vice and explains how easily man is drawn to it.

**Section VI (231-294):** Section VI asserts that man's passions and imperfections are simply designed to suit God's purposes. The passions and imperfections are distributed to all individuals of each order of men in all societies. They guide man in every state and at every age of life.

### **Analysis**

The second epistle adds to the interpretive challenges presented in the first epistle. At its outset, Pope commands man to "Know then thyself," an adage that misdescribes his argument (1). Although he actually intends for man to better understand his place in the universe, the classical meaning of "Know thyself" is that man should look inwards for truth rather than outwards. Having spent most of the first epistle describing man's relationship to God as well as his fellow creatures, Pope's true meaning of the phrase is clear. He then confuses the issue by endeavoring to convince man to avoid the presumptuousness of studying God's creation through natural science. Science has given man the tools to better understand God's creation, but its intoxicating power has caused man to imitate God.

It seems that man must look outwards to gain any understanding of his divine purpose but avoid excessive analysis of what he sees. To do so would be to assume the role of God.

The second epistle abruptly turns to focus on the principles that guide human action. The rest of this section focuses largely on "self-love," an eighteenth-century term for self-maintenance and fulfillment. It was common during Pope's lifetime to view the passions as the force determining human action. Typically instinctual, the immediate object of the passions was seen as pleasure.

According to Pope's philosophy, each man has a "ruling passion" that subordinates the others. In contrast with the accepted eighteenth-century views of the passions, Pope's doctrine of the "ruling passion" is quite original. It seems clear that with this idea, Pope tries to explain why certain individual behave in distinct ways,

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seemingly governed by a particular desire. He does not, however, make this explicit in the poem.

Pope's discussion of the passions shows that "self-love" and "reason" are not opposing principles. Reason's role, it seems, is to regulate human behavior while self-love originates it. In another sense, self-love and the passions dictate the short term while reason shapes the long term.

### **An Essay on Man: Epistle III**

#### **Summary**

The subtitle of the third epistle is "Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Society," and this section discusses man's relation to family, government, and religion. Pope states that love connects the universe and that all creatures exchange services in a symbiotic relationship. Individual instances of human tyranny, however, offend nature. Instinct and reason are the guiding principles of man's behavior and have dictated man's trajectory since creation.

Here is a section-by-section explanation of the third epistle:

**Introduction (1-6):** The introduction simply reiterates the points Pope made in the first two epistles.

**Section I (7-78):** Section I suggests that the whole universe is one system of society. Nothing is made wholly for the benefit to itself, nor wholly for the benefit of others. Instead, everything is bound together in a neighboring embrace and all "parts relate to whole" (21): Those who fail to perform the role that nature has ordained will not be aided by society.

**Section II (79-108):** Section II states that all creatures are given either reason or instinct, whichever is best suited to the individual. Reason or instinct operates all society in both man and the animals.

**Section III (109-146):** Section III first demonstrates how far society can be carried by instinct, then shows how much farther society can be carried by reason. In society, creatures are instinctively united by mutual need. Reason extends that instinct into emotional connection.

**Section IV (147-198):** Section IV discusses the state of man at the time of creation, in particular the harmony between all elements of society. Initially bound by instinct, man looked to other creatures for instruction on how to act and develop their own forms of society, using reason to teach themselves.

**Section V (199-214):** Section V explains the development of political societies, especially the origins of monarchy and patriarchal government.

**Section VI (215-318):** Section VI examines the roles of religion and government in society. According to Pope's argument, the origin of both true religion and

government is the principle of love: faith is the love of God and government is the love of man. By contrast, superstition and tyranny both originate from the same principle of fear. Thus self-love, through just and unjust means, can either drive man's ambition or restrain him. Pope then describes man's efforts to restore true religion and government on their first principle. Both religion and government take many forms, but their ultimate ends are to govern the soul and to govern society.

*George Herbert and  
Alexander Pope*

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### **Analysis**

The third epistle treats on man's social contract with family, government, and religion, and Pope focuses on the bonds that unite man with others. While the second epistle shows that self-love governs man's actions, love governs the universe, binding its disparate elements. Modern readers might be inclined to interpret this to mean erotic or familial love, but Pope actually refers to a sort of contractual love, which forms a building-block of God's design and the chain of being. Atoms, for example, attract and are attracted to each other, which ensures that they remain in their proper place. Likewise, dirt sustains the growth of plants, and when a plant dies, it returns to dirt to nourish its fellow plants.

Man's grass and flowers provide food for antelope while antelope also nourish man. All parts in the circle of life thus "relate to whole," and love "connects each being, greatest with the least / Made beast in aid of man, and man of best; / All serv'd, all serving: nothing stands alone" (21, 23-5). Love provides a convenient way for Pope to describe symbiosis in the relationship between God's creatures, indicative of God's greater design.

Pope goes on to discuss the effects that instinct and reason have on God's creation. All creatures are imbued with either instinct or reason, whichever is best suited to their nature. According to Pope's argument, instinct tends to characterize beasts while man serves reason. Those governed by instinct are largely complacent, needing no assistance from "pope or council" (84). By contrast, reason seems to result in more calculated behavior and these creatures must labor at happiness which instinct quickly secures. While these are hardly original observations, Pope implies that instinct is the work of God while reason is that of man. This conclusion accounts for the development of man. In man's infancy humans were governed by instinct. Man then learned various behaviors—ploughing from the mole, political arts from the bees, etc.—by copying animals, thus developing human reason.

Through observations of his fellow creatures, man began to build his own cities, demonstrating sociability through government and religion. Man's early societies were patriarchal, featuring mild and natural rulers. Everyone conducted themselves

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virtuously and celebrated God until patriarchs directed self-love towards personal ambition and priests perverted religious worship. It was not until man redirected self-love towards its natural sociability through restraint, namely "government and laws," that man formed a social contract, which established good government and laws by rational agreement for mutual security (272). Pope's conclusion, therefore, is that private good is best achieved by preventing a conflict with public good: "Thus God and nature link'd the general frame, / And bade self-love and social be the same" (317-8).

**An Essay on Man: Epistle IV**

**Summary**

The subtitle of the fourth epistle is "On the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Happiness" and depicts man's various attempts to achieve true human happiness. Pope endeavors to prove that virtue alone can generate such happiness.

Here is a section-by-section explanation of the fourth epistle:

Introduction (1-18): The introduction identifies happiness as man's ultimate aim and establishes man's search for happiness as the theme of the fourth epistle.

Section I (19-28): Section I enumerates the popular and philosophical false notions of happiness.

Section II (29-92): Section II suggests that happiness is man's end and that it can be attained by all.

Happiness is therefore equal which means that it must also be social since, as Pope establishes in the third epistle, man is governed by general, not specific laws. Because happiness is social, it is necessary for the order, peace, and welfare of society. It cannot, however, be located in external goods since these can be unequal. God balances the happiness of mankind by the two passions of hope and fear.

Section III (93-110): Section III shows that the happiness of individuals is in accordance with God's greater plan and is consistent with the equality of man. Man, however, might question why a virtuous man dies while a sinful man lives.

Section IV (111-30): Section IV answers man's concerns in Section III. Pope chastises man's presumption to question the ways of God; it is absurd to expect God to alter his laws to favor particular individuals.

Section V (131-48): Section V demonstrates that man cannot judge the goodness and righteousness of other men. This is the purview of God alone. Whichever men are most good and righteous must be the happiest.

Section VI (149-308): Section VI elucidates the conflict between vice and virtue. Though sometimes vice seems to prevail, it is part of God's order; man should be

content to be virtuous. External goods, for example, are not the proper rewards for virtue and are often inconsistent with or destructive of virtue. All the riches, honors, nobility, greatness, fame, and superior talents cannot make man happy without likewise having virtue.

Section VII (309-98): Section VII deals specifically with the relationship between virtue and happiness. Virtue can only provide a happiness which seeks to rise above the individual and embrace the universal. Happiness thus born will exist eternally. This perfection of virtue and happiness conforms to God's order and represents the ultimate purpose of mankind.

### **Analysis**

Despite the significant interpretive problems of the first two epistles, the fourth epistle provides an appropriate conclusion to *An Essay on Man*, knitting the poem's arguments together and ostensibly demonstrating man's relation to and purpose in the universe. According to Pope's argument, happiness is man's ultimate goal and can only be attained through virtuous behavior. Of course, as he indicates earlier in the poem, the lines between virtue and vice are often blurred. It is therefore important to assign an appropriate reward for virtue: "What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy, / The soul's calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy, / Is virtue's prize: a better would you fix? / Then give humility a coach and six" (167-70). Pope shows this reward to be a composed serenity free of earthly desires.

Indeed, such serenity cannot derive from riches or fame, material goods or currencies which usually serve as an impediment to virtue anyway.

The "soul's calm sunshine" that Pope describes allows man to transcend his earthly prison and look "through nature up to nature's God," allowing man to pursue "that chain which links th'immense design, / Joins heav'n and earth, and mortal and divine" (332). Serenity is thus the natural end of judicious self-love: "God loves from whole to parts; but human soul / Must rise from individual to the whole. / Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake" (261-3). This is not, of course, the momentary pleasure that basic self-love and the passions provide but rather the happiness that derives from knowing one is part of a divine plan and accepting one's place and role in it. In other words, trust God and all will be well because "Whatever is, is right" (l.294).

Although the fourth epistle provides a successful conclusion to Pope's ambitious philosophical project, this section is not without its problems. Perhaps most distressing is Pope's argument in Section IV, which dismisses man's concern that too often virtue appears to be punished while vice is rewarded. While this is addressed to an extent in Pope's discussion of material goods, Pope also asserts that

### **Notes**

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God acts by general and not specific laws which apply to the whole, not individual parts. This suggests that all men are treated exactly equally by God. Experience obviously contradicts this assertion, but so does Pope himself. He declares that to satisfy God's hierarchical order as well as man's social order, there must be differences of wealth and rank. He claims that equality of wealth is opposed to God's ways because it would breed discontent among those who deserve greater wealth and status. Though Pope qualifies this by suggesting redress in Heaven, this disparity of wealth and rank—a part of reality—undermine Pope's thesis.

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#### 4.11 Summary

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Pope's poetry is a remarkable, clear and adequate reflection of the spirit of the age in which he lived. There is hardly an ideal, a belief, a doubt; a fashion, a whim of female that is not neatly expressed in his poetry. All the merits and demerits of the Age, which was an era of prose are faithfully represented by the writings of Pope.

It was an "Age of Prose and Reason" and even the poetry of the age was prosaic. Pope is the spokesman of a hard intellectuality and rationality, qualities proper to prose. His themes too are prosaic – criticism, moral philosophy and satire. He is the most correct of English poets.

Pope feels that it is beyond humans and man to understand the ways of God. Therefore it is more appropriate for him to concentrate on himself that is, Pope wants man to observe his own complexities confusions and contradictions rather than talking about god and his ways. Pope finds man in a middle state because man does not know whether to act or rest. He also is always in doubt whether to see himself as a God or a beast, because he is a combination of the both. It is in this sense that Pope finds man to be dangling in between god and beast.

The basic contradictions in Man are his complex mind and confused State of mind along with contradictory desires of the body he is wise as well as selfish and in doubt forever. He can rise only to fall. Ell there we inner contradiction a curious combination between action and reaction or weaknesses and strengths. Pope does not find man's knowledge and reason to be of use, because man has knowledge but is his basic nature is full of complexities and confusion and he is in the state of being in between doubts. He has the power of reason, but his complex structure of mind fails and while in action which is improper. Thus man fails always.

According to Pope, man's main dilemmas or confusion is his lack of perfect capacities. Pope feels than man has no inner and outer reason and that results in his state of being in capable to determine whether what to do and what not to do.

Pope finds that man is created with such complexities that he can rise but only to fall, because a curious combination of weakness and strength. Due to his strengths, he aspires to rise above his nature. But because of his weakness, he fails to do so. Therefore man appears to be a lord of all things, but still he is a victim.

Man's chief strengths and weaknesses are his incompatibility to do things that are beyond his capacities. His knowledge is restricted and his dilemmas which is contradictory and complex leads him towards a life of doubts and unsuccess. His reasoning is faulty, his mind and body are on two sides. Man is only a riddle, a blending of traits, virtues and shortcomings. He is a glory as well as a joker of the world.

The 1 Epistle deals with the "nature and state of man with respect to the Universe." The poet thinks that man is not an imperfect being. His happiness in the present depends partly upon his ignorance of the future and partly upon his hope of a happier state. The cause of his most of the misery is pride, which blinds him to his limitations. Epistle II deals of man with respect to himself as an individual. Epistles III deals of man with respect to society and Epistle IV deals of man with respect to happiness.

The Object of Alexander Pope's Essay on Man" is to indicate the ways of God to man to prove that the scheme of the universe is the best inspite of appearances of evil, and that our failure to see the perfection of the whole is due to our limited vision.

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#### **4.12 Keywords**

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Vanity : Excessive pride in or admiration of one's own appearance.

Amorous: Feelling sexual desire.

Anxious: Experiencing worry, nervousness or unease.

Culminate : Reach or be at the meridian.

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#### **4.13 Review Questions**

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1. What is the summary for "The Collar" by George Herbert?
2. Explain in what way the title of the poem "The Collar" by George Hughes relates to its content.
3. What type of poem is the "The Collar"?
4. George Herbet-The Collar I struck the board and cried no more ..... please explain and paraphrase this poem?
5. Why does Pope advise man to study himself and not God?
6. How does the poet find man being on a middle state?

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7. What does the poet say when he suggests that man is created half to rise and half to fall?
8. What are man's chief strengths and major weaknesses? Give your answer on the basis of the your comprehension of the poet's view on man.
9. Write a few words about Pope's Poem "Essay on Man"?
10. Write a critical analysis of the poem "Essay On Man".
11. Epistles III and IV of "Essay On Man" deals with what?

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#### 4.14. Further Readings

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- *B. Prasad : A Background to the Study of English Literature, New Delhi: Macmillan; 1990*
- *W.H. Hudson : Outline History of English Literature, B.I. Publications*
- *R.D. Trivedi : A Compendious History of English Literature, New Delhi :Vikas Publishing House: 1990*
- Alexander Pope: Selected poetry and prose — Alexander Pope



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