

208



T.Y.B.A.
PAPER - IV
BRITISH LITERATURE
FROM 1550 - 1750

Dr. Devanand Shinde
Incharge Vice Chancellor
University of Mumbai,
Mumbai

Dr. Dhaneswar Harichandan
Incharge Director, Institute of
Distance and Open Learning,
University of Mumbai, Mumbai

Programme Co-ordinator : **Dr. Santosh Rathod,**
Asst. Professor-cum-Asst. Director,
IDOL, University of Mumbai

Course Co-ordinator : **Dr. Bijay Kumar Samal, MA, M. Phil., Ph.D.**
HOD, English,
Kirti M. Doongursee College,
Dadar (w) Mumbai 28

Course Writer : **Dr. B. K. Samal**
HOD, English,
Kirti M. Doongursee College,
Dadar (W) Mumbai 28

Dr. K. H. Pawar, MA, M. Phil., Ph.D.
Department of English,
M. D. College, Parel, Mumbai

Dr. Mrs. Savita Patil, MA, Ph.D.
HOD, English,
Elphinstone College,

Reprint October 2017, T.Y.B.A., Paper-IV, British Literature from 1550 - 1750

Published by : Professor cum Director
Institute of Distance and Open Learning ,
University of Mumbai,
Vidyanagari, Mumbai - 400 098.

DTP Composed : Ashwini Arts
Gurukripa Chawl, M.C. Chagla Marg, Bamanwada,
Vile Parle (E), Mumbai - 400 099.

Printed by : **ACME PACKS AND PRINTS (INDIA) PRIVATE LIMITED**
A Wing, Gala No. 28, Ground Floor, Virwani Industrial Estate,
Vishweshwar Nagar Road, Goregaon (East), Mumbai 400 063.
Tel. : 91 - 22 - 4099 7676

CONTENTS

| Unit No. | Title | Page No. |
|----------|--|----------|
| 1. | English Renaissance | 01 |
| 2. | The Caroline Age (1625-1649) | 33 |
| 3. | The Restoration Age | 46 |
| 4. | The Augustan Age | 59 |
| 5. | Threshold for Shakespearean Theatre | 88 |
| 6. | Critical Study of Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet | 98 |
| 7. | Critical Study of Shakespeare: Midsummer night's Dream Part-1 | 126 |
| 8. | Critical Study of Shakespeare: Midsummer night's Dream Part-2 | 143 |
| 9. | Critical Study of Wycherley: The Country Wife Part-I | 171 |
| 10. | Critical Study of Wycherley: The Country Wife Part-II | 192 |
| 11. | Critical Study of Poet: Edmund Spenser | 212 |
| 12. | Critical Study of Poet: Shakespeare | 229 |
| 13. | Critical Study of Poet: John Donne, George Herbert and John Milton | 252 |
| 14. | Critical Study of Poet: John Dryden | 286 |
| 15. | Critical Study of Poet: Alexander Pope | 306 |



I

Syllabus

T.Y.B.A. Paper- IV

British Literature 1550 – 1750

Texts Prescribed:

- 1) William Shakespeare: **A Midsummer Night's Dream**
- 2) William Shakespeare: **Romeo and Juliet**
- 3) William Wycherley: **The Country Wife**
- 4) Selected Verse from the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration periods

Elizabethan Period:

- a) Edmund Spenser: from **The Shepherd's Calendar**
March Eclogue
December Eclogue
- b) William Shakespeare: from **The Sonnets**
No. 2 "When forty winters shall besiege thy brow"
No. 26 "Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage"
No. 116 "Let me not to the marriage of true minds"
No. 141 "In faith. I do not love thee with mine eyes"

Jacobean Period:

- a) John Donne:
"The Flea"
"The Anniversarie"

Holy Sonnets:
"This is my play's last scene"
"A Hymne to God the Father"
- b) George Herbert:
"Mortification"
"Love"

Restoration Period:

- a) John Milton:
"Lycidas"
"On his Blindness"
- b) Alexander Pope
From Rape of the Lock
Canto I
What dire offence from am'roupus causes springs, (line 1)
And Betty's prais'd for Labours not her own (line 148)

II

- e) John Dryden
From Absalom and Achitophel
from "Of these the false Achitophel was first ... (line 150)
to Drawn from the Mouldy Rolls of Noah's Ark" (line 302)

Background Topics:

The teaching of the background topics should be related to the major literary works of the period. Students are expected to be acquainted with these works and to use them as illustrations when answering questions.

The Elizabethan Age (1550 – 1600):

- A. i) The Renaissance: The beginnings : its manifestations in the literature and culture of the period, with special focus on humanism.
ii) The Reformation
- B. A survey of the drama, poetry and prose of the period including the literary movement with which the following are associated.
Drama: The University Wits
Poetry: The epic (Spenser) the pastoral, the sonnet sequence
Prose: Sidney, Lyly and Greene

The Jacobean and Caroline Age (1601 – 1650) :

- A. The temper of the age: the shift from the Elizabethan sensibility : the impact of this shift on the literature of the period.
- B. A survey of the poetry, drama and prose of the period, including the literary movements with which the following are associated :
Drama: Ben Jonson, John Webster and Cyril Tourneur
Poetry: Metaphysical and Puritan poetry
Prose: Bacon, Bunyan, Sir Thomas Browne

The Restoration (1660 onwards) :

- A. The re-establishment of the monarchy after the fall of the Protectorate: the first appearance of women on the English stage. The Comedy of Manners.
- B. A survey of the poetry, drama and prose of the period, including the literary movements with which the following are associated :
Drama: William Wycherley. William Congreve, John Dryden, George Etherege
Poetry: Neo-Classical poetry, Dryden, Alexander Pope
Prose: Rise of the periodical essay – Joseph Addison's and Richard Steele's Tatler and Spectator

III

Recommended Reading :

1. Alpers, Paul E. Elizabethan Poetry : Modern Essays In Criticism (OUP, 1967).
2. Daiches, David. A Critical History of English Literature (Secker and Warburg, London, 1960).
3. Ford. Boris Ed. The New Pelican Guide To English Literature : The Age of Shakespeare Vol. 2 (Penguin, 1993), From Donne to Marvell Vol. 3 (Penguin, 1990).
4. Keast. William B. Seventeenth Century English Poetry : Modern Essays in Criticism (OUP. 1971).
5. King, Bruce, Seventeenth Century English Literature (Macmillan, 1983).
6. Leggatt, Alexander English Drama : Shakespeare to the Restoration 1590 – 1660. (Longman Literature in English Series, 1988).
7. Perfitt, George, English Poetry Of the Seventeenth Century (Longman Literature in English Series 1992).
8. Parry, Graham. The Seventeenth Century : The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature. 1603 – 1700 (Longman Literature in English Series, 1989).
9. Pooley, Roger. English Prose of the Seventeenth Century (Longman Literature in English Series, 1992).
10. Ricks. Christopher. The Penguin History of English Literature Vol.3 (Penguin. 1993).
11. Roston. Murray. Sixteenth Century English Literature (Macmillan. 1983).
12. Baugh. Albert C.A. Literary History of England. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century (1660 – 1789). 2nd Edition. (London, Routledge And Kegan Paul, 1967).
13. Clifford. James L. Ed. Eighteenth Century English Literature : Modern Essays in Criticism (OUP 1959).
14. Craig. Hardin J.D. A History of English Literature Series. Literature of The Restoration and The Eighteenth Century 1660 – 1798 Vol III (London. Macmillan. 1969).
15. Daiches David. A Critical History of English Literature. (Secker and Warburg. London, 1960).
16. Ford. Boris. Ed. The Pelican Guide To English Literature : From Dryden To Johnson. Vol. 4 (Penguin. 1982). From Blake To Byron. Vol. 5. (Penguin. 1982).
17. Jack, Ian, Augustan Satire : Intention And Idiom in English Poetry 1660 – 1750 (OUP 1978).

IV

18. Lonsdale Roger. The Penguin History of English Literature Dryden To Johnson Vol 4. (Penguin, 1993).
19. Probyn, Clive T. English Fiction of The Eighteenth Century 1700 – 1789 (Longman Literature In English Series, 1987).
20. Novak, Maximillian E. Eighteenth Century English Literature (Macmillan. 1986).
21. Sambrook, James. The Eighteenth Century : The Intellectual And Cultural Context of English Literature 1700 – 1789 (Longman Literature in English Series 1986).
22. Sutherland, James. A preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (OUP, 1975)

Paper Pattern :

1. There will be five question consisting carrying 20 marks each.
2. One question consisting of 3 alternative will be set on the background to cover each of the different time period – Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration.
3. A question with alternatives for each of the three main texts, of which two questions should be essay type and one question should be to write short notes.
4. For the question on poetry there will be 3 questions. Each question could cover at least two time periods – Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration. No period should be left out.



ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

Unit Structure:

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 The Historical Overview
- 1.2 The Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages
 - 1.2.1 Political Peace and Stability
 - 1.2.2 Social Development
 - 1.2.3 Religious Tolerance
 - 1.2.4 Sense and Feeling of Patriotism
 - 1.2.5 Discovery, Exploration and Expansion
 - 1.2.6 Influence of Foreign Fashions
 - 1.2.7 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions
- 1.3 The Literary Tendencies of the Age
 - 1.3.1 Foreign Influences
 - 1.3.2 Influence of Reformation
 - 1.3.3 Ardent Spirit of Adventure
 - 1.3.4 Abundance of Output
- 1.4 Elizabethan Poetry
 - 1.4.1 Love Poetry
 - 1.4.2 Patriotic Poetry
 - 1.4.3 Philosophical Poetry
 - 1.4.4 Satirical Poetry
 - 1.4.5 Poets of the Age
 - 1.4.6 Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry
 - 1.4.7 Elizabethan Sonnets and Sonneteers
- 1.5 Elizabethan Prose
 - 1.5.1 Prose in Early Renaissance
 - 1.5.2 The Essay
 - 1.5.3 Character Writers
 - 1.5.4 Religious Prose
 - 1.5.5 Prose Romances

- 1.6 Elizabethan Drama
 - 1.6.1 The University Wits
 - 1.6.2 Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare
 - 1.6.3 Other Playwrights
- 1.7. Let's Sum up
- 1.8 Important Questions

1.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will make the students aware with:

- The historical and socio-political knowledge of Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages.
- Features of the ages.
- Literary tendencies, literary contributions to the different of genres like poetry, prose and drama.
- The important writers are introduced with their major works.

With this knowledge the students will be able to locate the particular works in the tradition of literature, and again they will study the prescribed texts in the historical background.

1.1 THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The literary decline after Chaucer's death was due in considerable measure to political reasons. The dispute about the throne, which culminated in the War of Roses, dissipated the energy and resources of the country and finally destroyed in large measure the noble families. The art and literature depended on their patronage. The accession of Henry VII in 1485 brought about a period of quiet and recovery. Henry VII established a strong monarchy and restored social and political order. He curtailed the powers and privileges of barons and patronized the new rich class. The country resumed its power among European nations, and began through them to feel the stimulus of the Renaissance. Caxton's press, which was established in 1476 in London, was the earliest forerunner of Renaissance in England. Rickett remarks: "The Renaissance had come with Caxton." It began in London with the publication of English masterpieces that awakened a sense of their national life in the minds of the people.

King Henry VIII, who acceded to the throne of England in 1509, began an era of significant and purposeful changes. He ruled in the spirit of modern statecraft. He encouraged trade and manufacturers, and increased the wealth of the country. He hastened the decline of feudalism by allowing men of low birth to high positions. Thus the court became the field for the display of

individual ambition. Men of talent and learning found honourable place in his court. During his reign England contributed her part to the spread of the new civilization and new learning. Education was popularized. Cardinal's College and Christ Church College at Oxford were founded.

The Reign of Henry VIII also expedited the Reformation which had begun in England nearly two centuries before with Wycliffe. The spirit of emancipation of conscience from priestly control was strengthened by the example of German and Swiss reformers. In 1534 Henry VII enforced political separation from Rome on the occasion of the annulment of his first marriage. It provided an opportunity for radical theological reforms. Hugh Latimer was a powerful spokesman of the spirit of Reformation. His writings represent a development of popular English prose. The Reformation and various religious and political controversies gave rise to the writing of pamphlets, serious and satirical. The translation of the Bible by William Tyndale and Miles Caverdale is a significant development in English prose. During Henry's reign the court emerged as a great patron of learning, art and literature. The atmosphere of peace and calm which began to prevail after long turmoil and chaos paved the way for extraordinary development of literary activity.

Edward VI ruled from 1547 to 1553. The reign of Queen Mary from 1553 to 1558 was marred by religious conflicts. She restored Roman Catholicism in England. Creative activity was arrested during her time but it was replenished with much greater vigour in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558 – 1603).

The above historical overview is just an introduction to the socio-political and religious conditions leading to the golden period which is called the Age of Elizabeth.

The English Renaissance covers a long span of time, which is divided for the sake of convenience into the following three periods:

- i) The Beginning of Renaissance (1516 – 1558).
- ii) The Flowering of Renaissance (1558 – 1603). It is actually called the Age of Elizabeth.
- iii) The Decline of Renaissance (1603 – 1625). It is also termed the Jacobean Age.

Let's see these literary periods through different perspectives.

1.2 THE ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN AGES

Both the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods in the history of English literature are also known as The Age of Shakespeare. This span of time is the golden age of literature. It extends from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. It was an age of both contemplation and action. It was an era which was illustrious for the unprecedented development of art, literature and drama. John Milton calls England, during this age, as “a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.”

Let's see the main characteristics of this age.

1.2.1 Political Peace and Stability

Elizabeth brilliantly framed and followed the policy of balance and moderation both inside and outside the country. A working compromise was reached with Scotland. The rebellious northern barons were kept in check. She, therefore, could successfully establish peace in traditionally disturbed border areas. Under her able administration the English national life rapidly and steadily progressed.

1.2.2 Social Development

It was an age of great social contentment. The rapid rise of industrial towns gave employment to thousands. Increasing trade and commerce enriched England. The wealthy were taxed to support the poor. This created the atmosphere for literary activities.

1.2.3 Religious Tolerance

It was an era of religious tolerance of peace. Upon her accession she found the whole nation divided against itself. The north was largely Catholic, and the South was strongly Protestant. Scotland followed the Reformation intensely. Ireland followed its old traditional religion. It was Elizabeth who made the Anglican Church a reality. Anglicanism was a kind of compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Both the Protestants and the Catholics accepted the Church. All Englishmen were influenced by the Queen's policy of religious tolerance and were united in a magnificent national enthusiasm. The mind of man, now free from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. An atmosphere of all pervading religious peace gave great stimulus to literary activity.

1.2.4 Sense and Feeling of Patriotism

It was an age of patriotism. Queen Elizabeth loved England ardently and she made her court one of the most brilliant courts in Europe. The splendour of her court dazzled the eyes of the people. Her moderate policies did much to increase her popularity and prestige. Worship of the Virgin Queen became the order of the day. She was Spenser's Gloriana, Raleigh's Cynthia, and Shakespeare's "fair vestal throned by the West." Even the foreigners saw in her "a keen calculating intellect that baffled the ablest statesmen in Europe."

Elizabeth inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the Faery Queen. Under her administration the English national life progressed faster not by slow historical and evolutionary process. English literature reached the very highest point of literary development during her period.

1.2.5 Discovery, Exploration and Expansion

This is the most remarkable epoch for the expansion of both mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought and great action. It is an age which appeals to the eye, the imagination and the intellect. New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The great voyagers like Hawkins, Frobisher, Raleigh and Drake brought home both material and intellectual treasures from the East and the West. The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imagination of writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the illustrious development of dramatic literature. Drama progresses in an era of action and not of speculation. It has rightly been called the age of the discovery of the new world and of man.

1.2.6 Influence of Foreign Fashions

Italy, the home of Renaissance, fascinated the Elizabethans. All liked to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were not only found of Italian books and literature, but also of Italian manners and morals. Consequently the literature of England was immensely enriched by imitating Italian classics.

1.2.7 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions

It was an age of great diversity and contradictions. It was an age of light and darkness, of reason and of unreason, of wisdom and of foolishness, of hope and of despair. The barbarity and backwardness, the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages still persisted. Disorder, violence, bloodshed and tavern brawls still

prevailed. Highway robberies, as mentioned in Henry IV, Part I, were very common. The barbarity of the age is seen in such brutal sports as bear baiting, cock and bull fighting, to which numerous references are found in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite the advancement of science and learning people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts.

In spite of great refinement and learning it was an age of easy morals. People did not care for high principles of morality and justice. Bribery and intentional delays of justice were common evils. Material advancement was by fair means or foul, the main aim of men in high places. Hardly anyone of the public men of this age had a perfectly open heart and very few had quite clean hands.

In spite of the ignorance and superstition, violence and brutality, easy morals and lax values, Elizabethan Age was an age in which men lived very much, thought intensely and wrote strongly.

Let's discuss the literary tendencies of the age.

1.3 THE LITERARY TENDENCIES OF THE AGE

1.3.1 Foreign Influences

England was under the full effect of the revival of learning. It was now not confined to the scholars alone at the universities and to the privileged ones at the court. The numerous translations of the celebrated ancient classics were now available for common people who could not read the original classics. Then it came under the all pervading influence of humanism, openness of mind, love of beauty and freedom.

The knowledge of the world of antiquity exercised a great influence on the literature of this period. It was obtained through the recovery of the writings and works of art of the classical period. The idea presented in the literature of Athens and Rome that life was to be lived for its many sided development and fullest enjoyment, had a powerful influence on the literature of the period. The writers and artists cultivated the artistic forms used by classical poets, orators, sculptors and architects. In the year 1453, when the Turk Vandals invaded Constantinople, many Greek scholars, took shelter along with their manuscripts and libraries in Italy. Italy became the centre of classical literature and culture. Italy, thus, became the teacher of Europe in philosophy, art and literature.

1.3.2 Influence of Reformation

Both the Renaissance and the Reformation greatly influenced the literature of this age. Hudson says, "While the Renaissance aroused the intellect and the aesthetic faculties, the Reformation awakened the spiritual nature; the same printing press which diffused the knowledge of the classics, put the English Bible into the hands of the people; and a spread in the interest of religion was accompanied by a deepening of moral earnestness." All the great writers and dramatists of the Elizabethan Age were influenced by both the Renaissance and the Reformation.

1.3.3 Ardent Spirit of Adventure

An ardent spirit of adventure characterized this age. The new discoveries and explorations beyond the seas by voyagers kindled human imagination and popular curiosity. The entire literature of this period, especially the plays of the university Wits and Shakespeare, are imbued with the spirit of adventure and imagination.

1.3.4 Abundance of Output

It was an age rich in literary productions of all kinds. In Elizabethan Age treatises, pamphlets, essays, prose romances, sonnets, both Petrarchan and Shakespearean, Lyric, plays etc. were abundantly written. The output of literary productions was very wide.

Several important foreign books were translated into English. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, many of the great books of modern times had been translated into English. Many translations were as popular as the original works. Many celebrated writers, including Shakespeare, derived the plots of their works from translations. Sir Thomas North translated Plutarch's Lives John Florio translated Montaigne's Essais.

It was an era of peace and of general prosperity of the country. An intense patriotism became the outstanding characteristic of the age. It is the greatest and golden period of literature in English which developed all genres of literature.

1.4 ELIZABETHAN POETRY

One of the literary historians called Elizabethan age as a nest of singing birds about the composition of poetry in this period. There were many poets who contributed to develop this form of literature and it reached the peak of its development. The poets not

only adopted and innovated the forms of poetry and wrote on the varied themes. The poetry of Elizabethan era mirrors the spirit of Age. It reflects the spirit of conquest and self-glorification, humanism and vigorous imagination, emotional depth and passionate intensity. Sublimity was considered to be the essential quality of poetry. Spenser, Shakespeare and Marlowe had the immense power to exalt and sublimate the lovers of poetry.

The poetry of his period is remarkable for the spirit of independence. The poets refused to follow set rules of poetic composition. Consequently, new poetic devices and new linguistic modes developed. All varieties of poetic forms like lyric, elegy, eclogue, ode, sonnet etc. were successfully attempted. Thematically, the following main divisions of poetry existed during this period:

1.4.1 Love Poetry

The love poetry is characterized by romance, imagination and youthful vigour, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Daniel's *Delia*, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and his sonnets are noticeable love poems of this period.

1.4.2 Patriotic Poetry

The ardent note of patriotism is the distinctive characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. Warner's *Abicene's England*, Daniel's *Civil Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *The Barons War* and *The Ballad of Agincourt* are some memorable patriotic poems.

1.4.3 Philosophical Poetry

Elizabethan age was a period both of action and reflection. Action found its superb expression in contemporary drama. People thought inwardly. The tragedies of Shakespeare represent this aspect of national life. Brooke's poems, *On Human Learning*, *On Wars*, *On Monarchy*, and *On Religion* have philosophical leanings.

1.4.4 Satirical Poetry

It came into existence after the decline of the spirit of adventure and exploration, of youthful gaiety and imaginative vigour towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Donne's *Satires* and Drummond's *Sonnets* are some fine examples of this type of poetry. In the reign of James I life's gaiety was lost. A harsh cynical realism succeeded. Poetry had grown self-conscious. Poetry had crept under the shadow of the approaching civil conflicts.

The poetry of this age is original. The early classical and Italian influences were completely absorbed and the poetry of this period depicts the typical British character and temperament.

1.4.5 Poets of the Age

Wyatt and Surrey traveled widely in Italy. They brought to England the Italian and classic influence. They modeled their poetry on Italian pattern. They are the first harbingers of the Renaissance in English poetry. They are the first modern poets. The book that contains their poems is *Songs and Sonnets*, known as the Tottle's Miscellany. The brief introduction of the major poets of the age is necessary to be discussed along with their remarkable works.

I. Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Wyatt brought to English poetry grace, harmony and nobility. He followed the Italian models and attempted a great variety of metrical experiment – songs, sonnets, madrigals and elegies. He was the first poet, who introduced sonnet, which was a favorite poetical form in England with Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold and many others.

He first of all introduced personal or autobiographical note in English poetry. Wyatt's true ability as a poet is revealed not by the sonnets but by a number of lyrics and songs that he composed.

II. Earl of Surrey

Surrey is a disciple of Wyatt rather than an independent poetical force. His sonnets are more effective than those of Wyatt. The former followed the Petrarchan pattern of sonnet, whereas the latter modified it and made it typical English. The Petrarchan form is perhaps more impressive, the modified English form the more expressive. Shakespeare followed the English pattern of sonnet, introduced by Surrey. He was the first poet to use blank verse in his translation of Aeneid.

III. Thomas Sackville

Sackville was a great humanist whose only contribution to England poetry is *The Induction*. He has a sureness of touch and a freedom from technical errors which make him superior to Wyatt and Surrey.

IV. Sir Philip Sidney

Sidney was the most celebrated literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. As a man of letters he is remembered for *Arcadia* (a romance), *Apology For Poetry* (a collection of critical and

literary principles) and *Astrophel and Stella* (a collection of sonnets). These 108 love sonnets are the first direct expressions of personal feelings and experience in English poetry. He analyses the sequence of his feelings with a vividness and minuteness. His sonnets owe much to Petrarch and Ronsard in tone and style.

V. Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser is rightly called the poet's poet" because all great poets of England have been indebted to him. C. Rickett remarks, "Spenser is at once the child of the Renaissance and the Reformation. On one side we may regard him with Milton as "the sage and serious Spenser", on the other he is the humanist, alive to the finger tips with the sensuous beauty of the Southern romance."

Spenser's main poetical works are:

- *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579), two eclogues, March and December, are prescribed in your syllabus for detailed study.
- *Amoretti* (1595), a collection of eighty eight Petrarchan sonnets
- *Epithalamion* (1599), a magnificent ode written on the occasion of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle
- *Prothalamion* (1596), an ode on marriage
- *Astrophel* (1596), an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney
- *Four Hymns* (1576) written to glorify love and honour
- His epic, *The Faerie Queen* (1589 – 90).

Spenser's finest poetry is characterized by sensuousness and picturesqueness. He is a matchless painter in words. His contribution to poetic style, diction and versification is memorable. He evolved a true poetic style which the succeeding generations of English poets used. The introduction of Spenserian stanza is Spenser's most remarkable contribution to poetry. He is great because of the extraordinary smoothness and melody, his verse and the richness of his language, a golden diction which he drew from every source – new words, old words, obsolete words. Renwick says, "Shakespeare himself might not have achieved so much, if Spenser had not lived and laboured." Dryden freely acknowledged that Spenser has been his master in English. Thompson referred to him as "my master Spenser". Wordsworth praises him as the embodiment of nobility, purity and sweetness. Byron, Shelley and Keats are his worthy followers. The Pre-Raphaelites were inspired by Spenser's word-painting and picturesque descriptions. Therefore he is aptly called Poet's poet.

VI. Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman

The Hero and Leander was left incomplete due to Marlowe's untimely death. It was completed by Chapman. This poem is remarkable for felicity of diction and flexibility of versification. The poets show great skill in effectively using words and images. Besides completing Hero and Leander, Chapman also translated Iliad and Odyssey and composed some sonnets.

VII. William Shakespeare

Shakespeare composed many beautiful sonnets and two long poems – Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece. In the former the realistic passions are expressed through equally realistic pictures and episodes. It is remarkable for astonishing linguistic beauty. The latter is a contrast to the former. Having painted the attempts of an amorous woman, Shakespeare now proceeded to represent the rape of a chaste wife.

VIII. Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson was a pioneer in the field of poetry. His poetic work consists of short pieces, which appeared in three collections – Epigrammes, The Forest and The Underwood. He is a first-rate satirist in Elizabethan poetry. The spirit of satire looms large in these three collections of his poetry. He presents vivid sarcastic portraits in ten or twenty lines. His moral satires were nobler in tone and more sincere in expression than of Hall or Marston.

Ben Jonson was the first English poet to write Pindaric odes. His Ode to Himself is a fine example of this genre. His poetic style is lucid, clear and free from extravagances. He is also the forerunner of neo-classicism, which attained perfection in the works of Dryden and Pope. To Celia, Echo's Song and A Song are his memorable lyrics.

IX. John Donne

As the pioneer of the Metaphysical Poetry, Donne stands unrivalled. His contribution to poetry will be discussed along with the metaphysical Poetry. (For detailed study refer unit 2 of this book.)

Apart from the above major poets, there are few poets whose names need to be mentioned. They are Joseph Hall, John Marston, George Wither, and William Browne because they contributed or verse satire to the literature of Elizabethan period.

1.4.6 Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry

The Elizabethan England was the golden age of songs and lyrics. A number of poetical miscellanies, consisting of short lyrics

and songs by various poets, appeared. Some famous anthologies are Tottle's Miscellany (1557), The Paradise of Dainty Devices, A Handful of Pleasant Delights, The Phoenix Nest, The Passionate Pilgrim and England's Helicon. These collections contain countless songs and lyrics composed by various poets. Nearly two hundred poets are recorded in the short period from 1558 to 1625. Here we can consider only those poets who have infinite riches in a little room.

Various factors contributed to the unique development of lyricism during this period. The feeling of stability, peace and contentment enabled poets to compose songs and lyrics full of zest for life. Everybody, down from the flowery courtier to the man in the street, wrote lyrics. Translations from other languages inspired the people to write. The Elizabethans loved music. Music and lyric are closely related. It was an age of romance which also contributed to the development of lyricism.

The Elizabethan lyrical poetry seeks expression in a great variety of poetical forms. The lyric itself appears, now under the pastoral convention, now as sonnet and sonnet sequence, now in various composite literary forms.

The Elizabethan songs were of various kinds. They were love songs, religious songs, patriotic songs, fantastic songs, war songs, philosophical songs and religious songs. They were composed in every mood, grave, romantic, fantastic, sentimental, mocking and cynical. Even the plays and prose romances are full of songs and lyrics.

Form and expression were joined together and the lyrics became an expression of the soul. Love is the main theme of Elizabethan songs and lyrics. It is fanciful love, love that laughs and entreats and sighs. The pastoral elements like shepherds' feasts, shepherds' loves and joys of countryside characterize most of the songs and lyrics of this period.

Sir Philip Sidney wrote many songs which are characterized by depth of passion, exquisite beauty, romance and fancifulness. He inserted songs in the Shepherd's Calendar. His songs are characterized by loftiness, sensuousness, picturesqueness and superb musical quality.

Marlowe's genius was lyrical. He sang songs in the pastoral strain: "Come with me and be my love." Shakespeare's comedies and romances are littered with songs. His songs have rare originality and spontaneity. Freshness and rustic realism runs in many of his songs. Some of his songs are fanciful and fantastic. Some of his songs express the poignant feelings of love. His songs

have a magic of their own and are noticeable for spontaneity and sweetness.

Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists also incorporated songs in their plays. Thomas Dekker composed two beautiful songs. Beaumont and Fletcher contributed "Lay a garland on my horse" and "Hence, all our vain delights". Ben Jonson's masques and comedies have many lovely songs.

Lyly's songs are remembered for their delicate melody, flawless diction, and light and refined note. Green's songs are full of English feelings, pastoral and Renaissance fancies. Peele's lyrics survive for their melody and cadence, and Nash's are now frolicking and open, and gain musically melancholy. Lodge's songs are more varied and more inclined to pastoralism. Breton's songs are fresh, copious and are imbued with fine artistic feeling.

Thomas Campion deserves praises for his attractive lyrics and songs, which he himself adopted to musical requirement. He was stirred to rapture by sacred and profane love alike. His songs and lyrics are characterized by the deft use of sweet and apt phrases, musical quality of a high order and a mastery of complicated metres. He could express fantastic areas with great ease, spontaneity and felicity.

Samuel Daniel has to his credit a sonnet series called Delia, a romance entitled The Complaint of Rosamund, a long historical poem The Civil War and a large number of masques. Daniel is a master of closet lyric.

Drayton wrote many lyrics, verse tales and pastorals. Purity of his poetic style is admirable. He simplified English language by removing eccentricities and arbitrary inventions.

The Elizabethan lyric is light and airy. It is an expression of the holiday mood of its author. What distinguishes the lyrics of this period is their musical quality, the flight of fancy and the note of gay and joyous abandonment.

1.4.7 Elizabethan Sonnets and Sonneteers

The sonnet originated in Italy in the fourteenth century. It is particularly associated with the name of Petrarch, though it had been used before him by Dante. It was originally a short poem, recited to the accompaniment of music. The word sonnet is derived from the Italian word "sonnetto", meaning a little sound or strain. In course of time it became a short poem of fourteen lines with a set rhyme scheme. The sonnets of Petrarch and Dante were love sonnets. Petrarch addressed his sonnets to Laura and Dante to

Beatrice. It enjoyed great popularity in Italy during the fifteenth century. (You have studied sonnet form in detailed in paper 2: Reading Poetry at SYBA last year.)

In England Wyatt and Surrey began sonnet writing in imitation of the Italian sonnet. Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan model. He wrote 31 sonnets on the theme of love of rare beauty. Surrey gave a new turn to sonnet writing by introducing a new pattern which Shakespeare used later. His love sonnets were addressed to Lady Geraldine. They were marked by a note of melancholy and sadness. Wyatt and Surrey introduced the personal note in English sonnet.

Thomas Watson was the earliest Elizabethan to make a reputation as a sonneteer. In 1582 he published one hundred "passions" or "poems of love" which were described as sonnets, though many of them were of eighteen lines long. However, Watson's second volume of poems entitled *The Tears of Fancy or Love Disdained* were strictly confined to fourteen lines.

The publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* marks the real beginning of Elizabethan sonnet. His sonnets clearly show the influence of Petrarch, Ronsard and Watson. Petrarch wrote his sonnets for his beloved Laura. Sidney's sonnets express his ardent passion for his beloved Penelope, the Stella of his sonnets. His sonnets are effusions of personal passion. These sonnets are remarkable for their sincerity. He was the first English poet to indicate the lyric capacity of the sonnet. Sidney followed the Petrarchan scheme of sonnet. His example was followed by Daniel in *Delia*, Constable in *Diana*, Drayton in *Idea* and Spenser in *Amoretti*.

Spenser's *Amoretti*, a collection of 88 sonnets is memorable contribution to the art of sonnet writing. They are addressed to Elizabeth Boyle, whom he married. So an intimate, personal or autobiographical note runs in all of them. Spenser's sonnets are unique for their purity. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse.

Shakespeare is the greatest writer of the sonnet form. His sonnets are the most precious pearls of Elizabethan lyricism, some of them unsurpassed by any lyricism. The form he chose was not the Italian or the Petrarchan form. He preferred the Spenserian pattern, consisting of three quatrains, each rhyming alternately, and rhyming couplet to conclude. Thomas Thorpe printed a collection of 154 sonnets of Shakespeare in 1609. It was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H." and to a Dark Lady. The poet loved both of them dearly. The poet makes every allowance for the man, his youth, his attraction, his inexperience. He feels more bitterly towards the

woman. She, he feels had turned his friend from him in sheer wantonness of spirit. He prefers the companionship of his friend to the company of the mistress.

Some of his sonnets are conventional literary exercises on conventional themes. His sonnets are noticeable for rare beauty of images and the flawless perfection of style and versification

Henry Constable's sonnets are remarkable for melody, beauty and sensuousness. Daniel's collection of sonnets, known as *Delia*, is based on the conventional theme of love and has stock devices of contemporary sonnet writing. The language of his sonnets is pure and versification is correct.

Drayton is a distinguished sonneteer of Elizabethan Age. His sonnet sequence, known as *Idea* represents Platonic idea of beauty. He wrote fifty two sonnets. He uses typical stock devices. Dryton for the first time imparted dramatic element to sonnet writing. His sonnets suffer from lack of sincerity and artificiality.

The other sonnet writers are Lodge, Fletcher and Percy.

The Age of Shakespeare was the golden age of sonnet. Each poet contributed something new to the art of sonnet writing. The average Elizabethan sonnet illustrates the temper of the age. It bears graphic witness to the Elizabethan tendency to borrow from foreign literary sources.

1.5 ELIZABETHAN PROSE

The Age of Elizabeth was also conspicuous for the remarkable development of prose, which was variously written with great stylistic and linguistic excellence. The following prose genres developed during this period.

1.5.1 Prose in Early Renaissance

The prose of early Renaissance consists largely of translations. The writers of this period were educationists and reformers rather than creative writers. The following major writers need to be considered in a nutshell:

Sir Thomas More

He was one of the early humanists and the first prose writer of great literary significance. His famous work *Utopia* was written in Latin, but it was translated into English in 1551 by Ralph Robinson. It is the "true prologue of Renaissance." It shows the influence of

Plato. Utopia has been called “the first monument of modern socialism.” Thomas More extols democratic communism – people’s state, elected government, equal distribution of wealth and nine hours’ work a day. In it we find for the first time the foundation of civilized society, the three great words – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. More advocates religious tolerance. In English literary history Thomas More is not remembered for his contribution to style but for the originality of his ideas.

Roger Ascham

He was a great educationist. His first work *The School of Shooting* was written in English. Commenting on the state of English language he writes: “Everything has been done excellently well in Greek and Latin, but in the English tongue so meanly that no man can do worse.” But “I have written this English matter, in the English tongue for Englishmen.” His second work, *The School Master* contains intellectual instructions for the young. Ascham’s prose style is conspicuous for economy and precision. He was the first writer who wrote “the English speech for the Englishmen.” He is “the first English stylist.”

Sir Thomas Elyot and Sir John Cheke

Elyot’s *The Governor* is a treatise on moral philosophy and education. His prose does not concern the common man but it is restrained and classical.

Cheke was a teacher of Greek art at Cambridge. He wrote *The Heart of Sedition* which shows the influence of classicism and antiquity. To him both form and matter were equally important. His prose is vigorous, argumentative, eloquent and humorous.

1.5.2 The Essay

The Essay, which Montaigne began in France, was a very popular prose form during this Age. It has been variously defined. An essay is a short composition more or less incomplete. It is like lyric in poetry. It may be written on any subject under the sun. The year 1597, when Bacon published his ten essays, marks the beginning of essay writing in English literature.

Sir Francis Bacon

Bacon occupies a dominant place in English prose. He wrote varied type of prose. He is philosophical in *The Advancement of Learning*, historical in the *History of Henry VII*, and speculative in *New Atlantis*.

Bacon occupies a permanent place in English prose due to his Essays, ten in number, which appeared in 1597. The second edition and the third edition raised the number to 38 and 58 respectively. They are on familiar subjects and they represent the meditations of trained and learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear and aphoristic style. Bacon began the vogue of essay writing in English. His essays introduced a new form of literature into English literature.

He was the first English writer who employed a style that is conspicuous for lucidity, clarity, economy, precision, directness, masculinity and mathematical plainness. His images and figures of speech are simple and clearly illustrate the ideas that he wishes to communicate.

Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson wrote aphoristic essays which are compiled in *The Timber of Discoveries* which was published posthumously about 1641. His essays are moral and critical. Jonson's style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness and strength. He treats a subject in a simple and plain manner.

John Selden

John Selden's *Table Talk* abounds in sharp, acid-natured aphorisms, exhibiting tough common sense and little imagination. As a practitioner of aphoristic essay he stands next to Bacon and Ben Jonson. He also wrote *The Titles of Honour* and *The History of Titles*.

1.5.3 Character Writers

The seventeenth century witnessed the origin and development of another kind of essay, known as character writing. The character writers were influenced by Theophrastus, Seneca and dramatists. They are also highly indebted to Bacon who provided them with a pattern of style – concise, pointed and sententious. The following are the character writers:

- I. Thomas Dekkar wrote the *Bellman of London* and *A Strange Horse Race* which are noticeable for the portrayal of vivid character sketches. In character sketch the sentences are unusually short.
- II. Joseph Hall wrote the *Good Magistrate* and *Virtues and Vices*. He was endowed with the qualities required for character writing. Satire distinguishes his character sketches.

- III. Thomas Overbury's *Characters* is a collection of numerous well – portrayed characters. He usually packs the characters to some trade or occupation. The character takes colour from the occupation from which it draws its virtues and vices. His style is artificial and he subordinates substance to form, matter to manner.
- IV. Earle is superior to both Hall and Overbury as a character writer. His *Microcosmography* is his collection of well portrayed characters. It is written in a delightful and witty style. His style is easy, vigorous and fluent.
- V. George Herbert differs from all other character writers of his time. His famous work *A Priest in the Temple* or *A Country Parson* is not a collection of unconnected sketches, but a short treatise in thirty seven chapters. Each of the characters delineates a phase of parson's life – his knowledge, his praying, his preaching, his comforting etc. He aims at imparting reality to his character. His aim is to recommend religion by the portrayal of a charming and saintly life.
- VI. Thomas Fuller in his *Holy War and Profane State* does not follow the Theophrastian model. He belongs to a school of his own. What distinguishes Fuller is his boundless humanity which is visible in every page. He mixes his character sketches with interesting stories. He also imparts personal touch to his essays. His characters of virtues and vices are not merely fanciful exercises but they are real and concrete. His style is condensed and discursive.

1.5.4 Religious Prose

During this period religious controversy was in vogue. It gave rise to fine English prose and it also contributed to the evolution of English prose style. The religious prose writers are as under:

- I. Sir John Tyndale is remembered for the Translation of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. This translation formed the basis for The Authorized Version of the Bible (1611). It is written in traditional prose, purged from, ornateness and triviality. Its style is remarkable for simplicity, clarity, lucidity and directness because Tyndale's aim was to make the Bible readable even to peasants.
- II. Latimer's Sermon on the Ploughers and others were written in plain and straightforward English.

- III. Richard Hooker wrote *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* which is an outstanding contribution in the field of theology and prose style. Hooker's style is highly Latinised but it is free from pedantry and vulgarity. It is logical and convincing, musical and cadenced, clear and vigorous.

1.5.5 Prose Romances

The writing of prose romances is a remarkable development of this period. They anticipated novel which came into being during the eighteenth century. The prose romances of this period consisted of tales of adventure as well as of romance. They dealt with contemporary life and events of the past, with the life at the court and the life of the city. It was by turns humorous and didactic, realistic and fanciful. In short, it represented the first rough drafts of English novel. The prose romances of varied forms and shapes were written by many writers.

- I. George Gascoigne wrote the *Adventures of Master E.J.* which depicts a lively sketch of English country – house life. It has well-portrayed characters.
- II. John Lyly is the pioneer of the English novel, the first stylist in prose, and the most popular writer of the age. His famous work *Euphues* is incidentally “the first novel” in English language. It deals with love and romance. It foretells the rise of the novel of manners. It moves away from the fanciful idealism of medieval romance of manners. It moves away from the fanciful idealism of medieval romance and suggests an interest in contemporary life. *Euphues* is especially remarkable for its style, which is based on alliteration, play upon words, and antithesis. Lyly aimed at precision and emphasis by carefully balancing his words and phrases.
- III. Sir Philip Sidney wrote a prose romance *arcadia* (1590) which represents the restless spirit of adventure of the age of chivalry. It is a dream world compounded of Sidney's knowledge of classicism and Christianity, medieval chivalry and Renaissance luxury. Its style is full of affectations and artificiality. It is highly poetical.
- IV. As a writer of prose romances, Robert Greene is remembered for *Pandosta*, *Mamitia* and *Menaphone*. His romances are in moral tone and their style is imitative of Lyly. He has a sense of structural unity, restraint and verisimilitude. What distinguishes Greene is the skilful portraiture of women characters. Besides, these romances, Greene strikes a realistic note in *Mourning of Garment* and *Never Too Late*.

- V. Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590) is a pastoral romance, written in imitation of the ornate style of *Eupheus*. It is considered to be the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.
- VI. Thomas Nashe is the first great realist who graphically depicted contemporary London life and its manners. His descriptions of respectable roguery are tinged with satire. Nash's memorable work is *The Unfortunate Traveler or The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594) which has the rare distinction of being the first picaresque or rogue novel. It combines both comedy and tragedy. It may also be called the first historical novel. His prose style is clear, lucid, simple and forceful.
- VII. Thomas Deloney was a realist, who in his works *Thomas of Reading*, *Jack of Newbury* and *the Gentle Craft*, realistically depict contemporary bourgeois life. His style is remarkable for simplicity, clarity, directness and spontaneity. His prose runs easily into spirited dialogue.
- VIII. Robert Burton was a humanist whose *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is a distinguished work of philosophical prose. His style changes with the subject. It is lucid, tense, precise and rhetorical.

1.6 ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

The period marks the real beginning of drama. It is the golden age of English drama. The renewed study of classical drama shaped English drama in its formative years. Seneca influenced the development of English tragedy, and Plautus and Terence directed the formation of comedy. The classical drama gave English drama its five acts, its set scenes and many other features. Regular English tragedy, comedy and historical play were successfully written during this period.

Nichola Idal's *Relph Roister Doister* (1553) is the first English comedy of the classical school, which is divided into acts and scenes. *Gamar Gurton's Needle* (1575), written by an unknown writer is another comedy in the classical style.

The first complete tragedy of the Senecan type is *Gorbaduc* (1562), which was written by Thomas Morton and Thomas Sackville. The example of *Gorbaduc* was followed by Thomas Hughes in *The Misfortunes of Arthus* (1588) and George Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1566). All these tragedies were influenced by Seneca both in style and treatment of theme.

Another dramatic genre, which emerged during this period, is tragic-comedy, which mixes lamentable tragedy with pleasant mirth. Some memorable plays of this type are *Whetstone's Right*

Excellent and Famous History, Preston's A Lamentable Tragedy, Richard Edward's Demons and Rithias and R.B.'s Apius and Virginia.

Historical plays too were written during this period. Famous among the early historical plays are – The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England (1590), Tragedy of Richard, the Third (1590 – 94), The Victories of Henry the Fifth (1588) and the Chronicle History of Lear (1594).

1.6.1 The University Wits

Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, Kyd and Marlowe are known as the university Wits because they came either from Cambridge or from Oxford. They were romantic by nature and they represented the spirit of Renaissance. The great merit of the University Wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academic training. They paved the way for the successive writers like Shakespeare to express his genius. The contribution of the university Wits to the development of drama needs to be highlighted:

- I. John Lyly: Lyly wrote eight comedies, of which the best are Campaspe, Endymion, Grallathia, Midas and Love's Metamorphosis. He wrote for the private theatres. His writing is replete with genuine romantic atmosphere, humour, fancy for romantic comedy, realism, classicism and romanticism. Lyly established prose as an expression of comedy. He deftly used prose to express light feelings of fun and laughter. He also used a suitable blank verse for the comedy. High comedy demands a nice sense of phrase, and Lyly is the first great phrase maker in English. He gave to English comedy a witty phraseology. He also made an important advance at successful comic portrayal. His characters are both types and individuals. Disguise as a device was later popularized by Shakespeare in his plays especially in his comedies. The device of girl dressed as a boy is traced back to Lyly. The introduction of songs, symbolical of the mood owes its popularity to Lyly.
- II. George Peele: His work consists of The Arraignment of Paris, The Battle of Alcazar, The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe and The Old Wives' Tales. He has left behind a pastoral, a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and a romantic satire. He juxtaposes romance and reality in his plays. As a humorist he influenced Shakespeare. In The Old Wives' Tales he for the first time introduced the note of satire in English drama.

- III. Robert Greene: Greene wrote *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon and Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Greene was the first master of the art of plot construction in English drama. In his plays Greene has three distinct worlds mingled together – the world of magic, the world of aristocratic life, and the world of the country. There is peculiar romantic humour and rare combination of realism and idealism in his plays. He is the first to draw romantic heroines. His heroines Margaret and Dorothea anticipate Shakespeare's Rosalind and Celia.
- IV. Thomas Kyd: Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, a Senecan tragedy, is an abiding contribution to the development of English tragedy. It is a well constructed play in which the dramatist has skillfully woven passion, pathos and fear until they reach a climax. Kyd succeeded in producing dialogue that is forceful and capable. He introduced the revenge motif into drama. He, thus, influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. The device of *play within play*, which Shakespeare employed in *Hamlet*, is used for the first time in *The Spanish Tragedy*. He also introduced the hesitating type of hero, suffering from bouts of madness, feigned or real, in the character of Hieronimo, who anticipates the character of *Hamlet*.
- V. Christopher Marlowe: Marlowe's famous plays *Tamburlaine, the Great*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Edward II* and *The Jew of Malta* give him a place of preeminence among the University Wits. Swinburne calls him "the first great poet, the father of English tragedy and the creator of blank verse." He is, indeed, the protagonist of tragic drama in English and the forerunner of Shakespeare and his fellows. Marlowe provided big heroic subjects that appealed to human imagination. He for the first time imparted individuality and dignity to the tragic hero. He also presented the tragic conflict between the good and evil forces in *Dr. Faustus*. He is the first tragic dramatist who used the device of Nemesis in an artistic and psychological manner. Marlowe for the first time made blank verse a powerful vehicle for the expression of varied human emotions. His blank verse, which Ben Jonson calls, "Marlowe's Mighty Line" is noticeable for its splendour of diction, picturesqueness, vigour and energy, variety in pace and its responsiveness to the demands of varying emotions. Marlowe has been termed the father of English tragedy. He was in fact the first to feel that romantic drama was the sole form in harmony with the temperament of the nation. He created authentic romantic tragedy in English and paved the way for the full blossoming of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

1.6.2 Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was not of an age but of all ages. He wrote 37 plays, which may be classified as tragedies, comedies, romances or tragic-comedies and historical plays. The period of Shakespeare's dramatic activity spans twenty four years (1588 – 1612) which is divided into the following four sub-periods:

- i) The First Period (1588 – 96): It is a period of early experimentation. During this period he wrote Titus Andronicus, First Part of Henry VI, Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Richard II and Richard III and King John.

His early poems The Rape of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis belong to this period.

- ii) The Second Period (1596 – 1600): Shakespeare wrote his great comedies and chronicle plays during this period. The works of this period are The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing As You Like It, The Twelfth Night, Henry IV, Part I & II, and Henry V.
- iii) The Third Period (1601 – 08): It is a period of great tragedies Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear Othello, Julius Caesar, and of somber and better comedies All's Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure and Troilus and Cressida.
- iv) The Fourth Period (1608 – 1613) : Shakespeare's last period begins with Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, Henry VII and Pericles. What distinguishes Shakespeare's last period is the reawakening of his first love romance in Cymbeline, The Tempest and The Winter's Tale.

Shakespearean Comedy

Shakespeare brought perfection to the writing of romantic comedy. His comedies are classified into the following three categories.

- i) The Early Comedies: They are The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour Lost and The Two Gentlemen of Verona. The plays show signs of immaturity. The plots are less original, the characters are less finished and the style is also vigorous. The humour lacks the wide human sympathy of his mature comedies.

- ii) The Mature Comedies: Shakespeare's comic genius finds expression in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. These plays are full of love and romance, vigour and vitality, versatility of humour, humanity and well-portrayed characters.
- iii) The Somber Comedies: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* belong to the period of great tragedies. These comedies have a serious and somber time.

Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy

Shakespearean comedy is pre-eminently romantic. His predecessors – Lyly, Greene and Peele influenced his art of writing comedy. The main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy are given below:

- i) **Romance and Realism:** Shakespearean comedy is romantic. The classical unities of time, place and action are not observed in it. The settings are all imaginative. The action takes place in some remote far off place, and not in familiar surroundings. According to Raleigh Shakespearean comedy is a "rainbow world of love in idleness."

What distinguishes Shakespearean comedy is the fine and artistic blend of romance and realism. All his comedies are related to real life. There are contemporary figures and contemporary fashions in *Love's Labour Lost*. Bottom and his companions exist with fairies; Sir Toly Belch and Sir Andrew are companions of Viola and Olivia.

Shakespeare's characters are real. His dramatic personages are ordinary human beings and incidents are such as occurring in every day life. The romantic main plot and the realistic sub plot are harmoniously put together in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Charlton writes: "Shakespearean comedies are not satiric; they are poetic. They are not conservative, they are creative."

- ii) **Love:** Shakespearean comedy is essentially a comedy of love, which ends with the ringing of the marriage bells. Wooing distinguishes it from classical comedy. The entire atmosphere is surcharged with love. Not only the hero and the heroine are in love but all are in love. The Shakespearean comedy ends not with the celebration of one marriage but with many marriages.

Shakespeare has vividly exhibited carried manifestations of love in his comedies. In *As You Like It* he has described the love at first sight between Orlando and Rosalind, thoughtful love between Celia and Oliver, pastoral love between Phebo and Silvius.

The men and women who love truly have become superb representations of human nature. True love is spiritual. It is a union of minds and hearts.

- iii) **Shakespeare's Heroines:** Heroines in Shakespearean comedy play leading roles and surpass their male counterparts. Ruskin's remark that "Shakespeare has only heroines and no heroes" is certainly true to his comedies. Shakespeare's heroines Rosalind, Portia, Viola, Beatrice etc. are endowed with wit, common sense, human feelings and noble qualities of head and heart. They are wise, winning and charming. They have beautiful feelings, thoughts and emotions. They radiate joy, peace and spirit of harmony. Male characters in Shakespearean comedy only play a second fiddle. His heroines know how to fulfill their desires and resolve crisis. All heroines in Shakespearean comedy are guided by infinitive insight.
- iv) **Disguise:** The use of dramatic device of disguise is common to all the comedies of Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice* Jessica disguises herself in "the lovely garnish" of a boy, and Portia and Nerissa likewise don masculine attire. This device is also employed for instance, in *I As You Like It* Rosalind and Celia become Ganymede and Aliena, and in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Helena passes off in bed as Diana.
- v) **Humour:** Humour is the soul of Shakespearean comedy. It arouses thoughtful laughter. It is full of humane and genial laughter. Shakespeare's wit lacks malice and his mockery has no bite. Brilliant wit mingles with kindly mirth and genial humour.

Shakespeare's humour is many sided. He can arouse laughter from the mumblings of a drunkard and the intelligent repartees of leading women. The alert wit and bright good sense of a Rosalind arouse exquisite pleasure. His all pervasive spirit of mirth gains much from the presence of the Fool. Bottom and his companions, Feste, Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, Touchstone, Dogberry, Verges and Falstaff are Shakespeare's memorable fools, who not only create humour and laughter, but they also interlink the main and the subplots, and provide a running commentary on character and action. Falstaff is a superb comic character of Shakespeare.

- vi) **Admixture of Tragic and Comic Elements:** Shakespearean comedy differs from the classical comedy in the sense that in it the comic and the tragic elements are commingled. However, the tragic note does not dominate and the play ends on a note of joy. For example, *The Merchant of Venice* is pervaded by the tragic element from the signing of the bond to the end of the trial

scene. Ultimately the play ends happily, as Antonio, whose life has been threatened by Shylock, feels happy at heart as his life has been saved.

vii) **Music and Song:** Since music is the food of love. Shakespearean comedy is abundantly full of song and music. The Twelfth Night opens with a note of music which strikes the keynote of the play. Several romantic songs are scattered all over A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, As You Like It and Much Ado About Nothing.

viii) **The Role of Fortune:** "The course of true love never runs smooth." Lovers have to face the hostilities of parents, friends or relatives; and consequently, there are much tears and sighs, before the final union takes place. But all these difficulties and complications are unexpectedly removed by the benign power of Fortune.

Shakespearean comedy radiates the spirit of humanity and a broad vision of life. It is large – hearted in the conception, sympathetic in its tone and humanitarian in its idealism. Shakespeare created his own hallmark on the comedies in English drama.

Shakespearean Tragedy

Shakespearean comedy is romantic and not classical. It observes the fundamental requirements of tragedy expounded by Aristotle in The Poetics. The main characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy are as follows:

i) **Tragic Hero:** Shakespearean tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero or the protagonist. It is, indeed, a tale of suffering and calamity resulting in the death of the hero. It is concerned always with persons of high degree, often with Kings or princes or with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus and Antony. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not only great men, they also suffer greatly, their calamity and suffering are exceptional. The sufferings and calamities of an ordinary man are not worthy of note, as they affect his own life. The story of the prince like Hamlet, or the King like Lear, or the generals like Macbeth or Othello has a greatness and dignity of its own. His fate affects the fate of a whole nation or empire. When he falls from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast of the powerlessness of man. His fall creates cathartic effects on the audience.

Shakespeare's tragic hero is endowed with noble qualities of head and heart. He is built on a grand scale. For instance,

Macbeth has “vaulting ambition”, Hamlet noble inaction, Othello credulity and rashness in action, and Lear the folly and incapacity to judge human character. Owing to this “fatal flaw” the hero falls from a state of prosperity and greatness into adversity and unhappiness, and ultimately dies.

- ii) **Tragic Waste:** In Shakespearean tragedy we find the element of tragic waste. All exceptional qualities of the protagonist are wasted. At the end of the tragedy, the Evil does not triumph. It is expelled but at the cost of much that is good and admirable. The fall of Macbeth does not only mean the death of evil in him, but also the waste of much that is essentially good and noble. In Hamlet and King Lear the good is also destroyed along with the evil. There is no tragedy in the expulsion of evil, the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good.

- iii) **Fate and Character:** The actions of the protagonist are of great importance as they lead to his death. What we do feel strongly as the tragedy advances to its close is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and that the main source of these deeds is character. But to call Shakespearean tragedy the story of human character is not the entire truth. Shakespeare’s tragedies, as Nicoll points out are “tragedies of character and destiny.” There is a tragic relationship between the hero and his environment. A. C. Bradley also points out that with Shakespeare “character is destiny” is an exaggeration of a vital truth. Fate or destiny places the protagonist in just those circumstances and situations with which he is incapable of dealing. The flaw in the character of the protagonist proves fatal for him in the peculiar circumstances in which cruel Destiny has placed him. The essence of Shakespearean tragedy, therefore, is that Fate presents a problem which is difficult for the particular hero at a time when he is least fitted to tackle it. The tragic relationship between the hero and his surroundings is a significant factor in Shakespearean tragedy. So, both character and destiny are responsible for the hero’s tragic end.

- iv) **Abnormal Psychology:** Some abnormal conditions of mind as insanity, somnambulism and hallucinations affect human deeds. Lear and Ophelia become victims of insanity. Lady Macbeth suffers from somnambulism and her husband Macbeth from hallucinations.

- v) **The Supernatural Element:** The supernatural agency plays a vital role in Shakespearean tragedy. It influences the thoughts and deeds of the hero. In the age of Shakespeare ghosts and witches were believed to be far more real than they are today. It is the supernatural agency that gives the sense of failure in

Brutus, to the half formed thoughts of guilt in Macbeth and to suspicion in Hamlet. Supernatural agency has no power to influence events unless by influencing persons

- vi) Chance:** In most of Shakespeare's tragedies chance or accident exerts an appreciable influence at some point in the action. For instance it may be called an accident the pirate ship attacked Hamlet's ship, so that he was able to return forthwith to Denmark; Desdemona drops her handkerchief at the most fatal of moments; Edgar arrives in the prison just too late to save Cordelia's life.
- vii) Conflict:** Conflict is an important element in Shakespearean tragedy. According to Aristotle it is the soul of tragedy. This conflict may arise between two persons, e.g. the hero and the villain, or between two rival parties or groups in one of which the hero is the leading figure. This is called the external conflict. In Macbeth the hero and the heroine are opposed to King Duncan. There is also an "inner conflict", an inward struggle, in the mind of the hero and, it is this inner conflict which is of far greater importance in the case of the Shakespearean tragedy. In it there is invariably such as inner conflict in the mind of one or more of the characters. In Macbeth, according to Bradley, we find that "treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm: here is the outward conflict. But these powers and principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth of himself; here is the inner."
- viii) Catharsis:** Shakespearean tragedy is cathartic. It has the power of purging and thus easing us of some of the pain and suffering which is the lot of us all in the world. Compared to the exceptionally tragic life of the hero before our eyes, our own sufferings begin to appear to us little and insignificant. In a Shakespearean tragedy the spectacle of the hero's sufferings is terrible and it arouses the emotions of pity and terror. It is truly cathartic, as it purges the audience of the emotions of self-pity and terror.
- ix) No Poetic Justice:** Shakespearean tragedy is true to life. So, it excludes "poetic justice" which is in flagrant and obvious contradiction of the facts of life. Although villainy is never ultimately triumphant in Shakespearean tragedy, there is yet an idea that the fortunes of the persons should correspond to their deserts and dooms. We feel that Lear ought to suffer for his folly and for his unjust treatment of Cordelia, but his sufferings are out of all proportion to his misdeeds. In Shakespearean tragedy we find that the doer must suffer. We also find that villainy never remains victorious and prosperous at the end.

Nemesis overtakes Macbeth and all evil characters in Shakespearean tragedy.

- x) Moral Vision:** Shakespearean tragedy is not depressing. It elevates, exalts and ennobles us. Shakespeare shows in his tragedies that man's destiny is always determined to a great extent by his own character. He is an architect of his own fate. It always reveals the dignity of man and of human endeavour over the power of evil, which is ultimately defeated. Shakespearean tragedy ends with the restoration of the power of the good.

Shakespeare's Historical Plays

The historical plays were immensely popular in Elizabethan England. They reflected the spirit of the age. The people were intensely patriotic and were very proud of the achievements of their ancestors or the foreign fields. The newly awakened spirit of patriotism and nationalism enables the people to take keen interest in the records of bygone struggle against foreign invasion and civil disunion.

Shakespeare's historical plays span a period of 350 years of English history, from 1200 to 1550. His famous historical plays are Henry VI, Parts I, II & III, Richard II, Richard III, King John, Henry IV, Parts I & II and Henry V. He borrowed the raw material of his historical plays from the chronicles of Hall, Showe and Holinshed.

Shakespeare's historical plays are suffused with the spirit of patriotism. They show his love for authority and discipline. He considers law and authority necessary for civilized life, he fears disorder for it leads to chaos.

Shakespeare's Last Plays

Shakespeare's last plays known as dramatic romances form a class apart. His last four plays – Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest are neither comedies nor tragedies. All of them end happily but all fetch happiness to shore out of shipwreck and suffering. These last plays have a lot in common. It is appropriate to call them "dramatic romances" or tragicomedies." They contain incidents which are undoubtedly tragic but they end happily.

Shakespeare's last plays breathe a spirit of philosophic clam. They are stories of restoration, reconciliation, moral resurrection and regeneration.

1.6.3. Other Playwrights

I. Ben Jonson and the Comedy of Humours

Ben Jonson was a classicist in Elizabethan England, which was romantic both in character and temper. Jonson was the first great neo-classic. Like Donne, he revolted against the artistic principles of his contemporaries, and he sought a measure for the uncontrolled, romantic exuberance of Elizabethan literature in the classical literature. In all branches of his writings he is the conscious artist and reformer. To him the chief function of literature was to instruct and educate the audience and readers.

All plays of Ben Jonson are neo-classic in spirit. They aim at reforming and instructing society and individuals. He is primarily a writer of the comedies of humour. His famous comedies are *The Case is Altered*, *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Epicone* or *The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist*, *The Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Light Heart*, *Humour Reconciled* and *A Tale of A Tub*. Ben Jonson also wrote two tragedies *Sejanus* and *Cataline*.

Jonson propounded the theory of the comedy of humours. To him the purpose of the comedy is corrective and cathartic. The corrective and moral tone necessitated the presence of satire in his comedies. The audience must laugh to some end and the play must deal with some folly and cure it by its ridiculous and comic presentation. To him a comedy was a "comical satire." He derived the idea of humours from medieval medical science. In the older physiology the four major humours corresponding with the four elements and possessing the qualities of moisture, dryness, heat and cold. These elements, in different combinations, formed in each body and declare his character. Variations in the relative strength of these humours showed the individual differences. The disturbance of the natural balance is dangerous and it results in different ailments of body. In order to restore the natural balance of the body many purgings, bleedings and other painful reductions were affected in medieval times.

Ben Jonson used this term to include vices as well as follies, cruelty as well as jealousy. It was also used in the sense of mere caprice or trick of manner or peculiarity of chess. It also included vanity and affectation. In *Every Man Out of His Humour* he lucidly explained the term "humour" .

As when someone peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his effects, his spirits and his powers,
In his confluxions, all to run are way.

This may be truly said to be a humour. Jonson regarded it as one of the main functions of the comedy to expose the excesses, vanities and human affectations, which disturbed the balance of human personality. Jonsonian comedy of humours is classical and intellectual. He is the forerunner of the Restoration comedy of manners.

II. John Webster and the Revenge Tragedy

Webster's two tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* have earned for him an outstanding place in British drama. In subtlety of thought and reality of tragic passion he is second to Shakespeare. Both his tragedies are based on the revenge motif. In them he emerges as a painstaking artist who had refined the material and motives of the earlier tragedies of blood and gloom. He had converted melodrama into tragedy. He imparted moral vision, psychological subtlety and emotional depth to the tragedy of revenge and horror.

III. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher combined to produce a great number of plays. Their typical comedies are *A King and No King*, *The Knight of Burning Pestle* and *The Scornful Lady*. They wrote two tragedies – *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*.

IV. George Chapman

George Chapman was a classicist like Jonson. His two comedies *All Fools' Day* and *Eastward Ho* are remarkable for Jonsonian humour. His historical plays dealing with nearly contemporary history are *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *Charles, Duke of Byron* and *The Tragedy of Chabot*.

V. Thomas Middleton

Thomas Middleton was one of the most original dramatists of his time. His light farcical comedies like *A Mad World My Masters* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* are remarkable for vivacity. His other memorable plays *Women Beware Women*, *Changeling* and *The Witch*. *The Spanish Gypsy* is a romantic comedy which reminds us of *As You Like It*.

1.7 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the importance of English Renaissance which exercised a great impact on the development of English literature. We have taken an outline of the socio-political

milieu of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age including the literary features of these ages. Further we studied the different kinds of poetry like love poetry, patriotic poetry, philosophic poetry and satirical poetry to name few. You have also been introduced with the important poets of the age. The unit continues with the peculiarities of the Elizabethan prose and its various forms: essay, character writing, religious writing and prose romances. This prose writing projected the novel writing in the later ages

The final part of the unit focuses on the dramatic art developed by the Elizabethan playwrights. It includes the University wits and their contributions to drama, and as to how they pave the way for Shakespeare.

The unit extensively studies the dramatic activities of William Shakespeare and characteristics of his different kinds of drama like comedy, tragedy and historical plays.

1.8 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of Elizabethan Age?
2. How does poetry reflect the Spirit of Age in Elizabethan England? Discuss.
3. Write an account of the evolution of English poetry during the Age of Shakespeare.
4. What roles do Wyatt and Surrey play in the development of English poetry? Describe.
5. Give an account of Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry.
6. Write a note on Elizabethan sonnets and sonneteers.
8. Discuss briefly the development of Elizabethan prose.
11. Discuss the development of drama during the Elizabethan Age.
12. Discuss the characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy.
13. What are the main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy? Discuss.
14. Write a note on the contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare and their contribution to development of drama.
15. Write Short Notes on the following:
 - I. Character Writers in Elizabethan Period
 - ii. Prose Romances
 - iii. Love and Patriotic Poetry
 - iv. Elizabethan Poets.
 - v. Contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare
 - vi. University Wits.



THE CAROLINE AGE (1625 – 1649)

Unit Structure:

- 2.0. Objectives
- 2.1 General Characteristics of the Age
 - 2.1.1 Introduction
 - 2.1.2. Civil War
 - 2.1.3 The Rise of Puritanism
 - 2.1.4 Want of Vitality and Concreteness
 - 2.1.5 Want of the Sprit of Unity
 - 2.1.6 Dominance of Critical and Intellectual Spirit
 - 2.1.7 Decay of Drama
- 2.2 Poetry of the Age
 - 2.2.1 Characteristics of Milton’s Poetry
- 2.3 The Metaphysical Poets
- 2.4 The Cavalier Poets
- 2.5 Prose of Caroline Age
- 2.6. Let’s Sum up
- 2.7 Important Questions

2.0. OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit the students will be familiar with the Caroline age, literary production of the age, and the major writers who contributed to develop the different genres of literature. This will also help the students to learn about the Puritan, Metaphysical and Cavalier poetry that were written during this span of time.

2.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE

2.1.1 Introduction

The Caroline age is named after Charles I (1625-1649). Caroline is an adjective of Carolus, the Latin word for Charles. The age of Caroline is an age of poetry of three kinds or schools: Metaphysical, Cavalier and Puritan schools of poetry. Let’s see the characteristics of Caroline Age.

2.1.2. Civil War

The entire period was marked by civil war, which divided the people into two factions: one loyal to the King and the other opposed to him. The crisis began when James I, who had reclaimed the right of royalty from an Act of Parliament. He gave too much importance to the Divine Right and began to ignore the Parliament. The Puritans, who had become a powerful force in the social life of the age, began the movement for social and constitutional reforms. The Puritans influenced the English middle classes during the reign of James I. It was not till the time of his successor that Puritanism emerged as a great national power. The hostilities which began in 1642, lasted till the banishment of Charles I in 1649. There was little political stability from 1649 to 1660. These turbulent years saw the establishment of the commonwealth under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. There was great confusion over his death. In 1660 the political chaos and instability ended with the restoration of King Charles to the throne of England.

2.1.3 The Rise of Puritanism

The Puritan Movement may be regarded as a second and Renaissance, a rebirth of the moral nature of man following the first renaissance, intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Puritanism became a political as well as a moral and religious force. Puritanism had two chief objects: the first was personal righteousness; the second was civil liberty. In other words, it aimed to make men honest and to make them free.

Hampden, Eliot, Milton, Hooker and Cromwell were some eminent puritans. From religious point of view Puritanism included all shades of belief. In course of time it "became a great national movement. It included English Churchmen, separatists, Calvinists, Covenanters and Catholic noblemen.

Puritanism exercised great influence upon the tone and temper of English life and thought. The spirit which it introduced was fine and noble, but it was hard and stern. During the Puritan rule of Cromwell severe laws were passed. Simple pleasures were forbidden, theatres were closed. Puritanism destroyed human culture and sought to confine it within the circumscribed field of its own particular interests. It was fatal both to art and literature. Great literature could not be produced during this period. Milton was an exception. He was the greatest literary genius of this era. In his finest works he combines the moral and religious influences of Puritanism with the generous culture of the Renaissance.

2.1.4 Want of Vitality and Concreteness

The literature of this period lacks vitality and concreteness. W.J. Long writes: "Elizabethan literature generally is inspiring, it throbs with youth and hope and vitality. That which follows speaks of age and sadness; even its brightest hours are followed by gloom, and by the pessimism inseparable from the passing of old standard."

2.1.5 Want of the Spirit of Unity

Despite diversity, the Elizabethan literature was marked by the spirit of unity, which resulted from intense patriotism and nationalism of all classes, and their devotion and loyalty to the Queen who had a single-minded mission to seek the nation's welfare. During this period James I and Charles II were hostile to the interests of the people. The country was divided by the struggle for political and religious liberty, and the literature was divided in spirit as were the struggling parties.

2.1.6 Dominance of Critical and Intellectual Spirit

The critical and intellectual spirit dominates the literature of this period. W.J. Long writes: "In the literature of the Puritan period one looks in vain for romantic ardour. Even in the lyrics and love poems a critical, intellectual spirit takes its place, and whatever romance asserts itself is in form rather than in feeling, a fantastic and artificial adornment of speech rather than the natural utterance of a heart in which sentiment is so strong and true that poetry is its own expression."

2.1.7 Decay of Drama

The influence of Puritanism was detrimental to the growth of drama. The closing of the theaters in 1642 gave a final jolt to the development of drama. The actual dramatic work of this period was small and insignificant.

2.2 POETRY OF THE AGE

Milton represents the best of the Renaissance and the Puritanism. Though a Puritan, he was also a classicist and humanist. He delighted in everything that pleased his eyes. He was a passionate lover of beauty. He did not share the Puritan contempt for the stage. Nevertheless, he possessed the moral earnestness and the religious zeal of the Puritan.

Milton's early poems – On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, L'Allegra and Il Penseroso exhibit all that was best in Elizabethan literature. Comus expresses Puritanic moral zeal in the Renaissance form of mask. Lycidas is a pastoral elegy which is suffused with the moral zeal of the Puritans. Arcades is a masque. His well known sonnets of this period are On His Deceased Wife, To the Nightingale, The Massacre in Piedmont and On His Blindness. Milton wrote his finest poetry when he became totally blind. Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes were written during this period.

2.2.1 Characteristics of Milton's Poetry:

Milton was the greatest poet after Shakespeare. In his writing he has blended a wonderful union of intellectual power and creative power. He is also a consummate literary artist, whose touch is as sure in delicate detail as in vast general effects. Milton was a superb poetic artist. His poetry is remarkable for the following characteristics:

- i) **Sublimity:** Milton had a noble conception of a poet's vocation. To him poetry was not a mere intellectual exercise or diversion. It was something solemn, sacred and sublime. He pursued this ideal of poetry all through his life. Milton's poetry is sublime and majestic. It is the expression of a pure mind and noble mind, enriched by knowledge and disciplined by art. His poetry ennobles and elevates the readers.
- ii) **Love of Beauty:** Milton was possessed of a deep sense of beauty. He loved beauty in all its manifestations. His love for the external beauty of nature is exhibited in L'Allegro, Il Penseroso and Lycidas. The beauty of virtue attracted him. It found its earliest artistic expression in Comus. His last three works – Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes express his love for beauty and righteousness in a highly poetic manner.
- iii) **Puritanism:** There is also a powerful undercurrent of Puritanism in Milton's poetry. There is a nothing distinctly Puritan in his early poetry. It finds its earliest expression in Comus and Lycidas. In his later poetry the Puritan note is dominant, but it is always mild and subdued. The puritan and religious tendency in his later is seen in the choice of subjects, which are taken from the Bible. The aim of Paradise Lost is "to justify the ways of God to men." Paradise Regained portrays Christ's resistance to Satan's temptations and his victory over them. The theme of Samson Agonistes is also Biblical and is imbued with moral earnestness.

- iv) Classicism:** Milton was also a classicist. He was a keen student of ancient classics. His fondness for classicism is found in his choice for classical and semi-classical forms – epic (*Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*), the Greek tragedy (*Samson Agonistes*), the pastoral elegy (*Lycidas*), and the Ode (*Ode on the Nativity of Christ*). He designed his style on classical model. It is noble and sublime. He was fond of classical allusions. His diction is abundantly classical and his two epics are full of eloquent descriptions and enormous similes which remind us of ancient epics of Greece and Rome.
- v) Flawless Poetic Art:** Milton was a flawless poetic artist. Whatever he has written is remarkable for the excellence of artistic workmanship. Edward Albert writes : “As a poet Milton is not a great innovator; his function is rather to refine and make perfect. Every form he touches acquires a finality of grace and dignity. To Milton the art of poetry is “a high and grave thing, a thing of the choicest discipline of phrase, the fine craftsmanship of a structure, the most nobly ordered music of sound.” As a poetic artist Milton was never careless. There is hardly a line in his poetic work, which is unpoetical – hardly a word which is superfluous.
- vi) Milton’s Style:** Milton’s style is the highly distinguished style in English poetry. His mind was “nourished upon the best thoughts and finest works of all ages.” His language, says Pattison, was of one “who lives in the companionship of the great and the wise of the past time.” In his poetic style we inevitably find the imprint of a cultured mind, a lofty soul and an artistic conscience. Matthew Arnold remarked : “In the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction, he is as admirable as Virgil or Dante, and in this respect he is unique amongst us. No one else in English literature possesses the like distinction... Shakespeare is divinely strong, rich and attractive. But sureness of perfect style, Shakespeare himself does not possess. Milton from one end of *Paradise Lost* to the other, is in his distinction and rhythm constantly a great artist in the great style.” Above all, there is certain loftiness about the style of Milton which is found alike in his *Ode to Nativity* and *Paradise Lost*.

Milton’s style, says Raleigh, is not a loose flowing garment but is tightly fitted to the thought. He packs his meaning in the fewest possible words and in the most musical language. His is the grand style. “Of all the English styles”, says Raleigh, “Milton’s is best entitled to the name of classic.” It is noticeable for compactness, force and the unity of emotional impression, which are the distinctive characteristics of true classical style.

Milton was a conscientious artist and weighed every word he used for its meaning, weight and sound.

vii) Milton's Versification: Tennyson called Milton "God – gifted organ voice of England" and "mighty – mouthed inventor of harmonies." His entire poetry is marked by a unique musical quality. As a versifier, Milton reformed the loose dramatic blank verse of Elizabethan dramatists and made it a worthy epic metre. W.H. Hudson writes: "His blank verse in particular deserves the closest study. Though this form, as we now know, had long been used in the drama, it had not thus far been adopted for any non-dramatic poem. Milton was therefore making an experiment when he took as the measure of *Paradise Lost* "English heroic verse without rime." Of this measure he remains our greatest master."

2.3 THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

Taking a hint from Dryden's phrase about Donne, "He affects the Metaphysics", Dr Johnson called him and his followers the Metaphysical poets. For both in their thought and expression they are startlingly different from their predecessors, being fond rather of the subtle than the plain, of what lay beneath than on the surface.

A new kind of poetry, known as the metaphysical poetry, began with John Donne. It is characterized by much genuine poetic feeling, harsh metres, and those strained and whimsical images and turns of speech, which are called conceits. Let's see the major poets of Metaphysical School in a nutshell:

Donne's works include Satires, Songs and Sonnets and Elegies. His poetry is classified into three categories – amorous, religious and satirical. His poetry reveals "a depth of philosophy, a subtlety of reasoning, a blend of thought and devotion, a mingling of the homely and the sublime, the light and the serious, which make it full of variety and surprise." Donne's poetry bears the stamp of his scholarship. His images are far-fetched, obscure, unusual and striking.

George Herbert is the most widely read of all the metaphysical poets. His poems were published posthumously. His poetry is distinguished by clearness of expression, concrete imagery and intelligible conceits. He preferred simple, homely, racy language and naturalness of expression. His poetry is sensitive to the most delicate changes of feeling.

Richard Crashaw was both secular and religious in his poetry. His best work is *Steps to the Temple* (1646). His poetry is

noticeable for striking but fantastic conceits, for its religious fire and fervour. It is emotional rather than thoughtful.

Henry Vaughan was at heart a mystic. His books include *Poems*, *Olor Iscanus*, *Silex Scintillans* and *Thalia Rediviva*. He had a considerable gift for fantasy. Edward Albert writes : “His regard for nature, moreover, has a closeness and penetration that sometimes suggest Wordsworth.”

Abraham Cowley distinguished himself as a classical scholar. His well-known poems are *The Mistress*, *The Davideis* and the *Pindaric Odes*. He is important as a transitional poet of this period. He was the last of the metaphysical poets and in many respects he foreshadows the English classicists. With all his piety, his fantasy, his conceits and his Pindarism, Cowley is, first of all, an intellectual. His lyrics are often sweet and graceful.

The following are their chief characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry:

- I. **Fantastic Conceits:** Their poetry is seldom and an expression of what has been expressed by earlier poets. It abounds rather in thoughts brought from “afar”, from the innermost recesses of their own mind. Donne, thus, speaks of the wreath of his mistress’s hair capable of holding his decaying body together in the grave as his soul did in life, calling it therefore his soul in death.
- II. **Treatment of the Inwards:** The Metaphysicals deal not so much with the outward world—man, nature, and human life— as with what passed in their own mind. The Elizabethan, even when personal, dealt with what was but common experience. But the Metaphysicals lived in the world of their own fancy and speak of that only. This makes their thought novel and startling. As a child, Vaughan says in *The Retreat*, he had glimpses of his prenatal existence to which he longs to go:

Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move.

- III. **Far-Fetched Images:** The images suggested by Metaphysical poetry are often strange. They are usually the product of unnatural combinations of dissimilar objects and ideas. There is no obvious connection between love and geographical zone. But Carew compares the warmth of love

to the Torrid Zone, its lack to the Frigid Zone, and its normal proportion to the temperature zone.

- IV. **Monstrous Hyperboles:** Metaphysical poetry abounds in hyperboles that not only could not be credited but could not be imagined. In *Sweetest Love, I Do not Go*, Donne's mistress sighs, she exhales not breath but soul; and when she weeps, she sheds not tears but his blood.
- V. **Obscurity:** For all foregoing reasons metaphysical poetry is not easily intelligible, comprehensible and understandable. T. S. Eliot says that in trying to find words for their subtle thoughts and feelings, the Metaphysicals fail to carry the readers along with them.
- VI. **Learning:** Dr Johnson says that Metaphysicals were men of learning that is an advantage to any poet but sometimes the reader is completely mystified in search of meaning. These are the major characteristic features of Metaphysical poetry.

2.4 THE CAVALIER POETS

Cavalier poets, a group of English poets associated with Charles I and his exiled son. Most of their work was done between 1637 and 1660. Their poetry embodied the life and culture of upper-class, pre-Commonwealth England. They mixed sophistication with naïveté, elegance with raciness. Writing on the courtly themes of beauty, love, and loyalty, they produced finely finished verses and expressed with wit and directness. The poetry reveals their indebtedness to both Ben Jonson and John Donne. The leading Cavalier poets were Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, and Thomas Carew.

Cavalier Poetry is an early seventeenth century movement centered mainly on Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, John Suckling, Richard Lovelace, and Carew. Most of these poets were admirers of Ben Jonson. Cavalier Poetry gets its name from the supporters of King Charles I in the seventeenth century who were at that period called the Cavaliers. They were royalists during the Civil Wars. Cavalier Poetry is different from metaphysical poetry since it does not use complicated metaphors and unrealistic imagery, but prefers a rather straightforward expression. This poetry was erotic and its strength lied in its shortness. Simply, it did not confuse readers with deep meaning and allegory but reflected every thought

as they were supposed to be understood along with their motto "Carpe Diem" meaning "seize the day".

The most common characteristic of Cavalier Poetry is its use of direct language which expresses a highly individualistic personality. In more detail, the Cavaliers, while writing, accept the ideal of the Renaissance Gentleman who is at once a lover, a soldier, witty, a man of affairs, a musician, and a poet, but abandon the notion of his being also a pattern of Christian chivalry. They avoid the subject of religion, apart from making one or two graceful speeches. They attempt no plumbing of the depths of the soul. They treat life cavalierly, indeed, and sometimes they treat poetic convention cavalierly too. In short their features can be succinctly given in the following points:

- I. Generally they were intended to entertain rather than instruct.
- II. They were influenced by John Donne for his elaborate conceits and meditative tone and influenced by Ben Jonson for his admiration for ancient Greek and Roman poetry.
- III. Their style features conversational style based on natural speech patterns.
- IV. Classical Influence was exercised on these poets in terms of regular rhythmic patterns, carefully structured stanzas and simple but elegant language
- V. Theme of love was popular in their compositions. The love expressed was characterized by idealized love, addressed to imaginary women with classical names, sarcastic commentaries on the pursuit of coy beauties, mistress no longer goddess but woman spoken to and poem more important to poet than woman.
- VI. Their writing owes something to both styles. They used direct and colloquial language expressive of highly individual personality. They enjoyed the casual, the amateur and the affectionate poem. They did not write religious poetry, nor do they explore the depth of the soul. And finally, they celebrate minor pleasures and sadness of life.

The Cavalier poetry no longer remains on the domain of English literature. They soon disappear from the scene of poetry. Though they flourished during reign of Charles I, they were disgraced when Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, became leader. Some fled London; others arrested or imprisoned; while only Herrick lived to see restoration of Monarchy.

Now, let's introduce these poets and their contribution to the development of Cavalier Poetry as follows:

- I. **Thomas Carew** (1595?–1639?): Carew was one of the Cavalier poets. He was educated at Merton College, Oxford. He had a short diplomatic career on the Continent, then returned to England and became a favourite of Charles I and a court official.
- II. He is best known for his courtly, amorous lyrics, such as "Ask me no more where Jove bestows" and "He that loves a rosy cheek," but of equal importance are his "Elegy on the Death of Dr. Donne," and the highly erotic poem, "A Rapture." In his use of metaphysical and classical material, he shows the influence of both John Donne and Ben Jonson.

Thomas Carew shows great lyrical talent in Poems. His style and verification are so polished and refined that he anticipates the neo-classical poetry. He is neither obscure nor uncouth.

- III. **Richard Lovelace** (1618–1657?): He is another the English Cavalier poet. He was the son of a Kentish knight and was educated at Oxford. In 1642. He was briefly imprisoned for having presented to Parliament a petition for the restoration of the bishops. An ardent royalist, he served with the French army during the English civil war. On his return to England in 1648, he was imprisoned by the Commonwealth. His royalist sympathies lost him his entire fortune, and he died in extreme poverty. He is remembered almost solely for two extremely graceful, melodic, and much-quoted lyrics, "To Althea, from Prison" and "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars." The first volume of his poems, *Lucasta: Epodes, Odes, Sonnets, Songs, &c.*, appeared in 1649; the companion volume, *Lucasta: Posthume Poems*, in 1660.
- IV. **Robert Herrick**: In August 1591 Robert Herrick was the seventh child and fourth son born to a London goldsmith, Nicholas, and his wife, Julian Stone Herrick. When Herrick was fourteen months old, his father died. At age 16, Herrick began a ten-year apprenticeship with his uncle. The apprenticeship ended after only six years, and Herrick, at age twenty-two, matriculated at Saint John's College, Cambridge. He graduated in 1617. Over the next decade, Herrick became a disciple of Ben Jonson, about whom he wrote five poems. In 1623 Herrick took holy orders, and six years later, he became vicar of Dean Prior in Devonshire. His post carried a term for a total of thirty-one years, but during the Great Rebellion in 1647, he was removed from

his position because of his Royalist sympathies. Following the restoration of Charles II, Herrick was reinstated at Dean Prior where he resided from 1662 until his death in October 1674. He never married, and many of the women mentioned in his poems are thought to have been fictional.

His principal work is *Hesperides; or, the Works Both Human and Divine of Robert Herrick, Esq.* (1648). A group of religious poems printed in 1647 appear within the same book under a separate title page bearing the name *His Noble Numbers*. The entire collection contains more than 1200 short poems, ranging in form from epistles and eclogues to epigrams and love poems. Herrick was influenced by classical Roman poetry and wrote on pastoral themes, dealing mostly with English country life and village customs.

- V. **John Suckling:** He is a cavalier poet and playwright best known for his lyrics. He wrote four plays including *Aglaure* which had two fifth acts, one tragic and one with a happy outcome and a comedy. *The Goblins* (1638) was much influenced by Shakespeare's *Tempest* and generally thought to be his best. His chief works are included in *Fragmenta Aurea* including his best known lyrics 'A Ballad Upon a Wedding' and 'Why so Pale and Wan, Fond Lover?'. He also wrote a satire *A Session of the Poets* (1637), a send-up of contemporary poets.
- VI. Andrew Marvell combined Renaissance sensuousness and humanism with Puritanism in his poems. His poems deal with the theme of nature as in *Garden and Upon the Hill*; love as in *The Gallery*, *To His Coy Mistress*; and patriotism as in *Cromwell's Return from Ireland*.

2.5 PROSE OF CAROLINE AGE

The development of prose was copious and excellent in kind. Jeremy Taylor, the most prominent literary divine of this period, is remembered for his collection of sermons, known as *The Liberty of Prophesying*, *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*. These are fine specimens of religious prose.

The Puritan Richard Baxter wrote *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* which is purely religious in matter and aim.

Thomas Fuller, another divine, wrote much on religious subjects. His most memorable work is *Worthies of England*.

Sir Thomas Browne, a physician, wrote *Vulgar Errors*, *Hydriotaphia or Urn Burial* and *Religio Medici*. *Religio Medici*, his finest work, is an excellent prose companion to the metaphysical verse of the age. His writings are collections of independent papers. He is personal and intimate. Browne's style is pedantic, ornate and strongly Latinised. His style is a model for musical prose.

Milton wrote most of his prose during the middle period of his life when he was busy with public affairs. He wrote a number of pamphlets on various topics of public interest. *Aeropagitica*, a great and impassioned treatise on the freedom of the press, is his finest prose work.

Owen Feltham wrote *Resolves: Divine, Moral, Political*. These are essays which show Bacon's influence.

William Drummond made the first conscious and sustained effort in English to write political prose in a *Cypress Grave*.

Abraham Cowley cultivated a form of essay more intimate and confidential, though less profound, weighty and philosophical than the Baconian. As a writer his output consists of some discourses and prefaces. His essays are remarkable for intimacy and sincere self – revelation. His essay *Of Myself* is the finest of his compositions.

James Howell is the forerunner of Queen Anne essayists. His prose has no poetic quality. It is intellectual, simple, familiar and essay. Howell's *Epistolae* is a collection of familiar letters, domestic and foreign, partly historical, political and philosophical. He anticipated the periodical essay.

2.6. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have seen what Caroline Age is, its general features characterised by civil war, rise of Puritanism, lack of spirit of unity, dominance of intellectual spirit and decline of drama.

We studied the poetry of the age including Puritan Poetry, Metaphysical Poetry and Cavalier poetry along with their features and major poets. This section of the unit studies Puritan poetry and Milton as a puritan poet extensively; Metaphysical school of poetry thoroughly and Cavalier poetry in its entirety. The last portion of the unit is devoted to the prose of Caroline age especially the prose writers and their contribution to its development.

2.7. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What are the general characteristics of Caroline Age? Discuss.
2. Discuss the characteristics of Milton's age.
3. What is meant by the Puritan Movement? Discuss its influence on the literature of the seventeenth century.
4. Discuss Milton as a poet.
5. Write an essay on the Metaphysical poetry.
6. Write short notes on the followings:
 - I. Development of Prose in Milton's Age
 - II. Cavalier Poetry
 - III. Prose of Caroline Age



THE RESTORATION AGE

Unit Structure :

- 3.0. Objectives
- 3.1. Historical Overview of Restoration Age
 - 3.1.1 The Restoration
 - 3.1.2. Religious and Political Conflicts
 - 3.1.3. Revolution
- 3.2. Literary Characteristics of Restoration Age
 - 3.2.1. Rise of Neo-classicism
 - 3.2.2. Imitation of Ancient Masters
 - 3.2.3. Imitation of French Masters
 - 3.2.4. Correctness and Appropriateness
 - 3.2.5. Realism and Formalism
- 3.3. Poetry of Restoration Age
- 3.4. Prose of Restoration Age
- 3.5. Restoration Drama
 - 3.5.1. Restoration Heroic Tragedy
 - 3.5.2. Restoration Comedy of Manners
 - 3.5.2.1. Writers of Comedy of Manners
 - 3.5.2.2. Decline of Comedy of Manners
- 3.6. Let's Sum up
- 3.7. Important Questions

3.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will make the students know about:

- Historical overview of Restoration Age, its socio-political happenings and its impact on the literary production of the age.
- Literary features of the age, prose, poetry and drama of the period.
- The major writers will be introduced with their major works of literature.

The above knowledge will make the students to evaluate and study the prescribed literary texts in your syllabus.

3.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RESTORATION AGE

The period from 1660 to 1700 is known as the Restoration period or the Age of Dryden. Dryden was the representative writer of this period. The restoration of King Charles II in 1660 marks the beginning of a new era both in the life and the literature of England. The King was received with wild joy on his return from exile. The change of government from Commonwealth to Kingship corresponded to a change in the mood of the nation. In this period the Renaissance delight in this world and the unlimited possibilities of the exploration of the world, and the moral zeal and the earnestness of the Puritan period could no more fascinate the people of England. Moody and Lovett remark: "But in the greater part of the Restoration period there was awareness of the limitations of human experience, without faith in the extension of the resources. There was the disposition to accept such limitations, to exploit the potentialities of a strictly human world."

The historical events like the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the religious controversy and the revolution of 1688 deeply influenced the social life and the literary movements of the age.

3.1.1 The Restoration

The Restoration of Charles II brought about a revolutionary change in life and literature. During this period gravity, moral earnestness and decorum in all things, which distinguished the Puritan period, were thrown to the winds. The natural instincts which were suppressed during the previous era came to violent excesses.

The King had a number of mistresses and numerous children. He was surrounded by corrupt and degenerate ministers. Profligacy was glorified in the royal court. Corruption was rampant in all walks of life. The Great Fire of 1665 and the Plague that followed were popularly regarded as suitable punishments for the sins of the profligate and selfish King. While London was burning and the people were suffering, the King and his nobles kept up their revels.

The beginning of the Restoration began the process of social transformation. The atmosphere of gaiety and cheerfulness, of licentiousness and moral laxity was restored. The theatres were reopened. There was a stern reaction against the morality of the Puritans. Morality was on the wane. There was laxity everywhere in life. All these tendencies of the age are clearly reflected in the literature of the period.

During the Restoration period there was a rapid development of science. The establishment of the Royal Society was a landmark in history of England. The interest in science began to grow. The growing interest in science resulted in the beginning of rational inquiry and scientific and objective outlook. Objectivity, rationality and intellectual quality also enlivened the literature of this period.

The French influence was predominant during this period because the King had spent the period of his exile in France. The French manners and fashion spread from the court to the aristocracy. It also influenced contemporary literature.

3.1.2 Religious and Political Conflicts

This era also witnessed the rise of two political parties the Whigs and the Tories. These parties were to play a significant role in English politics. The Whigs sought to limit the powers in the interest of the people and the Parliament. The Tories supported the Divine Right theory of the King, and strove to restrain the powers of the people in the interest of the hereditary rulers. The rise of these political parties gave a fresh importance to men of literary ability. Almost all the writers of this period had political affiliations. Dryden was a Tory.

The religious controversies were even more bitter. The supporters of the Puritan regime were fanatically persecuted. The nation was predominantly Protestant and the Catholics were unduly harassed.

The religion of the King himself was suspect. His brother James was a Papist (Roman Catholic). As Charles II had no legitimate heir, it was certain that after him his brother James, a Catholic, would succeed to the throne. Efforts were made to exclude James from the throne. The King sided with his brother and he removed all obstacles for the accession of James. Dryden's famous poem *Absalom and Achitophel* reflects these religious and political conflicts of the day.

3.1.3 The Revolution

James II ascended the throne in 1685. He soon revealed his Roman Catholic prejudices and he secretly tried to establish Catholicism in the country. He became unpopular within three years and the whole nation rose against him. The bloodless revolution of 1688 called the Protestant William and Mary of Orange to the throne. The country was once again restored to health and sanity.

These deep and vigorous movements brought about certain changes in the inner social life. With the revival of factions and parties and the excitement caused by the Popish plot, a quality of force and ardour revived in civic feelings, so that the tone of literature and of social life is somewhat modified. With the political and moral transformation which began in 1688, the very Keynote of English literature, as of English life, was greatly changed. It can be said that the last years of the seventeenth century form a distinct period. It is a brief but well-marked transition separating the Restoration from the age of classicism.

3.2 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF RESTORATION AGE

The literature of the Restoration period marked the complete breaking of ties with the Renaissance literature. It reflected the spirit of the age. The spirit of corruption and moral laxity, which were predominant in the social life of the restoration, are reflected in literature.

The following are the chief feature of the period:

3.2.1 Rise of Neo-classicism

The Restoration marks a complete break with the past. The people believed in the present, the real and the material. Moody and Lovett remark: "In all directions it appeared as a disposition towards conservation and moderation. Men had learned to fear individual enthusiasm, and therefore they tried to discourage it by setting up ideals of conduct in accordance with reason and common sense, to which all men should adapt themselves. Rules of etiquette and social conventions were established and the problem of life became that of self-expression within the narrow bounds which were thus prescribed." All these tendencies were reflected in the literature of this period.

The writers, both in prose and poetry, tacitly agreed upon the rules and principles in accordance with which they should write. Rules and literary conventions became more important than the depth and seriousness of the subject matter to the writers of this period. They express superficial manners and customs of the aristocratic and urban society and did not pry into the mysteries of human mind and heart.

3.2.2 Imitation of the Ancient Masters

The authors of the period were not endowed with exceptional literary talents. So they turned to the ancient writers, in

particular, to the Latin writers, for guidance and inspiration. It was generally believed that the ancients had reached the acme of excellence and the modern poets could do no better than model their writings on the classics. Thus grew the neo-classical school of poetry. The neo-classicists or pseudo-classicists could not soar to great imaginative heights or could not penetrate deeply into human emotions. They directed their attention to the slavish imitation of rules and ignored the importance of the subject matter. This habit was noticeable in the age of Dryden. It strengthened in the succeeding age of Pope.

3.2.3 Imitation of the French Masters

King Charles II and his companions had spent the period of exile in France. They demanded that poetry and drama should follow the style to which they had become accustomed in France. Shakespeare and his contemporaries could not satisfy the popular literary taste. Pepys wrote in his diary that he was bored to see Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Italian influence had been dominant in Elizabethan period. Now began the period of French influence, which showed itself in English literature for the next century. Commenting on the French influence on the literature of this period W. H. Hudson writes: "Now the contemporary literature of France was characterized particularly by lucidity, vivacity, and by reason of the close attention given to form – correctness, elegance and finish. It was essentially a literature of polite society, and had all the merits and all the limitations of such a literature. I was moreover a literature in which intellect was in the ascendant and the critical faculty always in control. It was to this congenial literature that English writers now learned to look for guidance; and thus a great impulse was given to the development alike in our prose and in our verse of the principles of regularity and order and the spirit of good sense. As in verse pre-eminently these were now cultivated at the expense of feeling and spontaneity, the growth of an artificial type of poetry was the inevitable result."

The famous French writers like Corneille, Racine, Moliere and Boileau were imitated. Boileau's "good sense" ideal became very popular. English writers imitated the French blindly; rather they copied the worst vices of the French, instead of their wit, delicacy and refinement. The French influence is seen in the coarseness and indecency of the Restoration comedy of manners. The combined influence of French and classical models of tragedy is seen in the heroic tragedy. The French influence is responsible for the growth and popularity of opera.

3.2.4 Correctness and Appropriateness

The work of the authors of the Restoration period was imitative and of limited quality. Since they lacked creativity and flight of imagination, they abandoned freedom altogether and slavishly followed the rules. Edward Albert writes: "Thus they evolved a number of "rules" which can usefully be summarised in the injunction "Be Correct", correctness means avoidance of enthusiasm, moderate opinions moderately expressed, strict care and accuracy in poetic technique; and humble imitation of the style of Latin Classics."

The new tendency, which reached its climax in the Age of Pope, is very clearly marked in the literature of the Restoration period. To Dryden Dr. Johnson applied the term "Augustan", saying that Dryden did to English literature what Augustus did to Rome, which he found "of brick and left of marble." Dryden was the first representative of the new ideas that were to dominate English literature till the end of the eighteenth century.

3.2.5 Realism and formalism

Restoration literature is realistic. It was very much concerned with life in London, and with details of dress, fashions and manners. "The early Restoration writers", observes W. J. Long, "sought to paint realistic pictures of corrupt court and society, and emphasized vices rather than virtues and gave us coarse, low plays without interest or moral significance. Like Hobbes, they saw only the externals of man, his body and appetites, not his soul and his ideals.... Later, however, this tendency to realism became more wholesome. While it neglected romantic poetry, in which youth is eternally interested, it led to a keener study of the practical motives which govern human action."

The Restoration writers eschewed all extravagances of thought and language and aimed at achieving directness and simplicity of expression. Dryden accepted the excellent rule for his prose, and adopted the heroic couplet, as the next best thing for the greater part of this poetry. It is largely due to Dryden that "writers developed formalism of style, that precise, almost mathematical elegance, miscalled classicism, which ruled the English literature for the next century."

3.3 POETRY OF RESTORATION AGE

The poetry of the Restoration period is formal, intellectual and realistic. In it form is more important than the subject matter. S. A. Brooke writes: "The *artificial* style succeeded to any extinguished the *natural*, or to put it otherwise, a more intellectual

poetry finally overcame poetry in which emotion always accompanied thought.”

(i) John Dryden (1631-1700). Dryden was the first of the new, as Milton was the last of the former school of poetry. He was a versatile poet. *Absalom and Achitophel* is a fine, finished satire on contemporary political situation. *Medal* is an attack on Shaftesbury. *Mac Flecknoe* is a biting attack on a former friend, Thomas Shadwell.

Religio Laici and *The Hind and the Panther* are two doctrinal poems. Dryden appears as a great story teller in verse in *The Fables*. As a lyric poet his fame rests on *song for St. Cecilia's Day* and *On Alexander's Feast*.

Dryden is the representative poet of his age. He began the neo-classical age in literature. It was his influence and example which lifted the classic couplet for many years as the accepted measure of serious English poetry.

(ii) Samuel Butler (1612-1680). Butler's *Hudibras* is a pointed satire on Puritans. It was influenced by the satires of Rabelais and Cervantes. It has genuine flashes of comic insight. It is a great piece of satirical poetry and it stands next to Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. Butler is a remarkable figure in the poetic development of the Restoration period.

3.4 PROSE OF RESTORATION AGE

The Restoration marks the beginning of modern prose. Matthew Arnold remarks: “the Restoration marks the birth of our modern English prose. It is by its organism – an organism opposed to length and involvement, and enabling us to be clear, plain and short – that English prose after the Restoration breaks with the styles of the times preceding it, finds the true law or prose and becomes modern, becomes, in spite of superficial differences, the style of our own day.” The spread of the spirit of common sense and of the critical temper of mind; the love of definiteness and clarity; and of the hatred of the pedantic and obscure have contributed to the development of English prose. It was an age of intellectualism and rationalism, the qualities which are essential for prose.

The growing interest in rationalism and the advancement of science greatly aided the general movement towards precision and lucidity of expression which are the essential qualities of good prose style. Various political parties and groups, and growing interest in day to day activities encouraged journalism which needed simple, straightforward prose style. The Coffee houses

and drawing rooms attracted the intellectuals and general public for discussions on various topics of general interest. Thus an easy and conversational style, which properly expressed the tastes and the intellectual make-up of the new reading public, evolved. Thus, various factors contributed to the evolution of modern prose during the Restoration period.

John Dryden (1631-1700) was one of the greatest prose writers of this period. His prefaces and his famous *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* make him “the leader of that modern prose in which the style is easy, unaffected, moulded to the subject, and in which proper words are placed in their proper places.”

John Bunyan (1632-1704) wrote two prose allegories, *Grace Abounding*, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. Bunyan is called a pioneer of English novel. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is remarkable for impressive characters, presentation of contemporary life and dramatic interest. Bunyan's style is simple, clear, lucid, Biblical and colloquial.

The diaries of the period are important in terms of style and new form. There are two diary writers who need to be introduced. The *Diary* of Sir John Pepys (1633-1703) is remarkable for the unaffected naturalness of style and narrative skill. As a historical document it provides an interesting view of the life of Restoration London. John Evelyn's *Diary* was written with an eye on the public. It is a more finished production in the manner of style.

Other writers who deserve mention are Lord Halifax, Sir William Temple, Thomas Hobbes, and Sir John Locke.

3.5 RESTORATION DRAMA

The theatres which were closed in 1642 were opened during the Restoration. They became the riotous haunt of the upper classes. Consequently, the plays written for the play houses were distinctly calculated by the authors to appeal to a courtly and cavalier audience. It is this that explains the rise of the heroic tragedy and the development of the comedy of manners. The heroic tragedy appealed to artificial, aristocratic sentiments on the subject of honour. And the Restoration comedy of manners reflected the morally vicious but intellectually brilliant atmosphere of the saloons and the chocolate houses.

3.5.1 The Restoration Heroic Tragedy

The Restoration tragedy is also known as the Heroic Tragedy. The influence of French romance and drama produced its first important result in the form of the heroic play. Bonamy Dobree

comments on the Restoration Tragedy: "As regards Restoration Tragedy the classical formal element was already there with Ben Johnson, the heroic aspects were adumbrated, often in Fletcher and Massinger, and even in Shakespeare. Coriolanus is a figure of heroic tragedy and so indeed in Tamburlaine. Viola is a heroic woman...."

The Restoration Tragedy is artificial. Its emotions are unreal. According to Dobree the fantastic ideas of valour, the absurd notions of dauntless, unquenchable love of Restoration Tragedy "do not correspond with experience." It mainly deals with conflict between love and honour.

John Dryden was the principal writer of the Heroic tragedy. His famous tragedies are *Tyrannic Love*, *Conquest of Granada* and *All for Love*. In Dryden's heroic plays we find a hero of superhuman powers and with superhuman ideals; there is a heroine of unsurpassed beauty and constancy; there is an inner conflict in the minds of several characters between love and honour; and there is a striving story of fighting and martial enthusiasm, filled with intense dramatic interest. *All For Love* is the finest tragedy of this period.

Another playwright was Thomas Otway. He wrote *Alcibiades*, *Don Carlos*, *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserved*.

3.5.2 Restoration Comedy of Manners

The Restoration comedy is also known as Comedy of Manners. These comedies expressed a reaction against Puritanism and the sexual repression it had attempted to enforce. Fashionable intrigues, sex, marriage and adultery were treated with cynicism, with worldly wit and a sense of the comedy of life. The characters in the plays no doubt owed much to the courtiers, the wits, and the men about town as well as to ladies of fashion, citizens, wives and country girls. "Restoration Comedy", according to Moody and Lovett, "is a genuine reflection of the temper, if not of the actual life, of the upper classes of the nation, and as such it has a sociological as well as a literary interest."

The Restoration comedy was shaped both by native and French influences. It drew its inspiration from the native tradition which had flourished before the closing of theatres in 1642. It was also influenced by continental writers, especially by Moliere and Spaniard. It reflected closely the dissolute court life of the period. There was a community of spirit which led to an interest in French comedy. Moliere gave English dramatists the brilliant ideas of plots and some fine examples of comic characterization. The foreign influences, remarks Edward Albert, "blended with a tradition already

strongly established, and assisted the natural process of change demanded by the changing temper of the age, but they were transformed into something essentially English and contemporary. Thus, the comedy of Moliere was changed into a harder, more closely knit form which lacked the warmth and depth of insight of the original."

The comedy of manners is conspicuous for intellectual and refined tone. It is devoid of romantic passions and sentiments. It replaces emotion by wit and poetry by a clear, concise prose. The plays show a close and satirical observation of life and manners. The Comedy of Manners recalls the works of Ben Jonson.

It is realistic. The simple aim of this comedy is to show the manners of the upper ranks of society. They are shown with unemotional frankness. The aristocratic refined society, which it presents, is fashionable. It does expose "follies", but these are the follies of refined gentlemen, and not of "low characters. Everything coarse and vulgar is eschewed. A "whore is called 'a mistress'", a "pimp" a "friend" and a "cuckold maker" a "gallant". The cult of refinement is carried to an extreme.

It depicts a small world which has a distinct territory of its own – the fashionable parks and coffee houses of the London of Charles II's time. Its setting is provided by the public parks, fashionable clubs, taverns and drawing rooms of the aristocratic and the leisured classes of the time.

Sex is treated with utmost frankness. Its main subject is the intimate relationship between men and women. The people of this period looked upon love as a purely personal matter, marriage as a social performance. The writers of the comedy of manners dissected the complications of these relationships. It deals somewhat coldly with human love and lust. The subject of the relationship between the sexes was of utmost importance during this period. The Restoration Comedy is the expression of people endeavoring to readjust their values after a great upheaval. They tried to see themselves not as they might wish to be but as they really were. Outwardly the normal life of social acceptance went on, but what happened below it was complete laxity in established social standards. Extramarital relationships were the fashion of the day. Licentiousness was there but it was rationalized, argued, made subjects to scientific tests. The woman is treated neither as a goddess, nor as a plaything of men, not as an object of pleasures but as the companion of man with her own enchanting personality. She is to be won not by devotion or lust, but by intelligence, brilliance or wit, and charm of manners. The lovers love the game of love. They want to continue the game of love up to the end. This rationalized conception of love and courtship leads to an ideal

marriage in which the lovers prefer to retain the more agreeable names of Mistress and Gallant. It is a polished courtship in which passion gives place to manners. Nothing should be in excess, neither passion nor indifference, neither boldness in men, and nor coyness in women. The attitude must be easy and graceful.

The Restoration Comedies are considered as anti-social because they represent social institutions, particularly marriage in a ridiculous light. They are neither romantic nor revolutionary. Conventions are accepted to be played with and attacked, merely by way of giving opportunity for witty raillery, or point to an intrigue. The most brilliant and amusing statement of the experiment is given in Congreve's *The Way of the World* and Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. (The Country Wife is prescribed in your study. Study that text into the light of Restoration Comedy.)

Jeremy Collier condemned the Restoration comedy for immorality. Charles Lamb contradicts Collier. He remarks: "The Fainalls and Mirabells, the Dorimants and the Touchwoods, in their own sphere, do not offend any moral sense; in fact, they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break no laws. They know of none." Indeed, the Restoration comedy is neither moral, nor immoral, it is amoral.

The characters in Restoration comedies are largely types, whose dispositions are sufficiently indicated by a study of their names. We have Sir Foppling Flutter, Horner, Scrub, Sir John Brute, Squire Sullen, Lady Bountiful, Lady Fancyful, Mrs. Marwood, Mrs. Fainall etc. The Restoration dramatists drew their characters and copied their situations from the life they saw around them.

The Restoration dramatists were interested in wit and portrayal of manners rather than in the movement and progression of events. So they employed a spatial rather than a temporal plot. The loose-knit pattern of such a plot was a definite advantage to them. It provided a better scope for the contrast and balance of characters. Conflict and intrigues occupy an important place in the Restoration Comedy. These comedies abound in wit and repartee.

3.5.2.1. Writers of Comedy of Manners

(i) William Congreve (1670-1729): Congreve is the best and finest writer of the comedy of manners. His famous comedies are *The Old Bachelor*, *The Double Dealer*, *Love For Love* and *The Way of the World*. *The Way of the World* is considered by common consent as a work of art and as pure comedy of manners by dint of its many artistic excellences, such as wit and brilliant, sparkling, dialogues. Construction, characterization, dialogue are all alike brilliant. The story scarcely matters. Rickett remarks: "But such

scenes as those where reputations are murdered by gossip, such characters as Mrs. Millamant and Mirabell, such flashes of wit in the talk between Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Millamant are to the fore—reveal the Restoration drama at its height.”

In Congreve’s works the comedy of manners reaches perfection. His plays faithfully reflect the upper class life of his day. Their undoubted immorality is saved from being objectionable by brilliant wit, a hard finish and a total lack of realism. In the artificial society which he depicts, moral judgment would be out of place. The tone is one of cynical vivacity, the characters are well drawn. Congreve’s prose is lucid and pointed, and shows an excellent ear for rhythm and cadence. In all things he is a polished artist, whose distinctive quality is brilliance.”

(ii) George Etherege (1635-91): Etherege’s three plays are *The Comical Revenge*, *She Wou’d If She Cou’d*, *The Man of the Mode or Sir Foppling Flutter*. In these plays he painted a true picture of the graceful but licentious upper classes. The prose dialogue is brilliant and natural.

(iii) Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726): His best comedies are *The Relapse*, *The Provok’d Wife*, and *Confederacy*. The first two plays employ the familiar devices of the Restoration Comedy. *The Confederacy* breaks new ground. The dramatist deals with the middle classes in this play.

(iv) George Farquhar (1678-1707): His famous comedies are *Love and a Bottle*, *The Constant Couple*, *Sir Harry Wildhair*, *The Inconstant*, *The Way to Win Him*, *The Recruiting Officer*, and *The Beaux’s Stratagem*. He added something new to the Restoration Comedy, in taking his material from a wider life than the polite upper class depicted by Congreve, and his characters are more like ordinary people. His dialogue lacks the polish and the sustained wit of Congreve, and is nearer the level of normal conversation. In his rapidly developing humanity, and his growing respect for moral standards, Farquhar looks forward to the drama of Steele and the succeeding age.

(v) William Wycherley (for details see unit No. 9 in this Module)

3.5.2.2. Decline of Restoration Comedy of Manners

From 1700 a change began to be discernible in stage production. It was felt that the appeal of the Restoration Comedy of Manners was restricted only to the aristocratic society. The immoral and antisocial influence of these plays was clearly perceived and the voice of protest was also heard. It was felt that a more human note was needed. With the rise of the middle class the moral standards changed. Moreover, the periodical essay and newspapers which expressed the moral code of the rising middle

class emerged as powerful rivals of drama. Jeremy, who attacked the Restoration Comedy for immorality, wrote plays like *The Careless Husband* and *The Non-Juror*. These plays lack in wit and insight but represent the needs of the new age.

3.6. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the social and historical aspects of Restoration period stressing the phenomena like concept of restoration, religious and political conflicts on the social sphere and the revolution that brought a deep changes in the society in general and literary activities in particular.

The unit deals with the facets of restoration age like rise of neo-classicism, imitations of the ancient masters and their impact on the writings of the Restoration age, and introduction of correctness and appropriateness as well as formalism and realism in their writings. It also speaks of the prose and verse of the age. The emphasis is placed on the dramatic activities of restoration age especial the birth of new tragedy called Heroic tragedy and comedy called Comedy of Manners.

The important dramatists and their works are introduced which is followed by the discussion on the decline and decay of drama during Restoration Age.

3.7. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the historical and social background of the Restoration period.
2. What are the literary characteristics of the Restoration period? Discuss.
3. What is Heroic tragedy? Write a note on the Heroic Tragedy.
4. Discuss the characteristics of Restoration comedy of manners.
5. Write short notes on the followings:
 - I. Writers of Comedy of Manners
 - II. Restoration poetry with reference to Dryden
 - III. Decline of Comedy of Manners
 - IV. Restoration prose.



THE AUGUSTAN AGE

Unit Structure :

- 4.0. Objectives
- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Political and Social Milieu
- 4.3. Coffee Houses and Literary Activities
- 4.4. Interest in Reading and Publishing Houses
- 4.5. Rise of the Middle Class
- 4.6. Evangelical Movement
- 4.7. Literary Characteristics of the Age
 - 4.7.1. Age of Prose and Reason
 - 4.7.2. Age of Satire
 - 4.7.3. Age of Neo-classicism
 - 4.7.4. Age of Good Sense
 - 4.7.5. Follow Nature
 - 4.7.6. Town and City Life as a Theme of Literature
 - 4.7.7. Heroic Couplet & Poetic Diction Tools of Writers
- 4.8. The Age of Transition
 - 4.8.1. Features of Transitional Writing
- 4.9. Augustan Poetry
- 4.10. Transitional Poets
- 4.11. Precursors of Romanticism
- 4.12. Prose of Augustan Age
- 4.13. Drama of Augustan Age
- 4.14. Novel during Augustan Age
- 4.15. Let's Sum up
- 14.16 Important Questions

4.0. OBJECTIVES

The prime objectives of this unit are: to make the students aware of socio-political milieu of Augustan Age, of social change, of literary tendencies of the age, and of prose, novel, poetry and drama of the Augustan Age.

After studying this unit the students will locate the prescribed text into the literary period and understand the text in the light of the Augustan Period.

4.1 INTRODUCTION.

In literature this period is known as the Augustan age. According to Hudson the epithet "Augustan" was applied as a term of high praise, because the Age of Augustus was the golden age of Latin literature, so the Age of Pope was the golden age of English literature. This epithet serves to bring out the analogy between the first half of the eighteenth century and the Latin literature of the days of Virgil and Horace. In both cases writers were largely dependent upon powerful patrons. In both case a critical spirit prevailed. In both cases the literature produced by a thoroughly artificial society was a literature, not of free creative effort and inspiration, but of self-conscious and deliberate art." It is also known as the "classic age". Hudson writes: "The epithet "classic", we may take to denote, first that the poets and critics of this age believed that the writers of classical antiquity presented the best models and ultimate standards of literary taste, and secondly, in a more general way, that, like these Latin writers, they had little faith in the promptings and guidance of individual genius, and much in laws and rules imposed by the authority of the past.

Some remarkable political and social changes began to take place in England during the closing years of William III and the accession of Queen Anne (1702). That had a great impact on the development of literature during this period. The literature of this era was partly new and partly a continuance of that of the Restoration.

This age may be divided into two periods: the first stretching from 1700 to 1750 in the neo-classic Age, and the second, the transitional period which spans from 1750 to 1798. The classical tendencies lost their hold during the second period and there was a transition from classicism to romanticism. The period of transition is also known as the Age of Gray and Collins.

4.2 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MILIEU

Politically, this age witnessed the rise of two political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. Their political opinions and programmes were sharply divided. The Whig party stood for the pre-eminence of personal freedom and the Tory party supported the royal Divine Right. The Tories objected to the foreign wars because they had to pay taxes to prolong them, while the trading class Whigs favoured the continuance of war because it contributed to their prosperity. In

order to propagate their ideologies and programmes both the parties utilised the services of literary men. And the politicians bribed the authors to join one or the other political party. The politicians took the authors into their confidence. Thus began the age of literary patronage. Consequently, most of the writers showed a strong political bias. It was, in other words, a party literature. Literature was honoured not for itself but for the sake of the party. The politics of the period helped to make it an age of political pamphleteering. And the writers were too willing to make the most of it. In order to get prominence in political struggle both parties issued a large number of periodicals. The periodicals were the mouthpieces of their respective political opinions. Thus began the age of journalism and periodical essay. The rise of periodical writing allowed great scope to the development of the literary talent of prose writers of the time. The real prose style— neat, simple, clear and lucid— was evolved during this period. In the words of Albert: “It was the golden age of political pamphleteering and the writer made the most of it.”

4.3 COFFEE HOUSES AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES

People were keenly interested in political activity. A number of clubs and coffee houses came into existence. They became the centres of fashionable and public life. The Coffee houses were dominated by either of the parties. A Whig would never go to a Tory Coffee house and Vice Versa. The Coffee houses were the haunts of prominent writers, thinkers, artists, intellectuals and politicians. They figured prominently in the writings of the day. The Coffee houses gave rise to purely literary associations, such as the famous *Scribblers* and Kit-cat clubs. In the first number of *The Tattler*, Richard Steele announced that the activities of his new Journal would be based upon the clubs. The discussions in coffee houses took place in polished, refined, elegant, easy and lucid style.

Thus coffee houses also contributed to the evolution of prose style during the eighteenth century.

4.4 INTEREST IN READING AND PUBLISHING HOUSES

The rising interest in politics witnessed the decline of drama. It resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of reading public. Consequently a large number of men took interest in publishing translations, adaptations and other popular works of the time. They became the forerunners of modern public houses. They employed hack writers (the writers who write for money without worrying

about the quality of their writing) of the period. They lived in miserable hovels in the Grub Street.

4.5 THE RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

This period of literature saw the emergence of a powerful middle class. The supremacy of the middle class made it an age of tolerance, moderation and common sense. It sought to refine manners, and introduce into life the rule of sweet reasonableness. The church also pursued a middle way and the religious life was free from strife and fanaticism. The powerful dominance of the middle classes led to moral regeneration in the eighteenth century. The people were fast growing sick of the outrageousness of the Restoration period. People had begun once more to insist upon those basic decencies of life and moral considerations, which the previous generation had treated with contempt. The middle class writers were greatly influenced by moral considerations. Moreover, William III and Queen Anne were staunch supporters of morality. Addison in an early number of *The Spectator* puts the new tone in writing in his own admirable way: "I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit and wit with morality."

It was an era of the assimilation of the aristocracy and the middle class. The middle class appropriated classicism with its moralising needs. The emergence of middle class led to the rise of sentimentalism, feelings and emotions, which influenced the literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

4.6 EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

Religion in the age of Pope was deistic, formal, utilitarian and unspiritual. In the great Evangelical Revival, known as Methodism, led by Wesley and Whitefield, the old formalism and utilitarianism was abandoned. A mighty tide of spiritual energy poured into the Church and the common people. From 1739 the Evangelical Movement spread rapidly among the poor all over England, and it became particularly strong in the industrial towns.

4.7 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE

The political and social changes exhibiting the supremacy of good sense, rationality, sanity and balance left an imperishable mark on the literature of the Age of Pope and Dr. Johnson. The literature of the period bore the hallmark of intelligence, of wit and of fancy, not a literature of emotion, passion, or creative energy.

The main literary characteristics of the age are given below:

4.7.1 Age of Prose and Reason:

It is an age of prose, reason, good sense and not of poetry. A large number of practical interests arising from the new social and political conditions demanded expression not simply in looks, but in pamphlets, magazines and newspapers. Poetry was inadequate for such a task. Hence prose developed rapidly and excellently. Indeed, poetry itself became prosaic, as it was not used for creative works of imagination, but for essays, satires and criticism. The poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century as represented by the works of Pope and Dr. Johnson is polished and witty but lacks fire, fine feeling, enthusiasm and imaginative appeal. In short, it interests us as a study of life but fails to delight or inspire us. Matthew Arnold rightly calls if the eighteenth century “an age of prose”. The poetry of this period, according to Hudson, “lacked inevitably the depth and grasp of essential things which alone assure permanence in literature, and the quest for refinement in style resulted too often in stilted affectations and frigid conventionalism.”

4.7.2 Age of Satire:

The predominance of satire is an important literary characteristic of the age. Nearly every writer of the first half of the eighteenth century was used and rewarded by Whigs or Tories for satirising their enemies and for advancing their special political interests. Pope was an exception but he too was a satirist *par excellence*. W. J. Long writes: “Now satire—that is a literary work which searches out the faults of men or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule—is at best a destructive type of criticism. A satirist is like a labourer who clears away the ruins and rubbish of an old house before the architect and builders begin on a new and beautiful structure. The work may sometime be necessary, but it rarely arouses our enthusiasm. While the satires of Pope, place them with our great literature, which is always constructive in spirit; and we have the feeling that all these men were capable of better things than they ever wrote.”

4.7.3 Age of Neo-Classicism:

The Age of Pope and Johnson is often called the neo-classic age. We should clearly understand the meaning of the word “classic”. The term “classic” refers to writers of highest rank in any nation. It was first applied to the works of Greek and Roman writers like Homer and Virgil. In English literature any writer who followed the simple, noble and inspiring method of these writers was said to have a classic style. Period marked by a number of

celebrated writers who produce literature of a very high order, is also called the classic period of a nation's literature. The age of Augustus is the classic age of Rome. The age of Dante is the classic age of Italian literature. The age of the classic age is like those of Homer and Virgil. The writers of this period disregarded Elizabethan literary trends. They demanded that their poetry should comply with exact rules. In this respect they were influenced by French writers, especially by Boileau, who insisted on precise rules of writing poetry. They professed to have discovered their rules in the classics of Aristotle and Horace. Dryden, Pope and Johnson pioneered the revival of classicism which conformed to rules established by the great writers of other nations. They preferred only set rules to the depth and seriousness of subject matter. They ignored creativity, depth, vigour and freshness of expression. The true classicist pays equal consideration to the depth and seriousness of subject matter, and the perfect and flawless expression. The neo-classicist disregards the subject matter expresses the hackneyed and commonplace subjects in a polished and finished style modeled on the stylistic patterns of ancient writers.

Grierson in his famous book *The Background of English Literature* asserts that the hallmark of ancient classical literature is a harmonious balance between form and substance. This harmonious balance between form and substance was disturbed in the Age of Pope and Johnson. The writers of this period care for form, not for the weight of matter. They care only for manner, for artistic finish and polish, but not for genuine poetic inspiration. The content thought and feeling are subordinated to form.

4.7.4 Age of Good Sense:

Good sense is one of the central characteristics of the literature of this period. In the words of W. H. Hudson: "Good sense became the ideal of the time, and good sense meant a love of the reasonable and the useful and a hatred of the mystical, the extravagant and the visionary."

4.7.5 Follow Nature:

Another important characteristic of the age was the belief that literature must follow nature. Pope wrote in *The Essay on Criticism*: The rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,/ Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;/ Nature like Liberty is but restrained/ By the same laws which first herself ordain'd/ .../ Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem/ The follow Nature is to follow them.

By "nature" the Augustans meant to copy man and manners of society. Pope said, "The proper study of mankind is man."

Addison also wrote” “Wit and fine writing” consist not so much “in advancing things that are new, as in things that are known, an agreeable turn.”

4.7.6 Town and City Life as a Theme of Literature:

Another feature of the literature of the age is that it has a limited theme. It is a literature of the town and the fashionable upper circles of the city of London. Pope, Johnson, Addison, Steele etc., though urban in outlook and temperament, show remarkable interest in the middle classes and, thus, broaden the scope of literature. The theme of literature before them was strictly confined to fashionable and aristocratic circles. In the works of middle class writers classicism shows itself slightly coloured by a moralising and secretly sentimental intension.

4.7.7 The Heroic Couplet and the Poetic Diction as Tools of Writers:

The use of heroic couplet was predominant during this period. The heroic couplet was recognised as the only medium for poetic expression. In it the poets put all the skill and wrote with an unimaginable correctness and precision. The language of poetry became gaudy and inane. The common words or ordinary language were deliberately kept out from poetic literature. The result was that literature of the Augustan Age became artificial, rational and intellectual.

4.8 THE AGE OF TRANSITION (1850-1898)

The second half of the eighteenth century is known as a transitional period. It was an era of change from pseudo-classicism to romanticism. The decline of party spirit and the democratic upsurge exercised great influence both on life and literature.

4.8.1. The main characteristics of this period are given below:

- I. **Decline of Party Feud:** The rivalry between the Whigs and Tories still continued but it had lost its previous bitterness. This naturally led to a considerable decline of the activity in political pamphleteering. The poets and satirists ceased to be statesmen. The institution of literary patronage gradually crumbled during this period. Men of letters learnt to depend entirely on their public.
- II. **Influence of the French Revolution:** During the second half of the eighteenth century new ideas were germinating and new forces were gathering strength. The French Revolution of 1789 was only the climax of a long and deeply

diffused unrest. Revolutionary ideas gave birth to democratic and humanitarian feelings. And it influenced literature greatly.

- III. **The Revival of Learning:** This period is characterised by a kind of mild revival of learning. In literature it revealed itself in the study and editing of old authors like Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. The writers revived the old form of ballad. The publications of Bishop Percy's *Reliques* (1765), containing the oldest and finest specimens of ballad literature, is a landmark in the history of the Romantic Movement. The latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed the swift rise of historical literature.
- IV. **The New Realism:** The birth of a new spirit of inquiry was at the root of realism which is expressed in the novels of this period and is noticeable in the poetry of this century.
- V. **The Humanitarian Spirit:** This period is characterised by the rapid growth of democracy. Stress was laid on the individual worth of man. People became familiar with the notions of equality, liberty and brotherhood. The philosophy of Rousseau and the French Revolution popularised the democratic and humanitarian ideals, which immensely influenced the literature of this period.

4.9 THE AUGUSTAN POETRY

As we have seen that the Augustan poetry was the product of intelligence, good sense, reason and sanity. Polish and elegance of form were of more importance than subtlety or originality of thought. It plays upon the surface of life and entirely ignores primary human emotions and feelings. It is didactic and satiric. It is realistic and unimaginative. It is town poetry. It ignores the humbler aspects of life and the entire countryside.

The poetic style is polished, refined and artificial. It led "to the establishment of a highly artificial and conventional style which became stereotyped into a traditional poetic diction". During this period the satiric and narrative forms of poetry flourished. Heroic couplet dominated in this poetry. This metre produced a close, clear and pointed style. Its epigrammatic terseness provided a suitable medium of expression to the kind of poetry which was then popular. Let's see the eminent writers of the period.

4.9.1 Alexander Pope (1688-1744):

Pope is the representative poet of the Augustan Age. His famous works include *Pastorals*, *An Essay in Criticism*, *Windsor*

Forest, The Rape of the Lock, translations of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Elegy to the memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and *An Essay on Man*.

He was a great poet of his age. His influence dominated the poetry of his age. Many foreign writers and the majority of English poets looked to him as their model.

Pope's poetry is the real picture of the spirit of the age. The three poems in which he is undisputably the spokesman of his age are *The Rape of the Lock*, picturing its frivolities; *Dunciad* unveiling its squalor; *The Essay on Man*, echoing its philosophy. He is a representative poet of the age of "prose and reason". A hard intellectuality and rationality, qualities proper to prose, distinguish Pope's poetry. In *The Rape of the Lock* he realistically dealt with the life of the fashionable upper strata of London society.

He had a meticulous sense of the exact word in the exact sense. His poetic art is the finest specimen of the neo-classic conception of correctness. His admirable craftsmanship is best seen in the excellent use of the heroic couplet. He for the first time imparted immaculate artistic excellence to it.

4.9.2 Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84):

Dr. Johnson, a voluminous writer, was a man of versatile literary genius. He was the acknowledged dictator in contemporary literature. Smollett called him "the great champ of literature."

Johnson's two poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* belong to the Augustan school of poetry. Both are written in the heroic couplet and abound in Personifications and other devices that belonged to the poetic diction of the age of neo-classicism. In their didacticism, their formal, rhetorical style, and their adherence to the closed couplet they belong to the neo-classic poetry.

4.9.3 Other Poets:

Other poets who deserve mention are Matthew Prior, John Gray, Edward Young and Lady Winchilsea.

4.10 THE TRANSITIONAL POETS

The transitional poetry marks the beginning of a reaction against the rational, intellectual, formal, artificial and unromantic poetry of the age of Pope and Johnson. It was marked by a strong reaction against stereotyped rules. The transitional poets derived inspiration from Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. Unlike the Augustan poetry, it is poetry of countryside, of common and

ordinary people, and not of the fashionable, aristocratic society and town life. Love of nature and human life characterise this poetry. The transitional poets revolted against the conventional poetic style and diction of the Augustan poetry. They aimed at achieving simplicity of expression. This poetry appealed to emotions and imagination. It is marked by the development of naturalism.

Crabbe, Burns, Blake and many others are the pioneers of naturalism. The transitional poets are the forerunners of the splendid outburst of the romantic poetry of the nineteenth century. Let's study briefly about these poets and their works.

- I. James Thomson (1700-48) was the first to bring the new note in poetry both in his *Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence*. *The Seasons* is a blank verse poem and consists of a long series of descriptive passages dealing with natural scenes. Though its style is clumsy, the treatment is refreshing, full of acute observation and acute joy in nature. *The Castle of Indolence* is written in Spenserian Stanza and is remarkable for suggestiveness, dreamy melancholy and harmonious versification.
- II. Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74) represents the poetic tradition of neo-classicism so far as the use of the heroic couplet is concerned. His treatment of nature and rural life, note of human sympathy and simplicity of expression are characteristics of the transitional poetry. His first poem, *The Traveller* is written in the heroic couplet and deals with his wanderings through Europe. He uses simple and polished language. He reveals human sympathy for the sufferings of the poor. In *The Deserted Village* Goldsmith described the memories of his youth.
- III. Thomas Gray (1716-71) epitomises the changes which were coming, over the literature of his age. He was "a born poet, fell upon an age of prose". His early poems *Hymn to Adversity* and the odes *To Spring* and *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College* strike the note of melancholy that characterises the entire poetry of this period. Nature is described as a suitable background for the play of human emotions. His finest poem *The Elegy Written in A country Churchyard* has many new features in it. It is remarkable for the minute observation in the descriptions of nature, love and sympathy for the humble and the deprived, expression of the primary emotions of human life. His two odes, *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* express the new conception of the poet as an inspired singer. The first shows Milton's influence as regards melody and variety of expression. *The Bard* is even more romantic and original. It

breaks with the classical school and proclaims a literary declaration of independence. In *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin* he reveals interest in noise legends.

- IV. William Collins (1721-59) wrote his first work *Oriental Eclogues* in prevailing mechanical couplets but it is romantic in spirit and feeling. His *Ode To Evening* is instinct with a sweet tenderness, a subdued pathos, love of nature and a magical enchantment of phrase. His *Ode To Popular Superstitions of the Highlands* introduced a new world of witches, fairies and medieval kings. So it strikes a new and interesting note in romantic revival.
- V. William Cowper (1731-1800) is an immediate forerunner of the romantics. His first volume of poems, containing *The Progress of Error, Truth, Table Talk* etc. shows the influence of the neo-classical rules. *The Tasks* is Cowper's longest and finest poem. His descriptions of homely scenes of woods and brooks, of plowmen and teamsters and the letter carriers indicate the dawn of a new era in poetry. Cowper was a pioneer who preached the gospel "return to nature". He foreshadowed Wordsworth and Byron. In his love of nature, his emotional response to it and in his sympathetic handling of rural life he certainly anticipates Wordsworth. His minor poems *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* and *Alexander Selkirk* show the rise of romanticism in English poetry.
- VI. George Crabbe (1754-1832) is a pioneer of the naturalistic reaction against the Augustan tradition. His main poetical works are written in the heroic couplet but thematically they deal with the life of simple country folk and show his sincerity, sympathy and acute observation of human life. His descriptions of nature are neither sentimental nor picturesque nor sentimental. They are characterized by sincerity and minute observation. As a pioneer of the naturalistic reaction against the Augustan tradition, Crabbe's place is certainly very high.
- VII. Mark Akenside (1721-1770) began his poetic career with *Epistle to Curio* which is a brilliant satire in the Augustan tradition. His best known poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* is a long poem in Miltonic blank verse. It contains some fine descriptive passages on a nature.
- VIII. Other poets of the transitional period are Christopher Smart, Bishop Percy, Thomas Chatterton and James Macpherson. Percy's *Reliques* revived the romance of the middle Ages. He also revived the ballad which was deftly used by Coleridge and Keats.

4.11. PRECURSORS OF ROMANTICISM

By the end of the nineteenth century the poets had completely abandoned the classical tradition. Robert Burns and William Blake are the early representatives of the new school of poetry known as the romanticism.

- I. Robert Burns was influenced by the tradition of Scottish poetry and the life he saw around him. His two poems- *The Cotter's Saturday Night* and *Tam O'Shanter* are the earliest expression of romanticism in the eighteenth century. Burns spoke straight from the heart to the primitive emotions of the race. His poetry shows great interest in the lives of poor peasants of Scotland. He depicts with sincerity and compassion the poverty, sufferings, natural feelings, joys and sorrows of the people he saw around him. His poetry is the expression of the democratic spirit. Burns brilliantly blends man and nature. He carries into his scenic pictures the same tenderness he shows in dealing with the Cottagers. His finest poetry is lyrical. Both humour and pathos are intermixed in his poetry. As a stylist Burns represents the Scottish Vernacular tradition. He had a matchless gift for catching traditional airs and wedding them to words of simple and searching beauty.

- II. William Blake's first publication *Poetical Sketches* is a series of imitative poems. In it he experimented with various verse forms in the manner of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. His *The Songs of Innocence*, a collection of short lyrics expressing the poet's views of the original state of human society, symbolized in the joy and happiness of children. They have a passionate sincerity and a deep sympathy with the child. And his *Songs of Experience* is another collection of lyrics in which the mood of spontaneous love and happiness revealed in *Songs of Innocence* is replaced by a less joyful note. His other writings are *The Book of Thel*, *The French Revolution*, *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *The First Book of Brizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, *The Book of Los* and *The Song of Los*. Blake is the worthy predecessor of Wordsworth. His poetry deals with simple and ordinary themes— the love of the country, of simple life, of childhood and of home. He became the leader of naturalistic kind of poetry. He poetically deals with childhood, flowers, hills, streams, clouds, birds and animals. He, for the first time, introduced the note of mysticism in poetry. He clarified the common objects of nature and human life, and cast on them a halo of mysticism. In this respect he anticipates the mystical poetry of Wordsworth. Blake was a lyric poet *par excellence*. As a lyricist he is a visionary like Shelley. He rapturously sings of Nature, Love and Liberty.

4.12 PROSE OF AUGUSTAN AGE

The Augustan Age, as we have already discussed, is the age of prose in the real sense. The prose of Bacon, S.T. Browne, Burton and Milton is prose of an age of poetry; but the prose of the new age is far better adapted to an age richer in philosophic and political speculation than to poetry. The prose is greater in the art of critical exposition and journalistic realism than in work of creative imagination. Dryden is the pioneer of modern prose.

The Periodical Essay was the peculiar product of the eighteenth century. It was called a "periodical" because it was not published in book form like other types of essays, but it was published in magazines and journals which appeared periodically. It had an inherent social purpose. It aimed at improving the manners and morals of the people. Therefore, it is also termed as the "social essay". Defoe, Steele, Addison, Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith enriched the periodical essay during the eighteenth century.

We have already discussed that the increasing interest in the political affairs, the establishment of clubs and coffee houses also contributed to the development of prose. Let's throw more light on periodical essay.

(i) The Periodical Essay. Periodical essay played the role of mirror to show the society in its entirety. About the periodical essay Hazlitt writes: "It makes us familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterizes their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature", and shows the very age of body and the time, its form and pressure, takes minutes of our dress, airs, looks, words, thoughts and actions, and shows us what we are and what we are not, plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many coloured scenes, enables us, if possible, to become tolerably reasonable agents in the area in which we have to perform a part."

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731) is a pioneer in the periodical essay and in the novel. The germs of the periodical essay are found in Defoe's *Review*, which at first appeared weekly, then twice, and later thrice a week. Its main aim was to acquaint the English people with the thoughts of Defoe on international politics and commerce. The *Review* comes nearer the periodical essay proper in the section called *Advice from the Scandalous Club*; which is described as being "a weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice and Debauchery." Before the *Review* was a year old this section became a monthly supplement. Later, it was

separated from the main portion and was distinguished by the title of *The little Review*. Thus, in the *Review* the element of news ousts gossip and moral criticism. He contributed to *Mist's Journal* and *Applebee's Journal*. Defoe was a born journalist and pamphleteer who wrote with remarkable facility, command and effect on an infinite variety of subjects. He had the keenest sense of what the public wanted. He was a moral and social reformer and aimed at correcting and teaching his age. Defoe's papers are noticeable for their clear, lucid and vigorous style. He is, indeed, the great pioneer of the periodical essay, and he influenced *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was the most original writer of his time. He was the man of genius among many men of talent. But his connection with the periodical essay is very slight. He wrote a few papers for *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. His *Journal to Stella* is an excellent commentary on contemporary characters and political events. His *Drapier's Letters*, a model of political harangue (a lecture) and popular argument roused an unthinking English public and gained him popularity in England. He also contributed to Sheridan's periodical *The Intelligencer*. Swift was not by nature an essayist. He was not endowed with a genial humour, humane outlook and an impassioned approach to life. Swift's intellect was too massive for the essay and we look for the real Swift on the larger canvas of *Gulliver's Travels*, *A Tale of A Tub*. *The Battle of Books* and *A Tale of a Tub* rank among the finest prose satires in English literature. The style of *A Tale of A Tub* is verse and has a sustained vigour, ace and colorfulness. Swift's inventive genius, his fierce satire and his cruel indignation at life were well depicted in *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift was a great stylist. His prose is convincing and powerful. W.J.Long remarks: "Directness, simplicity, vigour mark every page." He writes "in the plainest style." "He was born to write great prose as Milton was born to write great poetry."

Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729), an original genius, founded the famous periodical, *The Tatler*. Expounding the purpose of writing *The Tatler* he wrote: "The general purpose of this paper is to express the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity and affectations, and to recommend general simplicity in our dress, discourse, and our behavior". As a social humorist, Steele paints the whole age of Queen Anne particularly the political and social disputes, the gentlemen and ladies, the characters of men, the humours of society, the new book, the new play. He was the originator of the *The Tatler* and joined with Joseph Addison (1672-1719) in creating *The Spectator* in 1711. The new paper appeared daily. In *The Tatler* Addison had been an occasional and latter a frequent contributor. In *The Spectator* both Steele and Addison were co adjustors from the start. Steele being an original genius

suggested the idea of the Spectator and his club. The Human figure of the Spectator, surrounded by his club consisting of representatives of various grades and classes of society, was an immense improvement of the crude machinery. Herein consists the superiority of *The Spectator*. Sir Roger is the central character in *The Spectator*. Other memorable characters in it are Sir Andrew, Will Honeycomb and the Spectator himself. *The Tatler* is a collection of disconnected essays, but there is a sort of unity in the latter due to the presence of these characters. However they both can't be separated from each other while studying and evaluating the periodical essays of the time. In this connection the views of William Long is important: "It is often impossible," remarks W.J.Long, "in the *Tatler* essays to separate the work of two men, but the majority of critics hold that the more original parts, the characters, the thought, the overflowing kindliness, are largely Steele's creation; while to Addison fell the work of polishing and perfecting the essays, and of adding that touch of humour which made them the most welcome literary visitors that England had ever received." Commenting on the co-authorship of Steele and Addison, Rickett also writes: "Steele brought to his work a wide experience of life, generous sympathies and a sunny humour: Addison brought a wide experience of literature, a polished style, and just a pleasant tang of acidity in his humour. Both were moralists at heart, with much the same outlook on the society of their day." In short span of for years in which Addison and Steele worked together the periodical essay was established as one of the most important forms of literature.

Addison had a gift for social criticism which Steele did not possess. In *The Spectator* he appears as a consummate painter of contemporary life and manners. He was an informed observer, a judicious critic of manners and characters. He aimed at social reformation, at establishing social standards of conduct in morals, manners, art and literature. His task was to recover people from that state of vice and folly into which the age had fallen. He had brought philosophy "out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffee houses. It was his task "to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality."

Addison was a genial and soft humorist. He had a keen sense of the ludicrous. He knew how to use ridicule without abusing it. He was the gentle satirist "who hit no unfair blow, the kind judge who castigated only in smiling." He was also a great master of prose style. "Addison may be said" writes Court hope, "to have almost created and wholly perfected English prose as an instrument for the expression of social thought". His style is noticeable for neatness and lucidity of expression. In this respect he represents "our indispensable eighteenth century".

(ii) Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84). He was a first-rate prose writer of the eighteenth century. In the beginning he contributed to *The Gentleman's Magazine* and to his periodical *The Rambler* which appeared twice. These papers were full of deep thoughts and observations. They lacked the elegance of *The Spectator*. *The Rambler* re-established the periodical essay when it was in danger of being superseded by the newspaper. During 1758-60 he contributed papers to *The Idler* and to *The Universal Chronicle*.

In 1747 he began working on his monumental work *The Dictionary of the English Language*. In the Preface he explains that his aim was to "preserve the purity and ascertain the meaning of our English idiom" and prevents the language from being overrun with "cant" and Gallicized words. He also wrote *Rasselas* and *Prince of Abyssinia*, a philosophical novel.

It is as a literary critic that Dr. Johnson left his imperishable mark on English prose. His two memorable critical works are *Shakespeare* and *The Lives of the poets*, a series of introductions to fifty two poets. T.S.Eliot regards him as "one of the three greatest critics of poetry in English literature: the other two being Dryden and Coleridge. As a poet and literary critic he was an ardent exponent of neo-classicism. His *Lives of the Poets*, remarks T.S.Eliot, "is the only monumental collection of critical studies of English poets in English language, with a coherence, as well as amplitude, which no other criticism can claim."

Johnson's prose style has been variously termed as "manly and straightforward, lucidly distinct, heavy, individual and ponderous, full of mannerisms, vigorous and forceful, wearisome but lucid." The style of *The Rambler* and *The Rasselas* is marred by mannerisms, but in *The Lives of the Poets* he gives up mannerisms and writes as lucidly and easily as he talked. Indeed, his style has the merits and defects of scholarship. He seldom uses language which is either empty or inexact. To him a standard prose style should be "above grossness and below refinement." The peculiar power of his style consists in "making the old new, and the commonplace individual."

(iii) Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74). Goldsmith enriched the periodical essay. He contributed to *The Monthly Review* and to several other periodicals. The earliest periodical with which his name is associated was *The Bee* which was published weekly. It contained papers on a variety of subjects. After the closure of *The Bee* his papers began to appear under the caption *The Citizen of the World* in a journal called *The Public Ledger*. It is one of the finest collections of essays ever written.

Goldsmith's essays reveal an extraordinary power, boldness, originality of thought and tenderness. His minute observation of man and human nature is remarkable. As an essayist he was inspired by a touch of fellow feeling, personal experience and kindly sympathy. His essays are also conspicuous for their genial humour. His style is clear, limpid and delicate. After Goldsmith the periodical essay began to decline. About his contribution to prose, Rickett writes: "Indeed, his quaint whimsicality, passing unexpectedly from delicate fancy to elfish merriment, anticipates in many ways the methods of Elia and Leigh Hunt.—He was a poet of a talent, a prose man of genius, a prose man, moreover, of distinctive and original genius."

(iv) Other Prose Writers. During this age prose was a common and popular medium of expression and communication.

John Arbuthnot is remembered for his political writings which include *The History of John Bull* and *The Art of political Lying*.

Lord Bolingbroke wrote on politics and philosophy in an agreeable, lucid and vigorous style. His works include *Letter to Sir William Wyndham*, *A Letter on the Spirit of Patriotism* and *The Idea of A Patriot King*.

Edmund Burke was the renowned politician, parliamentarian and orator. He wrote on political and philosophical topics. His philosophical writings are *A Vindication of Natural Society and Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. His political writings consisting of his speeches and pamphlets have an abiding place in English prose. His speeches collected in *American Taxation* and *On Conciliation with the Colonies* are distinguished by a passionate, rhetorical, brilliant and lucid style, fine and artistic arrangement of material and the statesmanlike insight which underlies these arguments. His speeches on the impeachment of Warren Hastings are highly moving. He also wrote a number of pamphlets. Burke's style has assigned him a permanent place in literature.

Adam Smith is known worldwide for his *The Wealth of Nations*. He laid the foundation of modern economic thought. In the history of English prose he is remembered for his plain and businesslike prose.

George Berkeley wrote *The Principles of Human Knowledge* and *The Minute Philosopher*. His writing revolves around the scientific, philosophical and metaphysical topics in a language of literary distinction.

Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* is the first great biography in English literature.

Lord Chesterfield was an eminent letter writer of this period. His *Letters to His Son* are noticeable for lucidity of expression, intimacy and flawless ease.

Thus, the eighteenth century was the golden age of English prose. Varied type of prose was written during this period.

4.13 DRAMA OF AUGUSTAN AGE

The first half of the eighteenth century was almost blank in dramatic literature. The days of the brilliant Restoration Comedy of Manners were over. Addison's *Cato* is the only noteworthy work in the field of tragedy. Steele's *The Constant Lovers* does not amuse as a tragedy. It preaches. So he became the founder of that highly genteel, didactic and vapid kind of play which is known as sentimental comedy. George Lillo wrote *London Merchant* and *Fatal Curiosity*. They are examples of domestic drama, in these plays, the characters and incidents were taken from common life and not from romance and history.

Hugh Kelly's *False Delicacy* and Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* are regarded the best examples of the sentimental comedy. In sentimental comedy tears took the place of laughter; melodramatic and distressing situations that of intrigue, pathetic heroines and serious lovers and honest servants that of rogues, gallants and witty damsels.

Reaction to the Sentimental Comedy

Goldsmith and Sheridan pioneered the movement against the sentimental comedy. "Goldsmith endeavors" writes Nicoll "to revive the spirit of *As You Like It*, where Sheridan strives to create another *The Way of the World*." Goldsmith attacked the sentimental comedy in his essay *The Present State of Polite Learning*. In another essay *On the Theatre or A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy*, he started with the classical formula that tragedy should represent the misfortunes of the great and comedy the frailties of humbler people. So, according to the classical principle the sentimental comedy had no place in literature. In the Preface to his comedy *The Good Natured Man* Goldsmith exposes the hollowness of sentimental comedy. *She Stoops to Conquer* is Goldsmith's masterpiece. About Goldsmith's dramatic writing, Rickett writes: "Goldsmith's *Good Natured Man* is excellent in parts; *She Stoops to Conquer* is excellent throughout, with a bright whimsical humour and a fresh charm of dialogue not attained since the days of Congreve. Less witty than the Restoration dramatists, Goldsmith is greatly superior in his humanity and taste."

Sheridan sought to revive the spirit and atmosphere of the comedy of manners, especially those of Congreve in *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. His last play *The Critic or A Tragedy Rehearsed* is very telling on popular sentimental drama. It has been called the best burlesque of the age.

4.14 NOVEL DURING AUGUSTAN

4.14.1. The Forerunners of Novel

The development of English prose contributed to the rise of novel during the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, *Captain Singleton*, *Moll Flanders*, *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *Roxana* are the forerunners of novel. His fictional works are called "fictional biographies." The entire gamut of his fictional work is biographical and he made no attempt towards the organization of material into a systematic plot. However, his fictional works are distinguished by "the extraordinary realism which is an important element in the art of novel writing. His stories are told so convincingly as if they were stories of real life. He also knew the art of narrating details effectively. He had a swift and resolute narrative method and a plain and matter-of-fact style. To the development of novel Defoe's contribution is remarkable. His fictional works "form the transition from the slight tale and the romance of the Elizabethan time to the finished novel of Richardson and Fielding." Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which satirises the manners and politics of contemporary England and Europe, is written in powerful and convincing prose. It also contributed to the evolution of English novel. The famous periodical *The Spectator* is a forerunner of English novel. It contains all the elements of social novel, except a harmonious plot. The material for the novels of manners or social comedy is found in *The Coverley Papers*. It contains vivid and realistic presentation of contemporary society, well delineated characters, rich fund of humour and pathos and a clear, lucid style. Edward Albert remarks: "if Addison had pinned the *Coverley Papers* together with a stronger plot, if insisted on only referring to the widow who had stolen the knight's affections, he had introduced some important female characters, we should have had the first regular novel in our tongue. As it is, this essay series bring us within measurable distance of the genuine eighteenth century novel."

4.14.2. Causes of the Popularity and Rise of Novel in the Augustan Age.

The following factors contributed to the development of novel during the eighteenth century.

I. The Spread of Education and the New Reading Public.

In the eighteenth century the spread of education and the appearance of newspapers and magazines led to a remarkable increase in the number of readers. The newspaper and the periodical essay “encouraged a rapid, inattentive, almost unconscious kind of reading habit”. It is exactly such a kind of habit that is required for novel reading. The middle-class people, who had a foremost place in English life and society, wanted to read for pleasure and relaxation without caring for any high classical or literary standards, and this change of emphasis favored the growth of the novel.

Moreover, the new reading class wanted to read about itself, about its own thoughts, motives and struggles. It did not have leisure enough for reading the lengthy heroic romances. It demanded new type of literature. So the novel was born, which mirrored the tastes and requirements of this new class of readers. Women, who had plenty of leisure, sought pleasure through novel reading.

II. The Democratic Movement.

The rise of the novel is also associated with the democratic movement in the eighteenth century. Hudson remarks: “The comprehensiveness of the novel, its free treatment of characters and doings of all sorts and conditions of men, and especially its handling of middle class and low life, are unmistakable evidences of its democratic quality.”

The rise of the middle class is closely related with the democratic movement. With the growth of commerce and industry, the prestige of the old feudal nobility was on the wane. And the middle classes were increasing steadily in social and political power. The middle classes were inclined to morality, sentiment and reality. The novel reflected the temperament of the middle class and, therefore, it became popular.

III. Comprehensiveness of Form.

Novel as a new form of literary art offered a fresh field, in which the writers were to work independently. Hudson writes: “Finally, as the form of the novel, gives a far wider scope allowed to the corresponding form of drama for the treatment of motives, feelings, and all the phenomena of the inner life, it tended from the first to take the peculiar place as the typical art form of the introspective and analytical modern world.”

IV. The Development of the New Prose Style.

One of the important causes of the development of novel is the evolution of a new prose style. As the novel deals with ordinary life, ordinary people, and ordinary events and with all sorts of miscellaneous matters, it requires plain, lucid and straightforward style. During the eighteenth century, writers like Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, Burke etc. evolved a plain style which was capable of expressing the realities of life. It has a close relation with the reflections and expressions the novel expresses.

V. The Decline of Drama.

Drama had grown artificial, unnatural and immoral during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. It was the decline of drama during the first half of the eighteenth century that made way for the novel.

The latter part of the eighteenth century was the golden age of the novel. A true novel is simply a work of fiction which relates the story of plain human life, under stress of emotion, which depends for its interest not on incident and adventure, but on its truth to nature. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, known as the "four wheels of novel"- all seem to have seized upon the idea of reflecting life as it is, in the form of a story, and to have developed it simultaneously.

4.14.3. The Four Wheels of the Novel.

Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne are known as the "four wheels of the novel". They brought this new genre to such maturity that it became the glory of England. Let's see, in short, these authors and their works as follows:

(i) Samuel Richardson (1689-1761). Richardson's first novel *Pamela* tells the story of the trials, tribulations, and the final happy marriage of the heroine. It is written in the forms of letters. It is also known as an epistolary novel because the novel is developed with the exchange of letters between the characters. It was instantly successful. In it the moral and social purposes are successfully blended. Pamela's character is well drawn. The plot, though simple, is well developed. It is considered as the *first novel in the modern sense*.

His *Clarissa* or *The History of A Lady* in eight volumes is a sentimental novel. It gave Richardson European reputation and "it is still regarded as one of the greatest of the eighteenth century novels". Clarissa's character is realistically drawn with psychological insight. It also contains the most remarkable study of

the scoundrel, Lovelace. In it the dramatic element is strong. It is characterized by pathos, sincerity and minute realism.

Richardson's novels are stories of human life, told from within, and depending for their interest not on incident and adventure, but on their truth to human nature. Reading his work is, on the whole, like examining an antiquated work of a stern wheel steamer, it is interesting for its undeveloped possibilities, rather than for its achievement.

Richardson's place in the history of English novel is very high. "Richardson", writes Rickett, "introduced sentimentality into English novel and popularized it forever. Without his influence we never have had *Tristram Shandy*, we certainly should have been without *Joseph Andrews*, ... Then the feminine standpoint taken in his writings stirred many able women to continue and amplify the feminine tradition. Fanny Burney and Jane Austen are indebted to him and a host of lesser names". In *Clarissa* he introduced the epistolary form of novel. He was the first novelist to show the real and vital knowledge of human heart, its perversities and contradictions.

(ii) Henry Fielding (1707-54). Fielding was the greatest of this new group of novelists. He is called "the father of English novel" because he for the first time propounded the technique of writing novel. He had a deeper and wider knowledge of life, which he gained from his own varied and sometimes riotous experiences. As a magistrate he had an intimate knowledge of many types of human criminality which was of much use to him in his novels. His first novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) began as a burlesque of the false sentimentality and conventional virtues of Richardson's *Pamela*. In it Fielding humorously narrates the adventures of the hero, Joseph Andrews, and his companion, Parson Adams. From the very beginning we see the stamp of his genius- the complete rejection of the epistolary form and moralizing, the structural development of the story, the broad and vivacious humour which was denied to Richardson, the genial insight into human nature, and the forceful and pithy style. In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding emerges on a pioneer of the novel of manners. In *Jonathan Wild* he gives us new and piercing glimpses of the ruffian mentality.

Fielding's masterpiece, *Tom Jones*, takes an enormous canvas and crowds it with numerous characters. It gives us the fullest and richest picture of English life about the middle of the eighteenth century. Although the picaresque element is strongly marked in this novel, it is more than a picaresque novel. Fielding calls it "the comic epic in prose." *Tom Jones* stands unrivalled in the history of English novel for its coherent and well-knit structure, richness of characterization, vivid and realistic presentation of

contemporary society, sane and wise point of view. *Amelia* is the story of a good wife who, in spite of temptation, remains faithful to a good-natured but erring husband, Captain Booth. It is at once a searching criticism of contemporary society and a mature. It soberly conceives story of everyday life, is rich in incident and, like *Tom Jones*, is remarkable for its insight into human character.

Fielding has rightly been called “the father of English novel”. He for the first time formulated the theory of novel writing in the prefaces of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, and followed his own definition with utmost consistency. Other novelists followed his example. He gave a definite form and shape to the novel. In the words of Richard Church: “He is the first writer to focus the novel in such a way that he brought the whole world as we see it, within the scope of this new, rapidly maturing literary form.”

Fielding is the first great realist in the history of English novel. Common life is the material of his novel but it is handled as Raleigh points out, “with the freedom and imagination of a great artist.” He presents a complete and comprehensive picture of contemporary society. His realism is epic in its range, sweep and variety. He is the founder of modern realistic novel and the novel of manners.

Fielding’s realism is connected with his comic point of view, his wise, tolerant acceptance of things as they are. He had nothing to do with the prudish morality of Richardson. He threw it aside and presented man in full length as he found him. Though he portrayed men with no reservations, he never forgot that he was one of them. From this inborn sympathy comes his large, tolerant way of looking at things, a view of life that often finds expression in raillery but never in cynicism. He laughs, but his laughter is always ready to give place to tenderness and pity. For him the tragedy of life lay in the presence of virtue and innocence in a world of evil, cruelty and deception. In the presentation of tragedy, Fielding is always direct, simple and sincere.

Fielding was the first to infuse the novel “with the refreshing and preserving element of humour.” He was capable of presenting pure comedy in such characters as Adams and Partridge and lower and more farcical comedy in characters like Mrs. Slipslop and Square Western. He effectively lashes out his satire at affectation, vanity, pedantry, hypocrisy and vice. But he is always human and humane. Irony is a great weapon of his satire.

Fielding’s aim was to replace Richardson’s morbid morality by a healthy commonsense morality. This commonsense morality gave him a shrewd insight into the weakness of his character.

Fielding was a superb craftsman. He changed the concept of plot construction. In his novels we get for the first time a closely-knit organic plot. Other novelists learnt the art of plot construction from him,

He is the creator of the novel of character. He peopled his novels with lively and interesting characters. He endowed his characters with life and vitality. He has vividly portrayed all kinds of characters like Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare he has a sympathetic yet maturely detached view of human comedy. The forces which guide his characters are; for the most part, natural human needs, for it were these that Fielding knew best.

Settings in Fielding's novels are realistic and recognizable. His narrative is energetic and effective. He initiates the practice of the omniscient narrator, which has been universally followed, by many following writers. As a stylist he broke away from the mannered, artificial style of the earlier novelists. It is fresh, clear, direct, unaffected, vigorous and easy. It gives vitality to his characters.

(iii) Tobias Smollett (1721-71). Smollett, who wrote *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, *The Adventures of eregrine Pickle*, and *The Expedition of Humhry Clinker*, added new feathers to the cap of the craft called English novel.

His novels are simply strings of adventures which are not organized into an artistic whole. He conceived the novel as a "large diffused picture of life. It is the personality of the hero which has the semblance of unity to various incidents and adventures. His novels are called episodic or panoramic novels. As a panoramic novelist Smollett has never been surpassed.

Smollett's characters are types and not individuals. He had a genius for depicting oddities and he excels as a caricaturist. He describes his characters in terms of externals. His characters are grossly exaggerated and distorted.

Smollett's presentation of the harsh and ugly realities of life and society makes him a forerunner of the novel of purpose. Hudson writes: It has, however, to be remembered that Smollett wrote expressly as a satirist and reformer, and that his purpose was to paint the monstrous evils of life in their true proportions and colures that he might thus drive them home upon the attention of the public, and we must certainly set it down to his credit that the sickening realism of the ship scenes in *The Roderick Random* led directly to drastic changes for the better in the conditions in the naval service. He, thus, anticipates the novel with purpose.

Smollett followed the tradition of the picaresque novel, which presents a union of intrigue and adventure. His style is vivid and lively. It is forceful and masculine. His method could be easily imitated. Dickens followed him. There was a spurt of picaresque him.

(iv) Laurence Sterne (1713-1768). Sterne's first novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* won him immediate recognition. It records the experiences of the eccentric Shandy family. "Its chief strength lies in its brilliant style,...and in its odd characters like Uncle Toby and Corporal Trimm, which, with all their eccentricities, are so humanized by the author's genius that they belong among the great "creations" of our literature." His second novel *A Sentimental Journey* combines fiction, sketches of travel, miscellaneous subjects and essays. It is remarkable for its brilliant style.

Sterne defined all conventions of novel writing. He contributed to the development of English novel in his own peculiar way. He is a skilled master in creating brilliant effects. Plot is non-existent in his novels. There is neither chronology nor progression. "His novels are one long parenthesis – a colossal aside to the reader. Yet despite the chaotic incoherence of his method of storytelling, his effects are made with consummate ease." Sterne's prose style, which is characterised by brilliance, force, precision, force, melody and sensuousness of the highest order, helped him to create brilliant effects. His technique of creating striking effects influenced the school of the Stream of consciousness.

Sterne's greatest contribution lies in the field of characterization. Cross writes: "He enlarged for the novelist the sphere of character building by bringing into English fiction the attitude of the sculptor and the painter, combined with a graceful and harmonious movement, which is justly likened to the transitions of music." His characters are drawn with an economy of strokes, and they are utterly solid, three-dimensional characters. He develops his characters by subtle and minute analysis of gesture, expressions, intonations and a hundred other details. He imparted humanity to his characters. His methods of characterisation is impressionistic, a method which he introduced for the first time. This method of characterisation was followed by the novelists of the Stream of consciousness school.

Sterne is the most original of English humorists. He deftly intermingles humour and pathos. He smiles at sorrow and finds matter for pathos in the most comical situation. He was the first to use the word, "sentimental" to indicate "the soft state of feelings and the imagination." He used this word in the sense now attached to it. He made the word classic and current in the record of his

continental travel, *The Sentimental Journey*. He could tell and distinguish between fine shades of feeling, and could communicate them to his readers in a way that aroused both compassion and mirth.

Sterne is the pioneer of modern impressionism. His impressionistic narrative method is very close to that of modern impressionists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. He is regarded as the first of the impressionists. "Richardson had given sentimentality, Fielding humour, Smollet liveliness" and Sterne impressionism.

(v) Other Novelists. Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* stands in the first rank of the eighteenth century novels. Its plot is simple, though sometimes inconsistent, the characters are human and attractive and humour and pathos are deftly mingled together. Goldsmith has adopted the direct method of narration through the principal character.

Goldsmith for the first time depicts the picture of English domestic life in this novel. It is also unique because it gives delightful and idealistic picture of English village life. The blend of humour and pathos makes it all the more charming.

Hency Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* is a sentimental novel which shows the influence of Sterne.

William Godwin (1745-1831) wrote *Caleb Williams* or *Things As They Are* in order to give "a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man."

Miss Fanny Burney (1752-1842), the first of the women novelists, is an important figure in the history of English novel. She wrote four novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *The Wanderer* but her fame rests mainly on the first two. She was endowed with considerable narrative faculty and great zest for life. She has successfully created the novel of domestic life. In *Evelina* she reverts to the epistolary method of Richardson, and in broad humour it follows the tradition of Fielding and Smollett, but without their coarseness. She for the first time wrote from a woman's point of view and, thus, brought feminine sensibility to English novel of the eighteenth century. "She has presented a large gallery of striking portraits", writes Edward Albert, "the best of which are convincing and amusing caricatures of Dickensian type. Her observation of life was keen and close and her descriptions of society are in a delightfully satirical vein, in many ways like that of Austen."

(vi) The Gothic Novel. The eighteenth century novel from Richardson to Miss Burney was, on the whole, conceived on realistic lines. Towards the close of the century the novel, like poetry showed signs of change, as it began to exhibit romantic tendencies. During the transitional period return to nature, absorption in the remote in time and space, especially in the middle Ages, became the marked literary characteristics. The new interest in nature made scenic descriptions or landscape an important element in novel. The interest in the past brought into being a new type of novel, known as the gothic novel, which anticipated the historical novel of the nineteenth century.

The Gothic novel or the novel of terror is the peculiar product of the late eighteenth century. It is a new genre of the romantic fiction which drew its inspiration from the general revival of interest in medieval life and art, in Gothic castles, in churches and Cathedrals and in ruins. The novelists resorted to the use of ghosts, portents and satanic forces in order to arouse emotions of awe, mystery and terror.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) wrote *Te Castle of Otranto* which proclaimed the entry of romantic revival into English novel. Walpole gave to the Gothic romance the elements on which it was to thrive for a generation to come – a hero sullied by unmentionable crimes, several persecuted heroines, a castle with secret passages and haunted rooms, and a plentiful sprinkling of supernatural terrors.

Mrs. Anne Radcliffe (1764-1832) was the most popular of terror novelists. She wrote five elaborate romances of which the most famous are *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Her stories have well constructed plots which contain medievalism, “a lively, if undisciplined imagination, and a skilful faculty of depicting wild scenery.” She could successfully create an atmosphere of suspense and dread. What distinguishes her as a novelist is the fact that she rationally used the supernatural machinery.

William Beckford (1660-1844) wrote *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, which deals with the mysteries of oriental necromancy. Satire mingles with sensation in his novels.

Matthew Lewis (1775-1818) wrote *The Monk*, which is the crudest terror novel.

Miss Clara Reve (1729-1807) is remembered for *Old English Baron*. It is a Gothic story.

Maturina is remembered for *The Fatal Revenge* and *Meimoth the Wanderer*.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the only terror novel which is still famous. It is the story of the ravages of manmade monster equivalent to the modern robot. It may be considered the first work of science fiction and the last one of the terror school.

Thus, at the close of the nineteenth century, we find the three types of fiction: first, the realistic novel which deals with social life and manners; secondly, the romance which represented the purely emotional interest in nature and the past; and finally, the humanitarian novel, which seriously undertook to right the wrongs sustained by the individual at the hands of society. "These three types", write Moody and Lovett, "...have defined three schools – the realists, the romanticists and the social novelists, which have continued, with innumerable cross divisions, until the present time."

4.15. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the social change in the eighteenth century called the Augustan Age which includes emergences of coffee houses and literary activities, interest of people in reading and publication houses and consequently the rise of middle class. It is followed by the discussion of the prime features of literary tendencies of Augustan age. On the literary domain, this period is called the age of prose and reason, the age of satire and the age of neo-classicism. It also covers the transitional poetry along with the eminent poets of transitional poetry that breaks its umbilical cord with neoclassicism and paves ways to the forthcoming age. The Augustan prose, poetry, drama and the new emergence of new genre called novel are discussed in detail.

4.16. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- 1 The eighteenth century is "an age of prose, reason and good sense". Discuss.
- 2 Give an account of eighteenth century society.
- 3 Discuss briefly the main characteristics of the transitional period during the eighteenth century. Why is it called the transitional period?
- 4 Discuss the contribution of the "four wheels of novel" to the development of English novel.
- 5 Write an essay on the transitional poets of the eighteenth century.
- 6 Discuss the contribution of Goldsmith and Sheridan to English comedy.

- 7 Give an account for the rise of novel in the eighteenth century.
- 8 Write short notes on the followings:
 - I. Poetry in the eighteenth century.
 - II. The development of the periodical essay.
 - III. The contributions of Defoe and Swift o the development of English prose
 - IV. The contribution of Steele and Addison to English prose.
 - V. Dr. Johnson's contribution to the development of English prose?
 - VI. The Gothic romance.
 - VII. Precursors of Romanticism



THRESHOLD FOR SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE

Unit Structure:

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1. The Theatre and the Stage Crafts of the Elizabethan Era
- 5.2. The Elizabethan Theatre.
- 5.3 The Shakespearean Theatre
- 5.4 Drama during the Reign of James I
- 5.5 About Romeo and Juliet
- 5.6 Short Summary of Romeo and Juliet
- 5.7. Let's Sum up
- 5.8. Important Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help the students to understand the background of the Shakespearean period. It is equally important to know the theatrical scenario of the Age, because without understanding it, one cannot grasp the Elizabethan Era completely. The unit also will relate the nutshell summary of the play.

5.1 THE THEATRE AND THE STAGE CRAFTS OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

In England the influence of the Italian Renaissance was weaker, but the theatre of the Elizabethan Age was all the stronger for it. Apart from the rediscovery of classical culture, the 16th century in England was a time for developing a new sense of national identity, necessitated by the establishment of a national church. Furthermore, because the English were more suspicious of Rome and the Latin tradition, there was less imitation of classical dramatic forms and an almost complete disregard for the rules that bound the theatre in France and Italy. England built on its own foundations by adapting the strong native tradition of medieval religious drama to serve a more secular purpose. When some of the continental innovations were blended with this cruder indigenous strain, a rich synthesis was produced. Consequently, the theatre that emerged was resonant, varied, and in touch with all

segments of society. It included the high seriousness of morality plays, the sweep of chronicle histories, the fantasy of romantic comedies, and the irreverent fun of the interludes.

At the same time, the theatre had to contend with severe restrictions. The suppression of the festival of Corpus Christi in 1548 as a means of reinforcing the Protestant Church marked the rapid decline of morality plays and mystery cycles. Their forced descent into satirical propaganda mocking the Catholic faith polarized the audience and led to riots. By 1590, playwrights were prohibited from dramatizing religious issues and they had to resort and confined to history, mythology, allegory, or allusion in order to say anything about contemporary society. Violations and flouting these restrictions meant imprisonment. Nevertheless, playwrights managed to argue highly explosive political topics. In Shakespeare's histories, for instance, the subject of kingship is thoroughly examined in all its implications: both the rightful but incompetent sovereign and the usurping but strong monarch are scrutinized. It was the most daring undertaking during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The situation for actors was not helped by the hostile attitude of the City of London authorities. The authorities regarded theatre as an immoral pastime to be discouraged rather than tolerated. Professional companies, however, were invited to perform at court from the beginning of the 16th century and public performances took place wherever a suitable space could be found--in large rooms of inns, in halls, or in quiet innyards enclosed on all sides with a temporary platform stage. Around the stage, the audience could gather while others looked out from the windows above. But such makeshift conditions only retarded the development of the drama and kept it on an amateurish level.

5.2 THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE.

These conditions were considerably improved during Elizabeth's reign by the legitimizing in 1574 of regular weekday performances and the building of the first playhouse in 1576 by James Burbage. The new theatre called simply the *Theatre* was erected in London immediately outside the City boundary. Other theatres followed, including the Curtain, the Rose, the Swan, and the Globe, where most of Shakespeare's plays were first staged. Just as the Spanish playhouse reproduced the features of the *corrale* it had grown out of, so the Elizabethan playhouse followed the pattern of the improvised innyard theatre. It was an enclosed circular structure containing two or three galleries with benches or stools and had an unroofed space in the middle where spectators could stand on three sides of the raised platform stage. Behind the stage was a wall with curtained doors and, above this was an actors' and musicians' gallery. Large numbers of people could be accommodated, and the price was kept low at between one penny

and sixpence. This type of stage allowed for fluid movement and considerable intimacy between actors and audience, while its lack of scenery placed the emphasis firmly on the actor interpreting the playwright's words. Such sheer simplicity presented a superb challenge for the writer: the quality of both language and acting had to be good enough to hold the attention of the spectators and make them use their imaginations.

This challenge was quickly taken up by a generation of playwrights who could carry forward the established dramatic forms and test the possibilities of the new stage. Christopher Marlowe was the major innovator who developed a vigorous style of tragedy that was refined by his contemporary. William Shakespeare began writing for the theatre about 1590. At this time, professional companies operated under the patronage of a member of the nobility. In Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, the actors owned their playhouse, prompt books, costumes, and properties, and they shared in the profits. Other companies paid rent to the patron and received salaries from him. There were very few rehearsals for a new play, and because the texts were not immediately printed (to avoid pirating by rival companies) each actor was usually given only his own lines, with the relevant cues, in manuscript form. No women appeared on the Elizabethan stage. The female roles were taken either by boy actors or, in the case of older women, by adult male comedians. As in Italy, all the actors had to be able to sing and dance and often to make their own music. The great actors of the day were Richard Burbage, who worked in Shakespeare's company, and Edward Alleyn, who was mainly associated with Ben Jonson. In spite of the fact that theatres like the Globe played to a cross section of London's populace, audiences seem to have been attentive and well behaved.

An alternative to the outdoor public playhouse was the private indoor theatre. The first of these was an abandoned monastery near St. Paul's Cathedral. It was converted in 1576 by Richard Farrant and renamed the Blackfriars Theatre. Others included the Cockpit, the Salisbury Court, and the Whitefriars. Initially these theatres were closer to the Spanish model, with the bare stage across one end, an inner stage at the back, benches in front for the audience, and galleries all around. Later, they made use of more elaborate scenery and featured the Italian-style proscenium arch. Because of the reduced size of the audience, higher prices had to be charged, which excluded all except the wealthier and learned segment of the public. This in turn affected the style of writing. These private theatres were mostly used by boy companies that presented a more refined and artificial type of drama. One of their chief dramatists was John Lyly, though Ben Jonson wrote many of his plays for them. Growing rivalry between the boy and adult companies, exacerbated by hostility from the

increasingly powerful Puritan movement, resulted in James I imposing even tighter controls and exercising heavy censorship on the theatre when he came to the throne in 1603.

5.3 THE SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE

Before Shakespeare's time and during his boyhood, troupes of actors performed wherever they could in halls, courts, courtyards, and any other open spaces available. However, in 1574, when Shakespeare was ten years old, the Common Council passed a law requiring plays and theatres in London to be licensed. In 1576, actor and future Lord Chamberlain's Man, James Burbage, built the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre", outside London city walls. After this many more theatres were established, including the Globe Theatre.

Elizabethan theatres were generally built after the design of the original Theatre. Built of wood, these theatres comprised three tiers of seats in a circular shape, with a stage area on one side of the circle. The audience's seats and part of the stage were roofed, but much of the main stage and the area in front of the stage in the center of the circle were open to the elements. About 1,500 audience members could pay extra money to sit in the covered seating areas, while about 800 "groundlings" paid less money to stand in this open area before the stage. The stage itself was divided into three levels: a main stage area with doors at the rear and a curtained area in the back for "discovery scenes"; an upper, canopied area called "heaven" for balcony scenes; and an area under the stage called "hell," accessed by a trap door in the stage. There were dressing rooms located behind the stage, but no curtain in the front of the stage, which meant that scenes had to flow into each other, and "dead bodies" had to be dragged off.

Performances took place during the day, using natural light from the open center of the theater. Since there could be no dramatic lighting and there was very little scenery or props, audiences relied on the actors' lines and stage directions to supply the time of day and year, the weather, location, and mood of the scenes. Shakespeare's plays masterfully supply this information. For example, in Hamlet the audience learns within the first twenty lines of dialogue where the scene takes place ("Have you had quiet guard?"), what time of day it is ("Tis now strook twelf"), what the weather is like ("Tis bitter cold"), and what mood the characters are in ("and I am sick at heart").

One important difference between plays written in Shakespeare's time and those written today is that Elizabethan plays were published after their performances, sometimes even after their authors' deaths. Those plays were in many ways a record

of what happened on stage during these performances rather than directions for what should happen. Actors were allowed to suggest changes to scenes and dialogue and had much more freedom with their parts than actors today. Shakespeare's plays are no exception. In Hamlet, for instance, much of the plot revolves around the fact that Hamlet writes his own scene to be added to a play in order to ensnare his murderous father.

Shakespeare's plays were published in various forms and with a wide variety of accuracy during his time. The discrepancies between versions of his plays from one publication to the next make it difficult for editors to put together authoritative editions of his works. Plays could be published in large anthologies called Folios (the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays contains 36 plays) or smaller Quartos. Folios were so named because of the way their paper was folded in half to make chunks of two pages each which were sewn together to make a large volume. Quartos were smaller, cheaper books containing only one play. Their paper was folded twice, making four pages. In general, the First Folio is of better quality than the quartos. Therefore, plays that are printed in the First Folio are much easier for editors to compile.

Although Shakespeare's language and classical references seem archaic to some modern readers, they were commonplace to his audiences. His viewers came from all classes, and his plays appealed to all kinds of sensibilities, from "highbrow" accounts of kings and queens of old to the "lowbrow" blunderings of clowns and servants. Even his most tragic plays include clown characters for comic relief and to comment on the events of the play. Audiences would have been familiar with his numerous references to classical mythology and literature, since these stories were staples of the Elizabethan knowledge base. While Shakespeare's plays appealed to all levels of society and included familiar story lines and themes. They also expanded his audiences' vocabularies. Many phrases and words that we use today, like "amazement," "in my mind's eye," and "the milk of human kindness" have been coined by Shakespeare. His plays contain a greater variety and number of words than almost any other work in the English language. This indicates that he was quick to innovate. He had a huge vocabulary, and was interested in using new phrases and words.

5.4 DRAMA DURING THE REIGN OF JAMES I

Although the Italian influence gradually became stronger in the early part of the 17th century, the English theatre was by then established and confident enough to take over foreign ideas without losing any of its individuality. Jonson became increasingly preoccupied with the dramatic unities, while other writers of the

Jacobean period such as John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and John Ford favoured a more definite separation of comedy and tragedy than had been the case in Elizabethan drama. They were given to sensationalism in their revenge plays, finding inspiration in the darker moods of Seneca and often setting them in Italy.

Meanwhile, at court the pastoral was finding new popularity, partly because it provided opportunities for spectacular scenery, and with it came the revival of the masque. The masque is a sumptuous allegorical entertainment combining poetry, music, dance, scenery, and extravagant costumes. As court poet, Ben Jonson collaborated with the architect and designer Inigo Jones to produce some of the finest examples of the masque. Having spent a few years in Italy, Jones was greatly influenced by the Italian painted scenery and its use of machinery. On his return to England he did much to bring scenic design up to date and introduced many innovations. Members of the court had thorough training in dancing, fencing, singing, instrumental music, and courtly ceremonial. They were therefore well prepared to perform in the masques, even to take solo parts and to appear in the chorus. Masques became even more elaborate under Charles I. In 1634 Jonson, however, angrily withdrew his contribution when he saw that the visual elements were completely overtaking the dramatic content. When the Civil War broke out in 1642, the Puritans closed all the theatres and forbade dramatic performances of any kind. This created an almost complete break in the acting tradition for 18 years until the Restoration of Charles II. Thereafter the theatre flourished once again though on quite different lines.

5.5. ABOUT ROMEO AND JULIET

Romeo and Juliet was first published in quarto in 1597, and republished in a new edition only two years later. The second copy was used to create yet a third quarto in 1609, from which both the 1623 Quarto and First Folio are derived. The first quarto is generally considered a bad quarto, or an illicit copy created from the recollections of several actors. The second quarto seems to be taken from Shakespeare's rough draft, and thus has some inconsistent speech and preserved lines which Shakespeare apparently meant to cross out.

Romeo and Juliet derives its story from several sources available during the sixteenth century. Shakespeare's primary source for the play is Arthur Brooke's Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet (1562), which is a long, dense poem. This poem in turn

was based on a French prose version written by Pierre Boiastuau (1559), who had used an Italian version by Bandello written in 1554. Bandello's poem was further derived from Luigi da Porto's version in 1525 of a story by Masuccio Salernitano (1476).

Shakespeare's plot remains true to the Brooke version in most details, with theatrical license taken in some instances. For example, as he often does, Shakespeare telescopes the events in the poem which take ninety days into only a few days. He also depicts Juliet as a much younger thirteen rather than sixteen, thus presenting a young girl who is suddenly awakened to love.

One of the most powerful aspects of *Romeo and Juliet* is the language. The characters curse, vow oaths, banish each other, and generally play with the language through overuse of action verbs. In addition, the play is saturated with the use of oxymorons, puns, paradoxes, and double entendres. Even the use of names is called into question, with Juliet asking what is in the name Romeo that denies her the right to love him.

Shakespeare uses the poetic form of sonnet to open the first and second acts. The sonnet usually is defined as being written from a lover to his beloved. Thus, Shakespeare's "misuse" of the prose ties into the actual tension of the play. The sonnet struggles to cover up the disorder and chaos which is immediately apparent in the first act. When the first sonnet ends, the stage is overrun with quarrelling men. However, the sonnet is also used by Romeo and Juliet in their first love scene, again in an unusual manner. It is spoken by both characters rather than only one of them. This strange form of sonnet is, however, successful, and even ends with a kiss.

It is worthwhile to note the rather strong shift in language used by both Romeo and Juliet once they fall in love. Whereas Romeo is hopelessly normal in his courtship before meeting Juliet, afterwards his language becomes infinitely richer and stronger. He is changed so much that the Mercutio remarks, "Now art thou sociable" (2.3.77).

The play also deals with the issue of authoritarian law and order. Many of Shakespeare's plays have characters who represent the unalterable force of the law like the Duke in *The Comedy of Errors* and Prince Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet*. In this play, the law attempts to stop the civil disorder and banishes Romeo at the midpoint. However, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, the law again seems to be a side issue which cannot compete with the much stronger emotions of love and hate.

5.6. SHORT SUMMARY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

The play is set in Verona, Italy, where a feud has broken out between the families of the Montegues and the Capulets. The servants of both houses open the play with a brawling/ fighting scene. It eventually draws in the noblemen of the families and the city officials, including Prince Escalus.

Romeo is lamenting the fact that he is love with a woman named Rosaline. Rosaline has vowed to remain chaste for the rest of her life. He and his friend Benvolio happen to stumble across a servant of the Capulet's in the street. The servant, Peter, is trying to read a list of names of people invited to a masked party at the Capulet house that evening. Romeo helps him read the list and receives an invitation to the party.

Romeo arrives at the party in costume and falls in love with Juliet the minute he sees her. However, he is recognized by Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. Tybalt wants to kill him on the spot. Capulet intervenes and tells Tybalt that he will not disturb the party for any amount of money. Romeo manages to approach Juliet and tell her that he loves her. She and he share a sonnet and finish it with a kiss.

Juliet's Nurse tells Romeo who Juliet really is. He is upset when he finds out he loves the daughter of Capulet. Juliet likewise finds out who Romeo is, and she laments the fact that she is in love with her enemy.

Soon thereafter Romeo climbs the garden wall leading to Juliet's garden. Juliet emerges on her balcony and speaks her private thoughts out loud, imagining herself alone. She wishes Romeo could shed his name and marry her. At this, Romeo appears and tells her that he loves her. She warns him to be true in his love to her, and makes him swear by his own self that he truly loves her.

Juliet then is called inside, but manages to return twice to call Romeo back to her. They agree that Juliet will send her Nurse to meet him at nine o'clock the next day, at which point Romeo will set a place for them to be married.

The Nurse carries out her duty, and tells Juliet to meet Romeo at the chapel where Friar Laurence lives and works. Juliet goes to find Romeo, and together they are married by the Friar.

Benvolio and Mercutio, a good friend of the Montegues, are waiting on the street when Tybalt arrives. Tybalt demands to know where Romeo is so that he can challenge him to duel in order that

he would avenge Romeo's sneaking into the party. Mercutio is eloquently vague, but Romeo happens to arrive in the middle of the verbal bantering. Tybalt challenges him but Romeo passively resists fighting, at which point Mercutio jumps in and draws his sword on Tybalt. Romeo tries to block the two men, but Tybalt cuts Mercutio and runs away, only to return after he hears that Mercutio has died. Romeo fights with Tybalt and kills him. When Prince Escalus arrives at the murder scene he chooses to banish Romeo from Verona forever.

The Nurse goes to tell Juliet the sad news about what has happened to Tybalt and Romeo. Juliet is heart-broken, but soon recovers when she realizes that Romeo would have been killed if he had not fought Tybalt. She sends the Nurse to find Romeo and give him her ring. Romeo comes that night and sleeps with Juliet. The next morning he is forced to leave at dusk when Juliet's mother arrives. Romeo goes to Mantua where he waits for someone to send news about Juliet or about his banishment.

During the night Capulet decides that Juliet should marry a young man named Paris. He and Lady Capulet go to tell Juliet that she should marry Paris, but when she refuses to obey Capulet becomes infuriated and orders her to comply with his orders. He then leaves, and is soon followed by Lady Capulet and the Nurse, whom Juliet throws out of the room, saying, "ancient damnation".

Juliet then goes to Friar Laurence, who gives her a potion or medicine that will make her seem dead for at least two days. She takes the potion and drinks it that night. The next morning, the day Juliet is supposed to marry Paris, her Nurse finds her "dead" in bed. The whole house decries her suicide, and Friar Laurence makes them hurry to put her into the family vault.

Romeo's servant arrives in Mantua and tells his master that Juliet is dead and buried. Romeo hurries back to Verona. Friar Laurence discovers too late from Friar John that his message to Romeo has failed to be delivered. He rushes to get to Juliet's grave before Romeo does.

Romeo arrives at the Capulet vault and finds it guarded by Paris, who is there to mourn the loss of his betrothed. Paris challenges Romeo to a duel, and is quickly killed. Romeo then carries Paris into the grave and sets his body down. Seeing Juliet dead within the tomb, Romeo drinks some poison he has purchased and dies kissing her.

Friar Laurence arrives just as Juliet wakes up within the bloody vault. He tries to get her to come out, but when she sees Romeo dead beside her, Juliet takes his dagger and kills herself

with it. The rest of the town starts to arrive, including Capulet and Montague. Friar Laurence tells them the whole story. The two family patriarchs agree to become friends by erecting golden statues of the other's child.

5.7. LET'S SUM UP

The unit covers the background information about the Elizabethan theatres including the theatres during the reigns of James I. The conditions of theatres before and after Shakespeare have been discussed. It also speaks of the stages, scripts, sources of the plays and the audience.

In the next part of the unit, *Romeo and Juliet* has been introduced and the plot summary of the play is retold so as to lead you to the next aspect of the play in the succeeding unit of this module.

5.8. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres
2. Relate a story of the play *Romeo and Juliet* in your own words.



CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE: ROMEO AND JULIET

Unit Structure :

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 List of the Characters
- 6.2 Study of the Major Characters
- 6.3 Act wise Summary and Analysis
- 6.4 Thematic Study of the Play
 - 6.4.1 Romeo and Juliet as the Love Tragedy
 - 6.4.2 Love and Violence
 - 6.4.3 The Individual versus Society
 - 6.4.4 The Destiny of the Lovers
 - 6.4.5 Images in the Play
 - 6.4.6 Different Points of View
 - 6.4.7 The Dramatic Use of the Poison in the Play
 - 6.4.8 Thumb-biting
 - 6.4.9 Queen Mab
- 6.5 Let's Sum up
- 6.6 Important Questions

6.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will help the students understand Romeo and Juliet in detail. First, the characters have been discussed in short and then in detail. The detailed reading of the summary will help them understand the play and its thematic concerns. That will be followed by the discussion of the different themes of the play.

6.1. LIST OF CHARACTERS

6.1.1. Romeo

Romeo is the son and heir of Montague and Lady Montague. He is a young man of about sixteen. He is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive. Though impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character. He lives in the middle of a violent feud between his family and the Capulets, but he is not at all interested in violence. His only interest is love. At the beginning of the play he is madly in love with a woman named

Rosaline, but the instant he lays eyes on Juliet, he falls in love with her and forgets Rosaline. Thus, Shakespeare gives us every reason to question how real Romeo's new love is, but Romeo goes to extremes to prove the seriousness of his feelings. He secretly marries Juliet, the daughter of his father's worst enemy. He happily takes abuse from Tybalt; and he would rather die than live without his beloved. Romeo is also an affectionate and devoted friend to his relative Benvolio, Mercutio, and Friar Lawrence.

6.1.2. Juliet

Juliet is the daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. She is a beautiful thirteen-year-old girl. She begins the play as a naïve child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly upon falling in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy. Because she is a girl in an aristocratic family, she has none of the freedom Romeo has to roam around the city, climb over walls in the middle of the night, or get into swordfights. Nevertheless, she shows amazing courage in trusting her entire life and future to Romeo, even refusing to believe the worst reports about him after he gets involved in a fight with her cousin. Juliet's closest friend and confidant is her Nurse, though she's willing to shut the Nurse out of her life the moment the Nurse turns against Romeo.

6.1.3. Friar Lawrence

Friar is a Franciscan friar. He is friend to both Romeo and Juliet. He is kind, civic-minded, and a proponent of moderation. Friar Lawrence secretly marries the impassioned lovers in hopes that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona. Being a Catholic holy man, Friar Lawrence is also an expert in the use of seemingly mystical potions and herbs.

6.1.4. Mercutio

Mercutio is a kinsman to the Prince, and Romeo's close friend. He is one of the most extraordinary characters in all of Shakespeare's plays. Mercutio overflows with imagination, wit, and a strange, biting satire and brooding fervour. He loves wordplay, especially sexual double entendres. He can be quite hotheaded, and hates people who are affected, pretentious, or obsessed with the latest fashions. He finds Romeo's romanticized ideas about love tiresome so he tries to convince Romeo to view love as a simple matter of sexual appetite.

6.1.5. The Nurse

She is Juliet's nurse. She is the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life. She is a vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character. The Nurse

provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. But, until a disagreement near the play's end, the Nurse is Juliet's faithful confidante and loyal intermediary in Juliet's affair with Romeo. She provides a contrast with Juliet. Her view of love is earthy and sexual, whereas Juliet is idealistic and intense. The Nurse believes in love and wants Juliet to have a nice-looking husband, but the idea that Juliet would want to sacrifice herself for love is incomprehensible to her.

6.1.6. Tybalt

Tybalt is one of the family members of Capulet. He is Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. He is vain, fashionable, and supremely aware of courtesy and the lack of it. He becomes aggressive, violent, and quick to draw his sword when he feels his pride has been injured. Once drawn, his sword is something to be feared. He loathes Montagues.

6.1.7. Lord Capulet

Capulet is the patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet, and enemy, for unexplained reasons, of Montague. He truly loves his daughter, though he is not well acquainted with Juliet's thoughts or feelings. He seems to think that what is best for her is a "good" match with Paris. Often prudent, he commands respect and propriety, but he is liable to fly into a rage when either is lacking.

6.1.8. Lady Capulet

She is Juliet's mother and Capulet's wife. A woman who herself married young (by her own estimation she gave birth to Juliet at close to the age of fourteen), she is eager to see her daughter marry Paris. She is an ineffectual mother, relying on the Nurse for moral and pragmatic support.

6.1.9. Lord Montague

He is Romeo's father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet. At the beginning of the play, he is chiefly concerned about Romeo's melancholy.

6.1.10. Lady Montague

She is Romeo's mother and Montague's wife. She dies of grief after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

6.1.11. Count Paris

He is a kinsman of the Prince and the suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet. Once Capulet has promised him he can

marry Juliet, he behaves very presumptuous toward, acting as if they are already married.

6.1.12. Benvolio

He is Montague's nephew and Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend. He makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public places, though Mercutio accuses him of having a nasty temper in private. He spends most of the play trying to help Romeo get his mind off Rosaline, even after Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet.

6.1.13. Prince Escalus

He is the Prince of Verona and a kinsman of Mercutio and Paris. As the seat of political power in Verona, he is concerned about maintaining the public peace at all costs.

6.1.14. Friar John

Friar is a Franciscan friar charged by Friar Lawrence with taking the news of Juliet's false death to Romeo in Mantua. Friar John is held up in a quarantined house, and the message never reaches Romeo.

6.1.15. Balthasar

He is Romeo's dedicated servant, who brings Romeo the news of Juliet's death. He is unaware that her death is a ruse.

6.1.16. Sampson & Gregory

They are two servants of the house of Capulet, who, like their master, hate the Montagues. At the outset of the play, they successfully provoke some Montague men into a fight.

6.1.17. Abram

He is Montague's servant, who fights with Sampson and Gregory in the first scene of the play.

6.1.18. The Apothecary

He is an apothecary in Mantua who looks like skeleton. Had he been wealthier, he might have been able to afford to value his morals more than money, and refused to sell poison to Romeo.

6.1.19. Peter

He is a Capulet servant who invites guests to Capulet's feast and escorts the Nurse to meet with Romeo. He is illiterate, and a bad singer.

6.1.20. Rosaline

She is the woman with whom Romeo is infatuated at the beginning of the play. Rosaline never appears onstage, but it is said by other characters that she is very beautiful and has sworn to live a life of chastity.

6.1.21. The Chorus

The Chorus is a single character who, as developed in Greek drama, functions as a narrator offering commentary on the play's plot and themes.

6.1.22. Pertruccio

The page of Tybalt

6.1.23. Chief Watchman**6.1.24. Citizens of the Watch**

6.2. STUDY OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

6.2.1. Romeo

The name Romeo, in popular culture, has become nearly synonymous with "lover." Romeo, in *Romeo and Juliet*, does indeed experience a love of such purity and passion that he kills himself when he believes that the object of his love, Juliet, has died. The power of Romeo's love, however, often obscures a clear vision of Romeo's character, which is far more complex.

Even Romeo's relation to love is not so simple. At the beginning of the play, Romeo pines for Rosaline, proclaiming her the paragon of women and despairing at her indifference toward him. Taken together, Romeo's Rosaline induced histrionics seem rather juvenile. Romeo is a great reader of love poetry, and the portrayal of his love for Rosaline suggests he is trying to re-create the feelings that he has read about. After first kissing Juliet, she tells him "you kiss by th' book," meaning that he kisses according to the rules, and implying that while proficient, his kissing lacks originality. In reference to Rosaline, it seems, Romeo loves by the book. Rosaline, of course, slips from Romeo's mind at first sight of Juliet. But Juliet is no mere replacement. The love she shares with Romeo is far deeper, more authentic and unique than the clichéd

puppy love Romeo felt for Rosaline. Romeo's love matures over the course of the play from the shallow desire to be in love to a profound and intense passion. One must ascribe Romeo's development at least in part to Juliet. Her level-headed observations, such as the one about Romeo's kissing, seem just the thing to snap Romeo from his superficial idea of love and to inspire him to begin to speak some of the most beautiful and intense love poetry ever written.

Yet Romeo's deep capacity for love is merely a part of his larger capacity for intense feeling of all kinds. Put another way, it is possible to describe Romeo as lacking the capacity for moderation. Love compels him to sneak into the garden of his enemy's daughter, risking death simply to catch a glimpse of her. Anger compels him to kill his wife's cousin in a reckless duel to avenge the death of his friend. Despair compels him to suicide upon hearing of Juliet's death. Such extreme behaviour dominates Romeo's character throughout the play and contributes to the ultimate tragedy that befalls the lovers. Had Romeo restrained himself from killing Tybalt, or waited even one day before killing himself after hearing the news of Juliet's death, matters might have ended happily. Of course, though, had Romeo not had such depths of feeling, the love he shared with Juliet would never have existed in the first place.

Among his friends, especially while bantering with Mercutio, Romeo shows glimpses of his social persona. He is intelligent, quick-witted, fond of verbal jousting (particularly about sex), loyal, and unafraid of danger.

6.2.2. Juliet

Having not quite reached her fourteenth birthday, Juliet is of an age that stands on the border between immaturity and maturity. At the play's beginning however she seems merely an obedient, sheltered, naïve child. Though many girls her age—including her mother—get married, Juliet has not given the subject any thought. When Lady Capulet mentions Paris's interest in marrying Juliet, Juliet dutifully responds that she will try to see if she can love him, a response that seems childish in its obedience and in its immature conception of love. Juliet seems to have no friends her own age. And she is not comfortable talking about sex (as seen in her discomfort when the Nurse goes on and on about a sexual joke at Juliet's expense in Act I, scene iii).

Juliet gives glimpses of her determination, strength, and sober-mindedness, in her earliest scenes, and offers a preview of the woman she will become during the five-day span of Romeo and Juliet. While Lady Capulet proves unable to quiet the Nurse, Juliet

succeeds with one word. In addition, even in Juliet's dutiful acquiescence to try to love Paris, there is some seed of steely determination. Juliet promises to consider Paris as a possible husband to the precise degree her mother desires. While an outward show of obedience, such a statement can also be read as a refusal through passivity. Juliet will accede to her mother's wishes, but she will not go out of her way to fall in love with Paris.

Juliet's first meeting with Romeo propels her full-force toward adulthood. Though profoundly in love with him, Juliet is able to see and criticize Romeo's rash decisions and his tendency to romanticize things. After Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished, Juliet does not follow him blindly. She makes a logical and heartfelt decision that her loyalty and love for Romeo must be her guiding priorities. Essentially, Juliet cuts herself loose from her prior social moorings—her Nurse, her parents, and her social position in Verona—in order to try to reunite with Romeo. When she wakes in the tomb to find Romeo dead, she does not kill herself out of feminine weakness, but rather out of an intensity of love, just as Romeo did. Juliet's suicide actually requires more nerve than Romeo's: while he swallows poison, she stabs herself through the heart with a dagger.

Juliet's development from a wide-eyed girl into a self-assured, loyal, and capable woman is one of Shakespeare's early triumphs of characterization. It also marks one of his most confident and rounded treatments of a female character.

6.2.3. Friar Lawrence

Friar Lawrence occupies a strange position territory in *Romeo and Juliet*. He is a kind hearted cleric who helps Romeo and Juliet throughout the play. He performs their marriage and gives generally good advice, especially in regard to the need for moderation. He is the sole figure of religion in the play. But Friar Lawrence is also the most scheming and political of characters in the play: he marries Romeo and Juliet as part of a plan to end the civil strife in Verona. He spirits Romeo into Juliet's room and then out of Verona. He devises the plan to reunite Romeo and Juliet through the deceptive ruse of a sleeping potion that seems to arise from almost mystic knowledge. This mystical knowledge seems out of place for a Catholic friar. Why does he have such knowledge and what could such knowledge mean? The answers are not clear. In addition, though Friar Lawrence's plans all seem well conceived and well intentioned, they serve as the main mechanisms through which the fated tragedy of the play occurs. The students should recognize that the Friar is not only subject to the fate that dominates the play—in many ways he brings that fate about.

6.2.4. Mercutio

With a lightning-quick wit and a clever mind, Mercutio is a scene stealer and one of the most memorable characters in all of Shakespeare's works. Though he constantly puns, jokes, and teases—sometimes in fun, sometimes with bitterness—Mercutio is not a mere jester or prankster. With his wild words, Mercutio punctures the romantic sentiments and blind self-love that exist within the play. He mocks Romeo's self-indulgence just as he ridicules Tybalt's hauteur and adherence to fashion. The critic Stephen Greenblatt describes Mercutio as a force within the play that functions to deflate the possibility of romantic love and the power of tragic fate. Unlike the other characters who blame their deaths on fate, Mercutio dies cursing all Montagues and Capulets. Mercutio believes that specific people are responsible for his death rather than some external impersonal force.

6.3 ACTWISE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Prologue

The chorus introduces the play, and tells the audience that two families in Verona have reignited an ancient feud. Two lovers, one from each family, commit suicide after trying to run away from their families. The loss of their children compels the families to end the feud.

Act I

Scene One

The servants of the Capulets are on the street waiting for some servants of the Montague's to arrive. When they do, Sampson from the Capulets bites his thumb at them, essentially a strong insult. Abraham from the Montague's accepts the insult and the men start to fight.

Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, enters and makes the men stop fighting by drawing his own sword. Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, then also enters the street. Seeing Benvolio, he too draws his sword and enters the fight.

Old Capulet runs onto the stage and demands a sword so that he too may fight. His wife restrains him, even when Old Montague emerges with his sword drawn as well. The Citizens of the Watch have put up a cry, and manage to get Prince Escalus to arrive. The Prince chides them for three times before causing the street of Verona to be unsafe. He orders them to return home, and personally accompanies the Capulets.

The Montagues and Benvolio remain on stage. They ask Benvolio why Romeo was not with him. He tells them that Romeo has been in a strange mood lately. When Romeo appears, the Montagues ask Benvolio to find out what is wrong, and then depart. Romeo informs Benvolio that he is in love with a woman named Rosaline who wishes to remain chaste for the rest of her life, which is why he is so depressed.

Scene Two

Paris pleads with Capulet to let him marry Juliet, who is still only a girl of thirteen. Capulet tells him to wait, but decides to allow Paris to woo her and try to win her heart. He then tells his servant Peter to take a list of names and invite the people to a masked ball he is hosting that evening.

Peter meets Romeo on the street, and being unable to read, asks Romeo to help read the list for him. Romeo does, and realizes that the girl he loves, Rosaline, will be attending this party. Peter tells him that it will be held at Capulet's house, and that he is invited if he wishes to come. Both Benvolio and Romeo decide to go.

Scene Three

Lady Capulet asks the Nurse to call for Juliet. She does, and then tells Lady Capulet that Juliet will be fourteen in two weeks. She then digresses and speaks of how Juliet was as a child, causing both Juliet and her mother embarrassment.

The mother tells Juliet that Paris has come to marry her. She then describes Paris as being beautiful, and compares him to a fine book that only lacks a cover. Juliet does not promise anything, but agrees to at least look at the man that night at dinner.

Scene Four

Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio are making their way to the masked party. Romeo is still depressed, even though he gets to see Rosaline. Mercutio tries to cheer him up by telling a story about Queen Mab, a fictitious elf that infiltrates men's dreams. Romeo finally shushes him and comments that he is afraid of the consequences of going to this party.

Scene Five

Romeo stands to the side during the dancing, and it is from this spot that he first sees Juliet. He immediately falls in love with her. Tybalt overhears Romeo talking to a serving man and recognizes him as Romeo Montague by his voice. However, before Tybalt can create a scene, Old Capulet tells him to leave Romeo alone, since it would look bad to have a brawl in the middle of the festivities.

Romeo finds Juliet and touches her hand. They speak in sonnet form to one another, and Romeo eventually gets to kiss her. However, Juliet is forced to go see her mother. The Nurse tells Romeo that Juliet is a Capulet, at which he is startled.

Juliet finds her Nurse at the end of the party and begs her to find out who Romeo is. The Nurse returns and tells her he is Romeo, the only son of the Montague family. Juliet is heart-broken that she loves a "loathed enemy".

Analysis of Act I

This play begins with a sonnet, a form of prose usually reserved for a lover addressing his beloved. The sonnet is a very structured form of prose, lending itself to order. Shakespeare cleverly contrasts this orderly sonnet with the immediate disorder of the first scene. Thus, the scene quickly degenerates into a bunch of quarrelling servants who soon provoke a fight between the houses of Montague and Capulet.

This scene is wrought with sexual overtones, with the various servants speaking of raping the enemy's women. The sexual wordplay will continue throughout the play, becoming extremely bawdy and at times offensive, yet also underlying the love affair between Romeo and Juliet.

The disorder within the play is evidenced by inverted circumstances. Servants start the quarrel, but soon draw the noblemen into the brawl. The young men enter the fight, but soon the old men try to deny their age and fight as well. The fact that this whole scene takes place in broad daylight undermines the security that is supposed to exist during the day. Thus the play deals with conflicting images: servants leading noblemen, old age pretending to be young, day overtaking night.

The Nurse speaks of Juliet falling as a child when she relates a story to Lady Capulet. This story indirectly pertains to the rise and fall of the characters. Since this is a tragedy, the influence of wheel's fortune cannot be overlooked. Indeed, Juliet's role in the play does parallel the wheel of fortune, with her rise to the balcony and her fall to the vault.

The Nurse also foreshadows, "An I might live to see thee married once". Naturally she does not expect this to be realized in so short a time, but indeed she does live to only see Juliet married once.

Romeo compares Juliet to, "a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" when he first sees her. This play on the comparison of dark and

light shows up frequently in subsequent scenes. It is a central part of their love that important love scenes take place in the dark, away from the disorder of the day. Thus Romeo loves Juliet at night, but kills Tybalt during the day. It especially shows up in the first act in the way Romeo shuts out the daylight while he is pining for Rosaline.

In the fifth scene the lover's share a sonnet which uses imagery of saints and pilgrims. This relates to the fact that Romeo means Pilgrim in Italian. It is also a sacrilegious sonnet, for Juliet becomes a saint to be kissed and Romeo a holy traveller.

The foreshadowing so common in all of Shakespeare's plays comes from Juliet near the end of the first act. She states, "If he be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding bed.". This will be related over and over again, from her Nurse and later even from Lady Capulet.

One of the remarkable aspects of the play is the transformation of both Romeo and Juliet after they fall in love. Juliet first comes across as a young, innocent girl who obeys her parents' commands. However, by the last scene she is devious and highly focused. Thus, she asks her nurse about three separate men at the party, saving Romeo for last so as not to arouse suspicion. Romeo will undergo a similar transformation in the second act, resulting in Mercutio commenting that he has become sociable.

There is a strange biblical reference which comes from Benvolio in the very first scene, when he attempts to halt the fight. He remarks, "Put up your swords. You know not what you do" (1.1.56). This is the same phrase used by Jesus when he stops his apostles from fighting the Roman guards during his arrest. It seems to preordain Juliet's demise, namely her three day "death" followed by a resurrection which still ultimately ends in death.

Act II

Introduction

The chorus introduces the next act, saying that Romeo has given up his old desire for a new affection. Juliet is likewise described as being in love. Both lovers share the problem that they cannot see each other without risking death, but the chorus indicates that passion will overcome that hurdle.

Scene One

Romeo enters and leaps over a garden wall. Mercutio and Benvolio arrive looking for Romeo, but cannot see him. Mercutio then call out to him in long speech filled with obscene wordplay. Benvolio finally gets tired of searching for Romeo, and they leave.

Romeo has meanwhile succeeded in hiding beneath Juliet's balcony. She appears on her balcony and, in this famous scene, asks, "Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?". She wishes that Romeo's name did not make him her enemy. Romeo, hiding below her, surprises her by interrupting and telling Juliet that he loves her.

Juliet warns Romeo that his protestations of love had better be real ones, since she has fallen in love with him and does not want to be hurt. Romeo swears by himself that he loves her, and Juliet tells him that she wishes she could give him her love again.

Juliet's Nurse calls her, and she disappears only to quickly reappear again. Juliet informs Romeo that if he truly loves her, he should propose marriage and tell her when and where to meet. The Nurse calls her a second time, and Juliet exits. Romeo is about to leave when she emerges yet a third time and calls him back.

Scene Two

Friar Laurence is out collecting herbs when Romeo arrives. Romeo quickly tells him that he has fallen in love with Juliet Capulet. The Friar is surprised to hear that Rosaline has been forgotten about so quickly, but is delighted by the prospect of using this new love affair to unite the feuding families.

Scene Three

Benvolio and Mercutio speak about Romeo's disappearance the night before. Benvolio tells Mercutio that Romeo did not come home at all. Romeo arrives and soon engages in a battle of wits with Mercutio, who is surprised by Romeo's quick replies. He says, "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo".

Juliet's Nurse arrives with her man Peter and asks to speak with Romeo. Mercutio starts making sexual jokes about the Nurse, but finally exits with Benvolio. The Nurse tells Romeo her mistress is willing to meet him in marriage. Romeo indicates the Nurse should have Juliet meet him at Friar Laurence's place that afternoon.

Scene Four

Juliet eagerly awaits her Nurse and news from Romeo. The Nurse finally arrives and sits down. Juliet begs her for information, but the Nurse comically refuses to tell her anything until she has settled down and gotten a back rub. She finally informs Juliet that Romeo awaits her at the chapel where Friar Laurence lives.

Scene Five

Romeo and Friar Laurence are in the chapel waiting for Juliet to arrive. The Friar cautions Romeo to "love moderately."

Juliet soon appears and Friar Laurence takes the two young lovers into the church to be married.

Analysis of Act II

The interaction and conflict of night and day is raised to new levels within the second act. Benvolio states that, "Blind is his love, and best befits the dark", in reference to Romeo's passion. And when Romeo finally sees Juliet again, he wonders, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. / Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon". Romeo then invokes the darkness as a form of protection from harm, "I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes". This conflict will not end until the disorder of the day eventually overcomes the passionate nights and destroys the lives of both lovers.

It is worthwhile to note the difference between Juliet and Rosaline. Juliet is compared to the sun, and is one of the most giving characters in the play. "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep. The more I give thee / The more I have, for both are infinite". Rosaline, by contrast, is said to be keeping all her beauty to herself, to die with her. This comparison is made even more evident when Romeo describes Rosaline as a Diana (the goddess of the moon) and says to Juliet, "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon".

The balcony scene is more than a great lovers' meeting place. It is in fact the same as if Romeo had entered into a private Eden. He has climbed over a large wall to enter the garden, which can be viewed as a sanctuary of virginity. Thus he has invaded the only place which Juliet deems private, seeing as her room is constantly watched by the Nurse or her mother.

One of the interesting things which Shakespeare frequently has his characters do is that they swear to themselves. For instance, when Romeo tries to swear by the moon, Juliet remarks that the moon waxes and wanes, and is too variable. Instead, she says, "Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self". Shakespeare often has characters encouraged to be true to themselves first, as a sign that only then can they be true to others..

Again, note the change in Juliet's behaviour. Whereas she used to obey the authority of her nurse, she now disappears twice, and twice defies authority and reappears. This is a sure sign of her emerging independence, and is a crucial factor in understanding her decision to marry Romeo and defy her parents.

There is a strong conflict between the uses of silver and gold throughout the action. "How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by

night" and "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow, / That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops". Silver is often invoked as a symbol of love and beauty. Gold, on the other hand, is often used ironically and as a sign of greed or desire. Rosaline is thus described as being immune to showers of gold, which almost seem to be a bribe. When Romeo is banished, he comments that banishment is a "golden axe," meaning that death would have been better and that banishment is merely a euphemism for the same thing. And finally, the erection of the statues of gold at the end is even more a sign of the fact that neither Capulet nor Montague has really learned anything from the loss of their children.

One of the central issues is the difference between youth and old age. Friar Laurence acts as Romeo's confidant, and the Nurse advises for Juliet. However, both have advice that seems strangely out of place given the circumstances of the play. For instance, Friar Laurence says to Romeo, "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast". He also advises Romeo to "Therefore love moderately". The insanity of this plea to love "moderately" is made ludicrous by the rapid events which follow. In fact, by the end of the play we even see Friar Laurence rejecting his own advice and stumbling to reach Juliet's grave before Romeo can find her. "How oft tonight have my old feet stumbled at graves?".

Act III

Scene One

Benvolio and Mercutio are on a street in Verona waiting for Romeo to arrive. While there, Tybalt and Petruccio see them and come over to provoke a quarrel. Tybalt is expressly looking to find Romeo, whom he wants to punish for sneaking into the masked party the previous day.

Romeo arrives and tries to be submissive to Tybalt by telling him that he harbours no hatred of the Capulet house. Tybalt is unsure how to deal with Romeo, but since Mercutio is provoking him to a duel, he draws his sword and attacks Mercutio. Romeo draws his sword and intervenes too late to stop Tybalt from stabbing Mercutio. Tybalt and Petruccio then exit the area.

Mercutio leaves the stage with Benvolio, who soon returns to tell Romeo that Mercutio has died. Romeo vows revenge on Tybalt, who soon reappears to fight with him. In the duel, Romeo kills Tybalt. Benvolio tells Romeo to run away before the Prince arrives.

The Prince, followed by the Montague and Capulet families, shows up at the scene. Benvolio tells him the entire story, but the Prince refuses to believe that Romeo is guiltless. He banishes Romeo from Verona, threatening to kill him should he return.

Scene Two

Juliet delivers one of the most elegant soliloquies in the play about Romeo, whom she is hoping to receive news about. Her Nurse enters with the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment, but as in the previous scene refuses to immediately tell Juliet what she knows. Instead, the nurse lets Juliet believe that it is Romeo who has been killed.

When the Nurse finally reveals the truth to Juliet, Juliet immediately chides Romeo for pretending to be peaceful when in fact he is able to kill Tybalt. She then recants, and tells the Nurse, "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?" Juliet laments the fact that Romeo has been banished, and indicates that she would rather have both her parents killed than see Romeo banished.

The Nurse promises to go find Romeo and bring him to Juliet's bed that night. She tells Juliet that he is hiding with Friar Laurence. Juliet gives the Nurse a ring for Romeo to wear when he comes to see her that night.

Scene Three

Friar Laurence tells Romeo that he is banished from Verona, and that he should be happy that the Prince was willing to commute the death sentence. Romeo considers banishment worse than death, because it means that he can never see Juliet again. When the Friar tries to console him, Romeo says, "Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love.../ Then mightst thou speak".

The nurse enters and finds Romeo on the ground weeping. She tells him to stand up. Romeo is so upset by the events that he starts to stab himself, but the Nurse snatches away the dagger. Friar Laurence tells Romeo that he should be happy, since he and Juliet are still alive and want to see each other. The Friar then gets Romeo to go see Juliet that night, with the expectation that Romeo will run away to Mantua the next morning.

Scene Four

The Capulets and Paris are preparing for bed, even though it is almost morning. Old Capulet decides right then that Juliet will marry Paris. He comments, "I think she will be ruled / In all respects by me". He tells Lady Capulet to speak to Juliet about the matter immediately before going to bed.

Scene Five

Romeo and Juliet are in her bedroom as daylight approaches. They pretend for a short minute that it really is still the night, but the Nurse arrives to tell Juliet her mother approaches. Romeo descends from the balcony to the ground and bids her goodbye.

Lady Capulet tells Juliet she has, to cheer her up, news about the planned wedding with Paris. Juliet tells her that she would sooner marry Romeo rather than Paris. Capulet himself enters and becomes furious when Juliet refuses to marry Paris. He calls Juliet "young baggage" and orders her to prepare to marry Paris the upcoming Thursday.

Lady Capulet refuses to help Juliet, and even the Nurse tells her that Paris is a fine gentleman whom she should marry. Juliet kicks out her Nurse and prepares to visit Friar Laurence. As the Nurse leaves, Juliet calls her, "Ancient damnation!".

Analysis of Act III

Mercutio leads the action in this most dramatic of the five acts. When wounded, he cries out "A plague o' both your houses", saying it three times to ensure that it becomes a curse. Indeed, it is the plague which causes the final death of both Romeo and Juliet. Friar John says that he was unable to deliver the letter to Romeo because, "the searchers of the town, / Suspecting that we both were in a house / Where the infectious pestilence did reign, / Sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth".

One of the most beautiful soliloquies is that of Juliet when she beckons for nightfall, again representing the contrast to the disorder of the day's events. "Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night, / Give me my Romeo, and when he shall die / Take him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heaven so fine / That all the world will be in love with night / And pay no worship to the garish sun".

The Nurse's arrival in this act with information about Romeo and Tybalt reinforces the fact that this is now a tragedy, not a comedy. This can be seen in the contrast of this scene with the first scene where the Nurse withholds information from Juliet. In the first scene, the Nurse is playfully devious in telling Juliet about where Romeo wants to meet her for their marriage. Now however, the same playfulness is no longer comic, rather it is infuriating. In this sense Shakespeare turns the Nurse from a comic character into a tragic character. She is a character who cannot realize the importance of what she is saying.

Juliet's dedication to Romeo emerges very strongly at this point. At first she derides Romeo for killing Tybalt, but she soon has a change of heart and says, "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?". She then states that she would sacrifice ten thousand Tybalts to be with Romeo, and later includes her parents in the list of people she would rather lose than Romeo. This dedication to a

husband or lover is something which emerges frequently in Shakespeare, and is a point he tries to emphasize.

Romeo's misery at being banished is clearly shown in his preference for death. "Then 'banished' / Is death mistermed. Calling death 'banished' / Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe". Friar Laurence tries to show him that by being alive he at least still has a chance to see Juliet again. Even the Nurse, entering where Romeo is hiding, says, "Stand up, stand up, stand up you be a man".

The analysis of the first act introduced the image of the wheel of fortune. This was applied to Juliet, who throughout the previous acts rose from a humble daughter to become a strong woman standing on a balcony, and completely in charge of her situation. However, at this juncture, the Nurse informs Romeo that Juliet "down falls again" as a result of his banishment and her loss of Tybalt. Later, Juliet takes this image even further, saying, "Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb".

This of course also is integrated with the foreshadowing so common in Shakespeare's plays. Lady Capulet comments about Juliet's refusal to marry Paris that, "I would the fool were married to her grave". This phrase will of course come true quite soon, when Juliet dies while still married to Romeo.

The conflict between the older generation and the younger comes to head in the final scene of act three. The Nurse advocates that Juliet forget about Romeo and instead focus on Paris, the virtues of whom she proceeds to extol. Juliet, poisoningly sweet in her sarcasm, sends the Nurse away from her for the first time, remarking, "Ancient damnation!", both a reference to the Nurse's age and to the problems she must deal with. This leaves Juliet completely alone to face the hostile world.

Act IV

Scene One

Paris is speaking with Friar Laurence about the wedding with Juliet. Friar Laurence, aware that Juliet cannot marry Romeo, is full of misgivings.

Juliet enters and is forced to speak with Paris, who acts arrogant now that the marriage is going to happen. Juliet rebuffs him by giving vague answers to his questions. She finally asks Friar Laurence if she can meet with him alone, meaning that Paris has to leave.

Friar Laurence comes up with a rash plan to get Romeo and Juliet together. He gives Juliet a poison which will make her appear dead to the world. In this way, rather than marry Paris, she will instead be placed in the vault where all deceased Capulets are buried. Friar Laurence will then send a letter to Romeo, telling him what is being done so that he can return and sneak Juliet out of the tomb and also away from Verona.

Scene Two

Juliet arrives home and tells her father that she has repented her sin of being disobedient to him. He pardons her and happily sends her off to prepare her clothes for the wedding day. Capulet then goes to tell Paris that Juliet will marry him willingly.

Scene Three

Juliet convinces both her mother and the Nurse that she wants to sleep alone that night. She prepares to drink the poison that Friar Laurence gave her, but cautiously puts a knife next to her bed in case the potion should fail to work. Juliet then drinks the potion and falls motionless onto her bed.

Scene Four

The Nurse goes to fetch Juliet but instead finds her lying dead. Lady Capulet enters and also starts lamenting her daughter's demise. Capulet then arrives and, discovering his daughter has committed suicide, orders the music to change to funeral tunes.

Analysis of Act IV

Friar Lawrence is the wildest and most scheming character in *Romeo and Juliet*: he secretly marries the two lovers, spirits Romeo to Mantua, and stages Juliet's death. The friar's machinations seem also to be tools of fate. Yet despite the role Friar Lawrence plays in bringing about the lovers' deaths, Shakespeare never presents him in a negative, or even ambiguous, light. He is always treated as a benign, wise presence. The tragic failure of his plans is treated as a disastrous accident for which Friar Lawrence bears no responsibility.

In contrast, it is a challenge to situate Paris along the play's moral continuum. He is not exactly an adversary to Romeo and Juliet, since he never acts consciously to harm them or go against their wishes. Like almost everyone else, he knows nothing of their relationship. Paris's feelings for Juliet are also a subject of some ambiguity, since the audience is never allowed access to his thoughts. Later textual evidence does indicate that Paris harbors a legitimate love for Juliet, and though he arrogantly assumes Juliet

will want to marry him, Paris never treats her unkindly. Nevertheless, because she does not love him, he represents a real and frightening potentiality for Juliet.

Once again Juliet demonstrates her strength. She comes up with reason after reason why drinking the sleeping potion might cause her harm, physical or psychological, but chooses to drink it anyway. In this action she not only attempts to circumvent the forces that obstruct her relationship with Romeo, she takes full responsibility for herself. She recognizes that drinking the potion might lead her to madness or to death. Drinking the potion therefore constitutes an action in which she takes her life into her own hands, and determines its worth to her. In addition to the obvious foreshadow in Juliet's vision of Tybalt's vengeful ghost, her drinking of the potion also hints at future events. She drinks the potion just as Romeo will later drink the apothecary's poison. In drinking the potion she not only demonstrates a willingness to take her life into her own hands, she goes against what is expected of women and takes action.

In their mourning for Juliet, the Capulets appear less as a hostile force arrayed against the lovers and more as individuals. The audience gains an understanding of the immense hopes that the Capulets had placed in Juliet, as well as a sense of their love for her. Similarly, Paris's love for Juliet seems wholly legitimate. His wailing cannot simply be taken as grief over the loss of a wife who might have brought him fortune. It seems more personal than that, more like grief over the loss of a loved one.

Many productions of *Romeo and Juliet* cut the scene depicting Peter and the musicians. Productions do this for good reason: the scene's humor and traded insults seem ill placed at such a tragic moment in the play. If one looks at the scene as merely comic relief, it is possible to argue that it acts as a sort of caesura, a moment for the audience to catch its breath from the tragedy of Act IV before heading into the even greater tragedy of Act V. If one looks at the scene in context with the earlier scenes that include servants a second argument can be made for why Shakespeare included it. From each scene including servants, we gain a unique perspective of the events going on in the play. Here, in the figure of the musicians, we get a profoundly different view of the reaction of the lower classes to the tragedy of Juliet's death. Initially the musicians are wary about playing a happy song because it will be considered improper, no matter their explanations. It is not, after all, for a mere musician to give

explanations to mourning noblemen. As the scene progresses it becomes clear that the musicians do not really care much about Juliet or the tragedy in which she is involved. They care more about the fact that they are out of a job, and perhaps, that they will miss out on a free lunch. In other words, this great tragedy, which is, undoubtedly, a tragedy of epic proportions, is still not a tragedy to everyone.

Act V

Scene One

Romeo has had a dream in which Juliet finds him dead which has disturbed him. His servant Balthasar arrives in Mantua from Verona with news that Juliet is dead. Romeo immediately orders him to bring a post horse so that he can return to Verona and see her for himself. Romeo then finds a poverty stricken apothecary and pays him for some poison.

Scene Two

Friar John arrives to tell Friar Laurence that he was unable to deliver the letter to Romeo. His excuse is that some people were afraid he carried the pestilence (the plague) and refused to let him out of a house. Friar Laurence realizes that this destroys his plans, and orders a crowbar so that he can go rescue Juliet from the grave.

Scene Three

Romeo and Balthasar arrive at Juliet's tomb, where Paris is standing watch to ensure no one tries to rob the vault. Paris sees Romeo and fights him, but is killed in the process. His page then runs off to fetch the city watchmen.

Romeo opens up the tomb and sees Juliet. He sits down next to her, takes a cup and fills it with the poison, then drinks it and dies kissing Juliet. Friar Laurence arrives only seconds later and discovers that Paris has been killed by Romeo.

Juliet awakes and finds Romeo dead beside her, with the cup of poison still next to him. She kisses him, hoping some of the poison will kill her as well. Friar Laurence pleads with her to come out of the vault, but instead Juliet chooses to kill herself with Romeo's dagger.

At this point the watchmen arrive, along with the Prince, Montague and Capulet. Friar Laurence tells them the story as he knows it, and Balthasar gives the Prince a letter written by Romeo which verifies the story. Montague, in order to make amends for Juliet's death, tells them he will erect a golden statue of her in

Verona for all to see. Not to be outdone, Capulet promises the same of Romeo. The Prince ends the play with the words, "For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

Analysis of Act V

Much in the way that the characters in Richard III dream about their fates in the final act of that play, Romeo too has a dream which tells of his fate. "I dreamt my lady came and found me dead". The use of dreams is meant to foreshadow, but also heightens the dramatic elements of the tragedy by irrevocably sealing the character's fate.

When Romeo goes to the Apothecary to buy his poison, it is as if he were buying the poison from Death himself. Note the description of the Apothecary, "Meagre were his looks. / Sharp misery had worn him to the bones". He is clearly an image of Death. Romeo pays him in gold, saying, "There is thy gold - worse poison to men's souls".

This description of gold ties into the conflict between gold and silver. It is gold that underlies the family feuding, even after the death of both Romeo and Juliet when Capulet and Montague try to outbid each other in the size of their golden statues. Thus for Romeo gold really is a form of poison, since it has helped to kill him.

The analysis of the first act pointed out some of the numerous sexual references throughout the play. In the final death scene there is even the full force of the erotic element. Romeo drinks from a chalice, a cup with a shape that is often compared to the torso of a woman. Meanwhile Juliet says, "O happy dagger, / This is thy sheath! There rust, and let me die". The dagger is of course Romeo's, and the sexual overtones are starkly clear. In addition to this, there is ambiguity about the use of the word "die." To die actually had two meanings when Shakespeare was writing, meaning either real death or sexual intercourse. Thus, even at the very end of the play, we cannot be sure from the words alone whether Juliet is committing suicide or engaging in sexual relations with Romeo.

A final comment concerns Friar Laurence. His actions at the end of the play are remarkable for a holy man because he attempts to play God. Friar Laurence gets Juliet to drink a potion which puts her to sleep, faking death, and then he tries to resurrect her. In his attempt to play God, Friar Laurence is condemned to fail by the simple arrogance of his act. This tie-in with the death of Christ would not have escaped the Christian audiences watching the play.

6.4 THEMATIC STUDY OF THE PLAY

6.4.1 Romeo and Juliet as the Love Tragedy

Romeo and Juliet is the most famous love story in the English literary tradition. Love is naturally the play's dominant and most important theme. The play focuses on romantic love, specifically the intense passion that springs up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet. In *Romeo and Juliet*, love is a violent, ecstatic, overpowering force that supersedes all other values, loyalties, and emotions. In the course of the play, the young lovers are driven to defy their entire social world: families ("Deny thy father and refuse thy name," Juliet asks, "Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, / And I'll no longer be a Capulet"); friends (Romeo abandons Mercutio and Benvolio after the feast in order to go to Juliet's garden); and ruler (Romeo returns to Verona for Juliet's sake after being exiled by the Prince on pain of death). Love is the overriding theme of the play, but a reader should always remember that Shakespeare is uninterested in portraying a prettied-up, dainty version of the emotion, the kind that bad poets write about, and whose bad poetry Romeo reads while pining for Rosaline. Love in *Romeo and Juliet* is a brutal, powerful emotion that captures individuals and catapults them against their world, and, at times, against themselves.

The powerful nature of love can be seen in the way it is described, or, more accurately, the way descriptions of it so consistently fail to capture its entirety. At times love is described in the terms of religion, as in the fourteen lines when Romeo and Juliet first meet. At others it is described as a sort of magic: "Alike bewitchèd by the charm of looks". Juliet, perhaps, most perfectly describes her love for Romeo by refusing to describe it: "But my true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up some of half my wealth". Love resists any single metaphor because it is too powerful to be so easily contained or understood.

Romeo and Juliet does not make a specific moral statement about the relationships between love and society, religion, and family. Rather, it portrays the chaos and passion of being in love, combining images of love, violence, death, religion, and family in an impressionistic rush leading to the play's tragic conclusion.

6.4.2 Love and Violence

The themes of death and violence permeate *Romeo and Juliet*. They are always connected to passion, whether that passion is love or hate. The connection between hate, violence, and death seems obvious. But the connection between love and violence requires further investigation.

Love, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is a grand passion, and as such it is blinding. It can overwhelm a person as powerfully and completely as hate can. The passionate love between Romeo and Juliet is linked from the moment of its inception with death: Tybalt notices that Romeo has crashed the feast and determines to kill him just as Romeo catches sight of Juliet and falls instantly in love with her. From that point on, love seems to push the lovers closer to love and violence. Romeo and Juliet are plagued with thoughts of suicide, and a willingness to experience it. Romeo brandishes a knife in Friar Lawrence's cell and threatens to kill himself after he has been banished from Verona and his love. Juliet also pulls a knife in order to take her own life in Friar Lawrence's presence just three scenes later. After Capulet decides that Juliet will marry Paris, Juliet says, "If all else fail, myself have power to die". Finally, each imagines that the other looks dead the morning after their first, and only, sexual experience ("Methinks I see thee," Juliet says, ". . . as one dead in the bottom of a tomb". This theme continues until its inevitable conclusion: double suicide. This tragic choice is the highest, most potent expression of love that Romeo and Juliet can make. It is only through death that they can preserve their love, and their love is so profound that they are willing to end their lives in its defence. In the play, love emerges as an amoral thing, leading as much to destruction as to happiness. But in its extreme passion, the love that Romeo and Juliet experience also appears so exquisitely beautiful that few would want to resist its power.

6.4.3 The Individual versus Society

Much of *Romeo and Juliet* involves the lovers' struggles against public and social institutions that either explicitly or implicitly oppose the existence of their love. Such structures range from the concrete to the abstract: families and the placement of familial power in the father; law and the desire for public order; religion; and the social importance placed on masculine honor. These institutions often come into conflict with each other. The importance of honour, for example, time and again, results in brawls that disturb the public peace.

Though they do not always work in concert, each of these societal institutions, in some way, present obstacles for Romeo and Juliet. The enmity between their families, coupled with the emphasis placed on loyalty and honour to kin, combine to create a profound conflict for Romeo and Juliet, who must rebel against their heritages. Further, the patriarchal power structure inherent in Renaissance families, wherein the father controls the action of all other family members, particularly women, places Juliet in an extremely vulnerable position. Her heart, in her family's mind, is not hers to give. The law and the emphasis on social civility demands terms of conduct with which the blind passion of love cannot

comply. Religion similarly demands priorities that Romeo and Juliet cannot abide by because of the intensity of their love. Though in most situations the lovers uphold the traditions of Christianity (they wait to marry before consummating their love), their love is so powerful that they begin to think of each other in blasphemous terms. For example, Juliet calls Romeo “the god of my idolatry,” elevating Romeo to level of God. The couple’s final act of suicide is likewise un-Christian. The maintenance of masculine honour forces Romeo to commit actions he would prefer to avoid. But the social emphasis placed on masculine honour is so profound that Romeo cannot simply ignore them.

It is possible to see Romeo and Juliet as a battle between the responsibilities and actions demanded by social institutions and those demanded by the private desires of the individual. Romeo and Juliet’s appreciation of night, with its darkness and privacy, and their renunciation of their names, with its attendant loss of obligation, make sense in the context of individuals who wish to escape the public world. But the lovers cannot stop the night from becoming day. And Romeo cannot cease being a Montague simply because he wants to; the rest of the world will not let him. The lovers’ suicides can be understood as the ultimate night, the ultimate privacy.

6.4.4 The Destiny of the Lovers

In its first address to the audience, the Chorus states that Romeo and Juliet are “star-crossed”—that is to say that fate controls them. This sense of fate permeates the play, and not just for the audience. The characters also are quite aware of it. Romeo and Juliet constantly see omens. When Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he cries out, “Then I defy you, stars,” completing the idea that the love between Romeo and Juliet is in opposition to the decrees of destiny. Of course, Romeo’s defiance itself plays into the hands of fate, and his determination to spend eternity with Juliet results in their deaths. The mechanism of fate works in all of the events surrounding the lovers: the feud between their families; the horrible series of accidents that ruin Friar Lawrence’s seemingly well-intentioned plans at the end of the play; and the tragic timing of Romeo’s suicide and Juliet’s awakening. These events are not mere coincidences, but rather manifestations of fate that help bring about the unavoidable outcome of the young lovers’ deaths.

The concept of fate described above is the most commonly accepted interpretation. There are other possible readings of fate in the play: as a force determined by the powerful social institutions that influence Romeo and Juliet’s choices, as well as fate as a force that emerges from Romeo and Juliet’s very personalities.

6.4.5 Images in the Play

One of the play's most consistent visual motifs is the contrast between light and dark, often in terms of night/day imagery. This contrast is not given a particular metaphoric meaning. Light is not always good, and dark is not always evil. On the contrary, light and dark are generally used to provide a sensory contrast and to hint at opposed alternatives. One of the more important instances of this motif is Romeo's lengthy meditation on the sun and the moon during the balcony scene, in which Juliet, metaphorically described as the sun, is seen as banishing the "envious moon" and transforming the night into day. A similar blurring of night and day occurs in the early morning hours after the lovers' only night together. Romeo, forced to leave for exile in the morning, and Juliet, not wanting him to leave her room, both try to pretend that it is still night, and that the light is actually darkness: "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes".

6.4.6 Different Points of View

Shakespeare includes numerous speeches and scenes in Romeo and Juliet that hint at alternative ways to evaluate the play. Shakespeare uses two main devices in this regard: Mercutio and servants. Mercutio consistently skewers the viewpoints of all the other characters in play. He sees Romeo's devotion to love as a sort of blindness that robs Romeo from himself. Similarly, he sees Tybalt's devotion to honor as blind and stupid. His punning and the Queen Mab speech can be interpreted as undercutting virtually every passion evident in the play. Mercutio serves as a critic of the delusions of righteousness and grandeur held by the characters around him.

Where Mercutio is a nobleman who openly criticizes other nobles, the views offered by servants in the play are less explicit. There is the Nurse who lost her baby and husband, the servant Peter who cannot read, the musicians who care about their lost wages and their lunches, and the Apothecary who cannot afford to make the moral choice, the lower classes present a second tragic world to counter that of the nobility. The nobles' world is full of grand tragic gestures. The servants' world, in contrast, is characterized by simple needs, and early deaths brought about by disease and poverty rather than dueling and grand passions. Where the nobility almost seem to revel in their capacity for drama, the servants' lives are such that they cannot afford tragedy of the epic kind.

6.4.7 The Dramatic Use of the Poison in the Play

In his first appearance, in Act II, scene ii, Friar Lawrence remarks that every plant, herb, and stone has its own special properties, and that nothing exists in nature that cannot be put to both good and bad uses. Thus, poison is not intrinsically evil, but is instead a natural substance made lethal by human hands. Friar Lawrence's words prove true over the course of the play. The sleeping potion he gives Juliet is concocted to cause the appearance of death, not death itself, but through circumstances beyond the Friar's control, the potion does bring about a fatal result: Romeo's suicide. As this example shows, human beings tend to cause death even without intending to. Similarly, Romeo suggests that society is to blame for the apothecary's criminal selling of poison, because while there are laws prohibiting the apothecary from selling poison, there are no laws that would help the apothecary make money. Poison symbolizes human society's tendency to poison good things and make them fatal, just as the pointless Capulet-Montague feud turns Romeo and Juliet's love to poison. After all, unlike many of the other tragedies, this play does not have an evil villain, but rather people whose good qualities are turned to poison by the world in which they live.

6.4.8 Thumb-biting

In Act I, scene I, the buffoonish Samson begins a brawl between the Montagues and Capulets by flicking his thumbnail from behind his upper teeth, an insulting gesture known as biting the thumb. He engages in this juvenile and vulgar display because he wants to get into a fight with the Montagues but doesn't want to be accused of starting the fight by making an explicit insult. Because of his timidity, he settles for being annoying rather than challenging. The thumb-biting represents the foolishness of the entire Capulet/Montague feud and the stupidity of violence in general.

6.4.9 Queen Mab

In Act I, scene iv, Mercutio delivers a dazzling speech about the fairy Queen Mab, who rides through the night on her tiny wagon bringing dreams to sleepers. One of the most noteworthy aspects of Queen Mab's ride is that the dreams she brings generally do not bring out the best sides of the dreamers, but instead serve to confirm them in whatever vices they are addicted to—for example, greed, violence, or lust. Another important aspect of Mercutio's description of Queen Mab is that it is complete nonsense, albeit vivid and highly colourful. Nobody believes in a fairy pulled about by "a small grey-coated gnat" whipped with a cricket's bone. Finally, it is worth noting that the description of Mab and her carriage goes to extravagant lengths to emphasize how tiny and insubstantial she

and her accoutrements are. Queen Mab and her carriage do not merely symbolize the dreams of sleepers, they also symbolize the power of waking fantasies, daydreams, and desires. Through the Queen Mab imagery, Mercutio suggests that all desires and fantasies are as nonsensical and fragile as Mab, and that they are basically corrupting. This point of view contrasts starkly with that of Romeo and Juliet, who see their love as real and ennobling.

Thus Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare's love tragedies which we have studied in the former units. To study this play, you must remember it point wise by breaking it in sub points. The characters of Romeo and Juliet are important which also are included in the theme of love tragedy. Apart from love and hate, other topic equally important is the role of fate or fortune in the lives of the lovers. When we talk of love in this play, we have to remember that Romeo is the lover also of the agony and pain in love. He appears to be so much dejected even before he saw Juliet. That is why it is said that he is in love with the very idea of being in love. To understand the play in detail the students are, however, advised to read the text of play.

6.5 LET'S SUM UP

This unit is a continuation of the earlier unit covering the detailed study of the play Romeo and Juliet. This unit structurally falls into three stages: introduction of characters and brief sketches of the major characters, scene wise summary of each Act followed by critical analysis of the Acts and thematic discussion of the play.

In the first part of the unit we have been acquainted with 22 characters (both minor and major) of the play with their descriptions based on their roles in the play. It further critically discusses the portrayal of the major characters of Romeo, Juliet, Friar Lawrence and Mercutio. The second part speaks of the summary of each scene followed by commentaries on the scenes. The unit ends with the survey of various themes in the play.

6.6. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss and describe Romeo and Juliet as a Shakespearean love tragedy.
2. Discuss the filial relationships reflected in *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. Romeo and Juliet does not have an evil villain, but rather people whose good qualities are turned to poison by the world in which they live. Illustrate the statement.

4. Give an account of the various themes of Romeo and Juliet.

5. Write a note on the followings:

- I. Character Sketch of Romeo
- II. Character Sketch of Juliet
- III. Character sketch of Friar Lawrence
- IV. Character sketch of Mercutio



CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE: MIDSUMMERNIGHT'S DREAM PART I

Unit Structure :

- 7.0. Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2. Sources of the Play
- 7.3. Form and Structure of the Play
- 7.4. Short Summary of the Play
- 7.5. List of Characters
- 7.6. Study of Major Characters
- 7.7. Let's Sum up
- 7.8. Important Questions

7.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you understand Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in detail. First, the introduction to the play, sources of the play, short summary of the play, and characters have been discussed in short and then in detail. The detailed reading of the unit will help you understand the play and its thematic concerns.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Before Shakespeare turned to *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is written in mid-1590s. It is one of his strangest and most delightful creations. It marks a departure from his earlier works and from others of the English Renaissance. The play demonstrates both the extent of Shakespeare's learning and the expansiveness of his imagination. The range of references in the play is among its most extraordinary attributes. Shakespeare draws on sources as various as Greek mythology: (Theseus, for instance, is loosely based on the Greek hero of the same name, and the play is peppered with references to Greek gods and goddesses.); English country fairy lore (the character of Puck, or Robin Good fellow, was a popular figure in sixteenth-century stories); and the theatrical practices of Shakespeare's London (the

craftsmen's play refers to and parodies many conventions of English Renaissance theater, such as men playing the roles of women). Further, many of the characters are drawn from diverse texts: Titania comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Oberon may have been taken from the medieval romance *Huan of Bordeaux*, translated by Lord Berners in the mid-1530s. Unlike the plots of many of Shakespeare's plays, however, the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems not to have been drawn from any particular source but rather to be the original product of the playwright's imagination.

7.2. SOURCES OF THE PLAY

Like his other plays, Shakespeare drew on many different sources to shape *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There does not seem to be an earlier plot that he incorporated- rather, a series of myths and tales that he drew from to create his own work. But most of our understanding of Shakespearean sources is like detective work: we piece together similarities but we have no direct testimony.

Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* seems to have given Shakespeare some of the mythical background for the play, particularly relating to Theseus's past exploits, romantic and otherwise. The name Egeus (Hermia's father) probably also came from Plutarch.

Shakespeare seems almost certain to have borrowed some information from the fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer, whose "Knight's Tale," in the *Canterbury Tales*, opens with lines about Theseus and Hippolyta. It also mentions observances of May Day.

Similarly, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, translated by Arthur Golding, gave Shakespeare a very clear working of the story of Pyramus and Thisby. This is probably where Shakespeare picked up his word "cranny," through which the unfortunate lovers are forced to speak.

And it is also likely that Shakespeare knew of the Roman writer Apuleius's story *The Golden Ass*. In it a poor man is transformed by enchantment into an ass. In the description of the transformation, there are many similar phrases that tie the two together.

For his fairies, Shakespeare had a vast store of folklore to draw on. Robin Goodfellow was particularly well-known in country lore, though Shakespeare may have been the first to give him the name of Puck. May Day (May 1) and Midsummer's Night (June

23/summer solstice) were two festivals important as background for the play. May Day (when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* actually takes place) was a favourite festival for rural England, a time in which the people left the city and headed for the woods, where they danced and celebrated. A king and queen of May were elected, and this "royal" couple went to the nobles' houses to give their blessings, much the way Oberon and Titania do at the end of the play. May Day was, above all, a time of lovers' madness: they, too, went to the woods and frequently spent the night there. Midsummer was a general celebration of madness and merriment, a time when magic was afoot and the fairies were particularly evident. Costumes and dancing played a large part in the festivities. "Midsummer madness," brought about by the heat, affected everyone, opening the way for illusion (and delusion) to transform reality.

Shakespeare even drew on some of his own work. The situation of the workmen awkwardly performing their amateur theatricals is similar to the show of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the way that couples mix up and transfer their affections is reminiscent of the *Midsummer lovers*. And if *Romeo and Juliet* was, as is often suggested, written directly before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it offers an entrance into the fairy world with Mercutio's famous description of Queen Mab.

7.3. FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Though Shakespeare's plays are now divided for us into acts and scenes, these are very likely the work of later editors. We do not really know where Shakespeare's players made their pauses. The Elizabethan stage was so bare and fluid that it wasn't necessary to stop frequently for scene or costume changes, as it is today. It's more interesting to look at the play itself to get a sense of form and structure.

Five-act Structure

ACT I: Exposition. The problem with the four lovers is revealed. They each seem to be in love with the wrong person.

ACT II: Rising Action. The quarrel between Oberon and Titania intensifies. Lysander is given the love juice.

ACT III: Climax. Oberon's plan works: Bottom is transformed and Titania humiliated. The lovers are in complete disarray.

ACT IV: Falling Action. The lovers, Titania, and Bottom wake up from their "dreams." Oberon and Titania are reconciled.

ACT V: Resolution. The three couples prepare for marriage, and the play within the play is performed, exorcising the tragic element in favour of the comic.

The play has a very simple time architecture. Most of the action takes place during one long frantic night, framed at either end by a brief spate of day. And time parallels place. The play opens at court, in the sunny, rational, social world of Theseus the duke. The main course of the play takes place in the Athenian woods outside of town. There it is night- a mysterious world filled with spirits and human passions. At the end we are in court again. Day has returned, the order of marriage is triumphant, and the bonds of the social world are re-strengthened.

You might also find structural beauty in the way Shakespeare juggles the four realms his characters inhabit. By the way they speak and the kinds of characters they reveal, the people in the play seem to occupy distinct realms of existence, which Shakespeare interweaves throughout the play. Theseus and Hippolyta, as members of the royal court, live in an extremely social world and stand for the orderly workings of society. The four lovers in their travels from court to wood and back to court again exist in a realm governed by the passions, and so come to stand for man's volatile emotional life. The rustic workingmen, with their simple trades, physical comedy, and earthy sensibilities, represent the material world. And the fairies- delicate, mysterious, elemental, with creative power and poetic art- represent the world of the spirit. All these worlds exist simultaneously. Shakespeare means us to see that the structure they combine to create is the human universe.

7.4. SHORT SUMMARY

Theseus, the duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius who loves Hermia, but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after

meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.

When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

7.5. LIST OF CHARACTERS

7.5.1. Puck

He is also known as Robin Good fellow, Puck is Oberon's jester, a mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks on mortals. Though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* divides its action between several groups of characters, Puck is the closest thing the play has to a protagonist. His enchanting, mischievous spirit pervades the atmosphere, and his antics are responsible for many of the complications that propel the other main plots: he mistakes the young Athenians, applying the love potion to Lysander instead of Demetrius, thereby causing chaos within the group of young lovers; he also transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass.

7.5.2. Oberon

He is the king of the fairies; Oberon is initially at odds with his wife, Titania, because she refuses to relinquish control of a young Indian prince whom he wants for a knight. Oberon's desire for revenge on Titania leads him to send Puck to obtain the love-potion flower that creates so much of the play's confusion and farce.

7.5.3. Titania

She is the beautiful queen of the fairies, Titania resists the attempts of her husband, Oberon, to make a knight of the young Indian prince that she has been given. Titania's brief, potion-induced love for Nick Bottom, whose head Puck has transformed into that of an ass, yields the play's foremost example of the contrast motif.

7.5.4. Lysander

He is a young man of Athens, in love with Hermia. Lysander's relationship with Hermia invokes the theme of love's difficulty: he cannot marry her openly because Egeus, her father, wishes her to wed Demetrius; when Lysander and Hermia run away into the forest, Lysander becomes the victim of misapplied magic and wakes up in love with Helena.

7.5.5. Demetrius

He is a young man of Athens, initially in love with Hermia and ultimately in love with Helena. Demetrius's obstinate pursuit of Hermia throws love out of balance among the quartet of Athenian youths and precludes a symmetrical two-couple arrangement.

7.5.6. Hermia

She is Egeus's daughter, a young woman of Athens. Hermia is in love with Lysander and is a childhood friend of Helena. As a result of the fairies' mischief with Oberon's love potion, both Lysander and Demetrius suddenly fall in love with Helena. Self-conscious about her short stature, Hermia suspects that Helena has wooed the men with her height. By morning, however, Puck has sorted matters out with the love potion, and Lysander's love for Hermia is restored.

7.5.7. Helena

Helena is a young woman of Athens, in love with Demetrius. Demetrius and Helena were once betrothed, but when Demetrius met Helena's friend Hermia, he fell in love with her and abandoned Helena. Lacking confidence in her looks, Helena thinks that Demetrius and Lysander are mocking her when the fairies' mischief causes them to fall in love with her.

7.5.8. Egeus

Egeus is Hermia's father, who brings a complaint against his daughter to Theseus: Egeus has given Demetrius permission to marry Hermia, but Hermia, in love with Lysander, refuses to marry Demetrius. Egeus's severe insistence that Hermia either respect his wishes or be held accountable to Athenian law places him squarely outside the whimsical dream realm of the forest.

7.5.9. Theseus

He is the heroic duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta. Theseus represents power and order throughout the play. He appears only at the beginning and end of the story, removed from the dreamlike events of the forest.

7.5.10. Hippolyta

She is the legendary queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus. Like Theseus, she symbolizes order.

7.5.11. Nick Bottom

Nick Bottom is the overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. His simultaneous nonchalance about the beautiful Titania's sudden love for him and unawareness of the fact that Puck has transformed his head into that of an ass mark the pinnacle of his foolish arrogance.

7.5.12. Peter Quince

Peter is a carpenter and the nominal leader of the craftsmen's attempt to put on a play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. During the craftsmen's play, Quince plays the Prologue.

7.5.13. Francis Flute

He is the bellows-mender chosen to play Thisbe in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman determines to speak his lines in a high, squeaky voice.

7.5.14. Robin Starveling

Robin is the tailor chosen to play Thisbe's mother in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Moonshine.

7.5.15. Tom Snout

Tom is the tinker chosen to play Pyramus's father in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers.

7.5.16. Snug

Snug is the joiner chosen to play the lion in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Snug worries that his roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience.

7.5.17. Philostrate

Theseus's Master of the Revels, he is responsible for organizing the entertainment for the duke's marriage celebration.

7.5.18. Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed

These are the fairies ordered by Titania to attend to Bottom after she falls in love with him.

7.6. STUDY OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

7.6.1. Puck

Puck, a jester and jokester or also known as Robin Goodfellow, is like a wild, untamed member of the fairy clan.

Though Oberon tells him they are "spirits of another sort," Puck, with his connection to English legend and folklore, seems related to a slightly more dangerous kind of sprite.

Not that he is truly malevolent. Although his tricks make people uncomfortable, they don't seem to do any permanent damage. He casts an ironic eye on humanity. Thinking people fools, he loves to make fools of them. But laughter, not tears, is his aim. He delights in mischief-making, like a boy bent on fun. He's the childlike antidote to Oberon's seriousness; that's why he's jester as well as jokester.

With his quickness, ventriloquism, and shape-changing ability, he clearly has magic fairy powers of his own. Meddling in the affairs of lovers and administering Cupid's love juice, he's reminiscent of Pan. And like him he seems to have some animal nature. He even tells us that he likes to take the form of animals and that he communicates with them.

He is also reminiscent of the Greek god Hermes, the messenger. Like him, he's a go-between for higher powers. Most of the magic he does in the play is at Oberon's request. He's more the instrument or administerer of magic than the creator of it. He is definitely in the service of Oberon, regarding him with respect and a little fear.

As the liaison between the various groups of characters in the play, Puck is also the character who communicates directly with us, the audience. His swiftness (he can fly around the earth in forty minutes) may give him the ability to cut through dimensions, too. He steps out of the play at the end to suggest that all we've seen may be just a dream- and you can be sure he says it with a wink.

Though there is little character development in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and no true protagonist, critics generally point to Puck as the most important character in the play. The mischievous, quick-witted sprite sets many of the play's events in motion with his magic, by means of both deliberate pranks on the human characters (transforming Bottom's head into that of an ass) and unfortunate mistakes (smearing the love potion on Lysander's eyelids instead of Demetrius's).

More important, Puck's capricious spirit, magical fancy, fun-loving humor, and lovely, evocative language permeate the atmosphere of the play. Wild contrasts, such as the implicit comparison between the rough, earthy craftsmen and the delicate, graceful fairies, dominate *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck seems to illustrate many of these contrasts within his own character: he is graceful but not so saccharine as the other fairies;

as Oberon's jester, he is given to a certain coarseness, which leads him to transform Bottom's head into that of an ass merely for the sake of enjoyment. He is good-hearted but capable of cruel tricks. Finally, whereas most of the fairies are beautiful and ethereal, Puck is often portrayed as somewhat bizarre looking. Indeed, another fairy mentions that some call Puck a "hobgoblin," a term whose connotations are decidedly less glamorous than those of "fairy".

7.6.2. Nick Bottom

Nick Bottom is a clown, actor, weaver and even romantic hero. He is a complex character. He's able to attract sympathy in the midst of his absurd buffoonery and to elicit concern even though he exhibits some obnoxious qualities. This mix of characteristics has made readers feel many contradictory things about him. Some say he is a boor, that he treats his fellow players with a lack of respect; others note his large ego and need for being in the spotlight. Still other readers find him a perfect clown and take his posturing as harmless joking. He may, of course, reflect all these things.

He is certainly filled with energy; it seems to stream out of him sometimes in ways that he can't stop. He never uses one word when two will do; in the same way, he'd rather not play just one part when he could play them all. Bottom is a ham. He's also a bad actor. The two qualities together make him inevitably funny to us. His enthusiasm trips him up again and again. He is enamoured of words. If he misuses or mispronounces them he doesn't notice—though we do. He thinks he knows more than he does know, and it can make him seem arrogant, just as his overabundant energy can make him seem like a bully. But the testimony of his fellow workers makes it clear that they take it all in stride; in fact, they adore him. They seem to appreciate his energy and his acting ability. They're even a little bit in awe of him. And his fondness for them is equally apparent. When he returns to them at last, they are his "lads," his "hearts." The affection these men share is real and touching, especially amid all the confused feelings of love in the rest of the play.

Though he's a bumbler, Bottom also seems to be possessed of a special grace. As a working-class tradesman unaccustomed to finery and delicate manners, his treatment of his fairy servants is a model of courtly behaviour. He's not just kind; he's interested in them. He may look like an ass at first glance, but another look reveals something deeper.

Part of his special quality is indicated by the fact that he alone of the mortals actually becomes involved with the fairy world. That Bottom doesn't think Titania's love or dalliance with him is

preposterous means he is open to the fairy power in a way no one else is. He may cut a ridiculous figure, wearing an ass's head, but what's interesting is that these strange little creatures don't look ridiculous to him and he's at ease with them as with other persons. When he wakes from his dream, he's unwilling to completely let go of his experience. He feels somehow a joke has been played on him, but he also senses something deeper at the heart of the joke. He tests it on his tongue, savours it, releases it, and calls it back. He's not attached to reason like Theseus, and he does have something of the artist in him. He's willing to absorb his magical experience like a vision and let it find its own meaning. He acts like a fool, but Shakespeare shows us he's not a fool.

Bottom is larger than life. He has a huge appetite. He'd rather engage something than let it go by. That gives him, in the truest sense, a sense of humility. And it's a peculiarity of human nature that humility is ennobling. Bottom's not such a joke, after all.

Whereas Puck's humor is often mischievous and subtle, the comedy surrounding the overconfident weaver Nick Bottom is hilariously overt. The central figure in the subplot involving the craftsmen's production of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, Bottom dominates his fellow actors with an extraordinary belief in his own abilities (he thinks he is perfect for every part in the play) and his comical incompetence (he is a terrible actor and frequently makes rhetorical and grammatical mistakes in his speech). The humor surrounding Bottom often stems from the fact that he is totally unaware of his own ridiculousness; his speeches are overdramatic and self-aggrandizing, and he seems to believe that everyone takes him as seriously as he does himself. This foolish self-importance reaches its pinnacle after Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. When Titania, whose eyes have been anointed with a love potion, falls in love with the now ass-headed Bottom, he believes that the devotion of the beautiful, magical fairy queen is nothing out of the ordinary and that all of the trappings of her affection, including having servants attend him, are his proper due. His unawareness of the fact that his head has been transformed into that of an ass parallels his inability to perceive the absurdity of the idea that Titania could fall in love with him.

7.6.3. Helena

Helena is primarily defined by her relationship to love, but unfortunately that love is lacking. The unhappy experience of unrequited love seems to have penetrated to her very core. Although attractive, tall, and willowy, she questions her own virtues because being unloved makes her feel unworthy of love.

It's true that Demetrius originally loved her, and she has cause for being upset that he now seems to care for Hermia. But Helena is a prime example of the ill effects of "doting" too much: she loses respect for herself.

Helena is so used to being rejected that she might not be able to recognize real love if it came her way. When both Lysander and Demetrius turn their loving gazes on her, she can only suspect that they're making fun of her. Even at the end, she feels that Demetrius is hers, and yet somehow is not. Since he's the one holdover with charmed eyes, she's more correct than she knows. Neither she nor Hermia speaks in the last act. Perhaps they're both wondering about what they've got, having got what they supposedly wanted.

Although Puck and Bottom stand out as the most personable characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they themselves are not involved in the main dramatic events. Of the other characters, Helena, the lovesick young woman desperately in love with Demetrius, is perhaps the most fully drawn. Among the quartet of Athenian lovers, Helena is the one who thinks most about the nature of love—which makes sense, given that at the beginning of the play she is left out of the love triangle involving Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius. She says, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind," believing that Demetrius has built up a fantastic notion of Hermia's beauty that prevents him from recognizing Helena's own beauty. Utterly faithful to Demetrius despite her recognition of his shortcomings, Helena sets out to win his love by telling him about the plan of Lysander and Hermia to elope into the forest. Once Helena enters the forest, many of her traits are drawn out by the confusion that the love potion engenders: compared to the other lovers, she is extremely unsure of herself, worrying about her appearance and believing that Lysander is mocking her when he declares his love for her.

7.6.4. Theseus

As duke of Athens, Theseus occupies an important social and political position that is at the heart of his character. Though he had a lively past, filled with heroic war exploits and romantic conquests, he now is a figure of the Athenian establishment, upholding the social order. As such, he represents, in contrast to the volatile lovers, the stabilizing force of marriage.

Theseus is a traditional Greek mythic hero. He is mentioned in many ancient texts, including Homer, Euripides, Plutarch, and Ovid. He is probably most famous for having killed the monstrous Minotaur, in the labyrinth of Minos on Crete. Though there is occasional mention of his former deeds, the person of

Shakespeare's Theseus is as much the playwright's invention as he is a legendary figure.

With his upholding of the social order comes Theseus's praise of reason as a primary power. He and Hippolyta are untouched by the fairy realm. They seem to be above the magic, but you might also see them as being outside of it. Theseus's reliance on reason blocks him off from some of the more mystical realms of human experience. In Act V, he draws a famous comparison between the lover, the lunatic, and the poet. He feels they are all under the sway of their imaginations, which blinds them to reality. In consequence, some realms of passion and art are closed to him.

Theseus may be trapped in his position, or he may be filling it grandly. In either case, he has a kindly awareness of his subjects. Though he may not be appreciative of art per se, he understands the good intentions of the actors. He knows that his position alone has a certain power and seeks to use it with a clear and just mind.

7.6.5. Hippolyta

A warrior in her own right, Hippolyta maintains a kind of aloof dignity. She too is a Greek legendary figure, an Amazon queen of fierce pride and strength. In the beginning of the play she counters Theseus's impatience for the wedding day with a cool, imperial rationality of her own. Yet she doesn't rely so completely on reason: she is charmed and a little disturbed by the lovers' stories. She's not willing to discount their tales completely. While viewing the performance of the rustic workingmen, she seems to be impatient with the amateur nature of the production, though she warms to it by the end. Perhaps she too feels the necessity to temper her natural passions with stateliness proper to her office. She can be compared to the emotionally stormy lovers. Both she and Theseus bracket the play, beginning and end, like the pillars of society between which the Midsummer Madness occurs.

7.6.6. Hermia

Hermia shows her spunkiness right from the beginning. Though the forces of familial and social power are brought heavily to bear upon her, she sticks to her guns. Her first words are a defence of Lysander against the accusations of her father, Egeus, and Theseus. She asks that her father look with her eyes, to try to see her viewpoint. She stands up for what she believes in even though it may mean her death.

Hermia is unswerving in her devotion to Lysander through all his changes and always gives him the benefit of the doubt. She

loves him with an authenticity that goes beyond "doting," and her pain at being betrayed by him seems equally real.

She is described as having a dark complexion and being small. No more physical detail than that is portrayed about her character. Her temper is as fierce as her love; when it's kindled by jealousy toward Helena, she turns into a real spitfire. Although, especially in the beginning, Hermia speaks the proper courtly romantic poetry with Lysander, she shows that there is something beyond propriety in her character. But when it comes to defending her virgin modesty in the woods, she's quick to make Lysander keep his distance.

Hermia's combination of passion and judgment is set off from the feelings of all the other lovers. She knows what she wants; she is willing to make great sacrifices for it; she will fight like a lioness in defense of it; and ultimately trusts in her power. She's not above love-foolishness, but she gives to the romantic comedy a sturdy foundation.

7.6.7. Lysander

It's hard to get a grip on the character of Lysander. Indeed, because of the frustrating interference of Puck, it's hard for him to keep a grip on himself. In the play it is difficult telling him and Demetrius apart. They both seem to be defined more by the object of their desires than by any qualities in and of themselves.

Lysander has the unlucky distinction of professing his undying eternal love for two different women, one after the other. It certainly makes us suspicious of the steadfastness of his character. Consequently, the beautiful, flowery, romantic poetry he speaks rings hollow. He's made the butt of Shakespeare's ironic comedy of fickle love. He goes through all the right motions, says all the right words, but doesn't show any depth of character. He defends his new infatuation with Helena by swearing it comes from reason. But since we know it comes from Cupid's magic flower, both Lysander's love and reason seem suspect. His normalcy is his main characteristic: he's just a lover, doing the foolish things that lovers do.

7.6.8. Demetrius

Like Lysander, Demetrius is difficult to identify except by his relation to the one he loves, or, more particularly, to the one who loves him. Helena's chasing after him and his irritation with her are the primary marks of his character. Since in his uncharmed state he even threatens Helena with bodily harm, he comes off as not quite the gracious courtly lover he means to be. And we may wonder,

too, about how easily his eye was distracted from Helena by Hermia in the first place. His constant remarks at the performance of "Pyramus and Thisby" show him to be clever, but maybe a little rude, too. In any event, as the one person still under the spell of fairy magic and therefore not seeing with true eyes, he seems a bit foolish laughing at the acted "lovers" in the play. He doesn't know it, but he's still in a play of his own.

7.6.9. Oberon

As king of his magical realm, Oberon is the most powerful figure in the play. Everything about him is commanding, from his language to his magic spells. He is in essence an artist: he knows his craft and how it operates, and he can use his skills to their fullest effect. Since he sets in motion the charmed encounters that are at the heart of the play, he is the author of the plot. The characters play out their dramas to fulfil his needs and wishes. He alone has the overview that an author has.

At times Oberon seems to be almost an elemental, natural force. Because of his quarrel with Titania, the world of nature is completely out of balance. Only a primal power could wreak that kind of havoc on nature. This doesn't mean he is a perfect, all-powerful being. His anger toward Titania has overtones of both jealousy and revenge. You may feel that she has become obsessed with the Indian boy and is neglecting her royal duties as consort of the fairy king, but doesn't Oberon's response seem petulant, maybe a little mean? He is, after all, quite willing to humiliate her and seems to take inordinate joy in it. Yet from the start he is touched by the lovers' plight, and his aim is to unite them, as it is to unite himself and Titania. He knows the power of concord over discord. He isn't all-seeing enough to prevent Puck from making the mistake that brings about the confusion for the lovers, but he knows how to right the wrong that's been done.

Oberon's brilliant poetry is the key to his importance in the play. His speeches contain some of the most extravagant writing in all of Shakespeare. Oberon raises poetry to the level of magic, as if his words were part of his fairy magic lore. He has a commanding knowledge of flowers, which seem to be at the heart of the fairy realm. The dangerous love juice is contained in a flower, as is its antidote. His famous description of Titania's favourite resting place calls out the names of flowers as if just to speak them were to induce a spell. And, indeed, he does induce a spell of poetry. If he describes something, like the Arrow of Cupid striking the flower, or the dawn rising, he does so with such command of detail and sensuality that the scene comes to life before us.

When Oberon finally restores harmony to his relationship with Titania, he seems to do so for everyone else too. Bottom has his ass's head removed in a twinkling, and the lovers are reunited. The wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta can now proceed. The outer edges of the play are held down by the orderly Theseus and Hippolyta, but its inner core burns with the conflict, passion, and magic of the fairy rulers. Theseus mentions that all theater is made up of shadow-plays. When Puck refers to Oberon as the "king of shadows," he's letting us see that as poet and playwright, Oberon is a master of the art.

7.6.10. Titania

Titania is a regal and commanding person. She is not readily willing to give in to the king, and her insistence on keeping the changeling shows both her strong personal will and the respect she has for her priestess. Though she may lack Oberon's knowledge of magic, she is certainly a primary power like him and has her own court of fairy attendants. She's not about to take any nonsense from him, and she throws his past romantic exploits right in his face.

Though she may not know the spells, she has the fairy charm. The world she moves in seems to have a special magical grace. She lives among flowers; even her fairy attendants have floral names. Song and dance seem to be the nature of her fairy business. She's not a match for Oberon's magic- he's able to put the dotting charm on her. But her world, even more than his, seems to be an enchanted one, delicate, strange, of another dimension and size.

Titania, like Oberon, has the power of poetry. Her description of the natural world in disarray is one of the high points of the play. She seems to invest the disturbed natural forces with her own emotional distress, so that the waves, air, and mud seem to be living, breathing, personal things. She knows the range and importance of her and Oberon's power. She may not see that her obsession is as equally to blame as Oberon's jealousy, but she understands the fullest dimensions of the resulting quarrel. Her description of the changeling's mother is a marvel of poetic imagery. The comparison between the pregnant woman and the sails filled with wind makes the world seem filled with a female creative force. Titania embodies that power.

7.6.11. Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout, and Starveling

These simple folk carve out their own realm in the play, with Bottom at the front. Shakespeare has them speak prose, serving as a sharp contrast to the poetry of the lovers and fairies. They stand as representatives of an innocent real world, plain, good-natured,

and well-meaning. Their preposterous bad acting and terrible attempts at poetry are made fun of, but their good intentions and shared fellowship are always apparent. Shakespeare may use them to satirize elements of his theater, but he does so in a way that makes their theatrics, not them, the objects of his comedy. Their burlesque may make them look ridiculous, but as characters they fare better than the more articulate lovers do. They are a necessary adjunct to the other worlds of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They counteract the duke's stiff reliance on reason, the lovers' high moral flights of fancy, and the fairies' elegant and primal poetry. All of these realms together make a recognizably human world.

7.7. LET'S SUM UP

This unit introduces Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* including the mythological sources of the plot. Though Shakespeare had borrowed the plot of the play like his other plays, he improvised and made it new so skilfully and deftly with the help of his imagination that it ceases to be the revised version and appears to be his own creativity.

It continues to give a list of characters in the play with their descriptions. The major characters are portrayed for the detailed study.

7.8. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Give a plot summary of the play, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* in your own words.
2. Portray the followings characters:
 - I. Puck
 - II. Nick Bottom
 - III. Helena
3. Write short Notes on the followings:
 - I. Sources of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*
 - II. Significance of title, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
 - III. Form and structure of the play



CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE: THE MIDSUMMAR NIGHT'S DREAM PART-II

Unit Structure

- 8.0. Objectives
- 8.1. Summary and Analysis of the Acts
- 8.2. Themes of the Play
 - 8.2.1. True and False Love
 - 8.2.2. Seeing and Being Blind
 - 8.2.3. Waking and Dreaming
 - 8.2.4. Reality and Illusion
 - 8.2.5. Reason and Imagination
 - 8.2.6. Change and Transformation
 - 8.2.7. The Difficulty of the Love
 - 8.2.8. Magic
 - 8.2.9. Dreams
 - 8.2.10 Contrast
 - 8.2.11. Theseus and Hyppolyta
 - 8.2.12 the Love Potion
 - 8.2.13 The Craftmen's Play
- 8.3. Critics on the Play
 - 8.3.1. On the Play
 - 8.3.2. On Characterisation
 - 8.3.3. On End of the Play
 - 8.3.4. On Shakespeare's Poetic Speeches
 - 8.3.5. On Bottom's "vision"
 - 8.3.6. On Fairies
 - 8.3.7. On Comedy of Language
- 8.4. Let's Sum up
- 8.5. Important Questions

8.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help the students understand *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its different themes. The detailed reading of the summary in this unit will help them understand the play and its thematic concerns. This also includes the discussion of the different themes of the play. The section titled the critics on the play will enable them to perceive the different aspects of the play through perspectives of the eminent critics on *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*.

8.1. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

ACT I

Scene I

The course of true love never did run smooth. . . .

At his palace, Theseus, duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, his fiancée, discuss their wedding, to be held in four days, under the new moon. Impatient for the event and in a celebratory mood, Theseus orders Philostrate, his Master of the Revels, to “stir up the Athenian youth to merriments” and devise entertainments with which the couple might pass the time until their wedding. Philostrate takes his leave, and Theseus promises Hippolyta that though he wooed her with his sword (Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, presumably met Theseus in combat), he will wed her “with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling”—with a grand celebration to begin at once and last until the wedding.

Egeus, a citizen of Athens, strides into the room, followed by his daughter Hermia and the Athenian youths Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus has come to see Theseus with a complaint against his daughter: although Egeus has promised her in marriage to Demetrius, who loves her, Lysander has won Hermia's heart, and Hermia refuses to obey her father and marry Demetrius. Egeus demands that the law punish Hermia if she fails to comply with his demands. Theseus speaks to Hermia sharply, telling her to expect to be sent to a nunnery or put to death. Lysander interrupts, accusing Demetrius of being fickle in love, saying that he was once engaged to Hermia's friend Helena but abandoned her after he met Hermia. Theseus admits that he has heard this story, and he takes Egeus and Demetrius aside to discuss it. Before they go, he orders Hermia to take the time remaining before his marriage to Hippolyta to make up her mind. Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and Demetrius depart, leaving Hermia alone with Lysander.

Hermia and Lysander discuss the trials that must be faced by those who are in love: “The course of true love never did run smooth,” Lysander says. He proposes a plan: he has an aunt, wealthy and childless, who lives seven leagues from Athens and who dotes on Lysander like a son. At her house, Hermia and Lysander can be married—and, because the manor is outside of Athens, they would be free from Athenian law. Hermia is overjoyed, and they agree to travel to the house the following night.

Helena, Hermia’s friend whom Demetrius jilted, enters the room, lovesick and deeply melancholy because Demetrius no longer loves her. Hermia and Lysander confide their plan to her and wish her luck with Demetrius. They depart to prepare for the following night’s journey. Helena remarks to herself that she envies them their happiness. She thinks up a plan: if she tells Demetrius of the elopement that Lysander and Hermia are planning, he will be bound to follow them to the woods to try to stop them; if she then follows him into the woods, she might have a chance to win back his love.

Analysis of Scene I

From the outset, Shakespeare subtly portrays the lovers as a group out of balance, a motif that creates tension throughout the play. For the sake of symmetry, the audience wants the four lovers to form two couples; instead, both men love Hermia, leaving Helena out of the equation. The women are thus in nonparallel situations, adding to the sense of structural imbalance. By establishing the fact that Demetrius once loved Helena, Shakespeare suggests the possibility of a harmonious resolution to this love tangle: if Demetrius could only be made to love Helena again, then all would be well. By the end of the play, the fairies’ intervention effects just such an outcome, and all *does* become well, though it is worth noting that the restoration of Demetrius’s love for Helena is the result of magic rather than a natural reawakening of his feelings.

The genre of comedy surrounding the Athenian lovers is farce, in which the humor stems from exaggerated characters trying to find their way out of ludicrous situations. Shakespeare portrays the lovers as overly serious, as each is deeply and earnestly preoccupied with his or her own feelings: Helena is anxious about her looks, reacting awkwardly when Lysander calls her “fair”; Hermia later becomes self-conscious about her short stature; Demetrius is willing to see Hermia executed to prevent her from marrying another man; and Lysander seems to have cast himself as the hero of a great love story in his own mind (III.ii.188, III.ii.247). Hermia is stubborn and quarrelsome, while Helena lacks self-confidence and believes that other people mock her. The airy world of the fairies and the absurd predicaments in which the lovers

find themselves once in the forest make light of the lovers' grave concerns.

*Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.*

Scene II

In another part of Athens, far from Theseus's palace, a group of common laborers meets at the house of Peter Quince to rehearse a play that the men hope to perform for the grand celebration preceding the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. Quince, a carpenter, tries to conduct the meeting, but the talkative weaver Nick Bottom continually interrupts him with advice and direction. Quince tells the group what play they are to perform: *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*, which tells the story of two lovers, separated by their parents' feud, who speak to each other at night through a hole in a wall. In the play, a lion surprises Thisbe one night and tatters her mantle before she escapes. When Pyramus finds the shredded garment, he assumes that the lion has killed Thisbe; stricken with grief, he commits suicide. When Thisbe finds Pyramus's bloody corpse, she too commits suicide. Quince assigns their parts: Bottom is to play Pyramus; Francis Flute, Thisbe; Robin Starveling, Thisbe's mother; Tom Snout, Pyramus's father; Quince himself, Thisbe's father; and Snug, the lion.

As Quince doles out the parts, Bottom often interrupts, announcing that he should be the one to play the assigned part. He says that his ability to speak in a woman's voice would make him a wonderful Thisbe and that his ability to roar would make him a wonderful lion. Quince eventually convinces him that Pyramus is the part for him, by virtue of the fact that Pyramus is supposed to be very handsome. Snug worries that he will be unable to learn the lion's part, but Quince reassures him that it will be very easy to learn, since the lion speaks no words and only growls and roars. This worries the craftsmen, who reason that if the lion frightens any of the noble ladies in the audience, they will all be executed; since they are only common laborers, they do not want to risk upsetting powerful people. Bottom says that *he* could roar as sweetly as a nightingale so as not to frighten anyone, but Quince again convinces him that he can only play Pyramus. The group disperses, agreeing to meet in the woods the following night to rehearse their play.

Analysis of Scene II

The most important motif in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and one of the most important literary techniques Shakespeare

uses throughout the play, is that of contrast. The three main groups of characters are all vastly different from one another, and the styles, moods, and structures of their respective subplots also differ. It is by incorporating these contrasting realms into a single story that Shakespeare creates the play's dreamlike atmosphere. Almost diametrically opposite the beautiful, serious, and love-struck young nobles are the clumsy, ridiculous, and deeply confused craftsmen, around whom many of the play's most comical scenes are centered.

Where the young lovers are graceful and well spoken—almost comically well suited to their roles as melodramatically passionate youths—the craftsmen often fumble their words and could not be less well suited for acting. This disjunction reveals itself as it becomes readily apparent that the craftsmen have no idea how to put on a dramatic production: their speeches are full of impossible ideas and mistakes (Bottom, for example, claims that he will roar “as gently / as any sucking dove”); their concerns about their parts are absurd (Flute does not want to play Thisbe because he is growing a beard); and their extended discussion about whether they will be executed if the lion's roaring frightens the ladies further evidences the fact that their primary concern is with themselves, not their art .

The fact that the workmen have chosen to perform the Pyramus and Thisbe story, a Babylonian myth familiar to Shakespeare's audiences from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, only heightens the comedy. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is highly dramatic, with suicides and tragically wasted love (themes that Shakespeare takes up in *Romeo and Juliet* as well). Badly suited to their task and inexperienced, although endlessly well meaning, the craftsmen are sympathetic figures even when the audience laughs at them—a fact made explicit in Act V, when Theseus makes fun of their play even as he honors their effort. The contrast between the serious nature of the play and the bumbling foolishness of the craftsmen makes the endeavor all the more ridiculous. Further, the actors' botched telling of the youthful love between Pyramus and Thisbe implicitly mocks the melodramatic love tangle of Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander.

Act II

Scene I

In the forest, two fairies, one a servant of Titania, the other a servant of Oberon, meet by chance in a glade. Oberon's servant tells Titania's to be sure to keep Titania out of Oberon's sight, for the two are very angry with each other. Titania, he says, has taken a little Indian prince as her attendant, and the boy is so beautiful

that Oberon wishes to make him his knight. Titania, however, refuses to give the boy up.

Titania's servant is delighted to recognize Oberon's servant as Robin Goodfellow, better known as Puck, a mischievous sprite notorious for his pranks and jests. Puck admits his identity and describes some of the tricks he plays on mortals.

The two are interrupted when Oberon enters from one side of the glade, followed by a train of attendants. At the same moment, Titania enters from the other side of the glade, followed by her own train. The two fairy royals confront one another, each questioning the other's motive for coming so near to Athens just before the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of loving Hippolyta and of thus wishing to bless the marriage; Oberon accuses Titania of loving Theseus. The conversation turns to the little Indian boy, whom Oberon asks Titania to give him. But Titania responds that the boy's mother was a devotee of hers before she died; in honor of his mother's memory, Titania will hold the boy near to her. She invites Oberon to go with her to dance in a fairy round and see her nightly revels, but Oberon declines, saying that they will be at odds until she gives him the boy.

Titania storms away, and Oberon vows to take revenge on her before the night is out. He sends Puck to seek a white-and-purple flower called love-in-idleness, which was once hit with one of Cupid's arrows. He says that the flower's juice, if rubbed on a sleeper's eyelids, will cause the sleeper to fall in love with the first living thing he or she sees upon waking. Oberon announces that he will use this juice on Titania, hoping that she will fall in love with some ridiculous creature; he will then refuse to lift the juice's effect until she yields the Indian prince to him.

Analysis of Scene I

Act II serves two main functions: it introduces the fairies and their realm, and it initiates the romantic confusion that will eventually help restore the balance of love. The fairies, whom Shakespeare bases heavily on characters familiar from English folklore, are among the most memorable and delightful characters in the play. They speak in lilting rhymes infused with gorgeous poetic imagery. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play dominated by the presence of doubles, and the fairies are designed to contrast heavily with the young lovers and the craftsmen. Whereas the lovers are earnest and serious, Puck and the other pixies are merry and full of laughter; whereas the craftsmen are bumbling, earthy, and engage in methodical labor, the fairies are delicate, airy, and indulge in effortless magic and enchantment.

The conflict between Oberon and Titania imports into the fairy realm the motif of love being out of balance. As with the Athenian lovers, the eventual resolution of the tension between the two occurs only by means of magic. Though the craftsmen do not experience romantic confusion about one another, Bottom becomes involved in an accidental romance with Titania in Act III, and in Act V two craftsmen portray the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, who commit suicide after misinterpreting events.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was probably performed before Queen Elizabeth, and Shakespeare managed to make a flattering reference to his monarch in Act II, scene i. When Oberon introduces the idea of the love potion to Puck, he says that he once saw Cupid fire an arrow that missed its mark:

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth
 Cupid, all armed.
 A certain aim he took
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
 And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
 And the imperial vot'ress passèd on,
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free
 (*II.i.155–164*).

Queen Elizabeth never married and was celebrated in her time as a woman of chastity, a virgin queen whose concerns were above the flesh. Here Shakespeare alludes to that reputation by describing Cupid firing an arrow “at a fair vestal thronèd by the west”—Queen Elizabeth—whom the heat of passion cannot affect because the arrow is cooled “in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon.” Shakespeare celebrates how Elizabeth put affairs of state before her personal life and lived “in maiden meditation, fancy-free.” He nestles a patriotic aside in an evocative description, couching praise for the ruler on whose good favor he depended in dexterous poetic language. (Audiences in Shakespeare's day would most likely have recognized this imaginative passage's reference to their monarch.)

Because many of the main themes and motifs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are very light, even secondary to the overall sense of comedy and the dreamlike atmosphere, it is perhaps more important to try to understand not *what* the play means but rather *how* Shakespeare creates its mood. One technique that he uses is to embellish action with a wealth of finely

wrought poetic imagery, using language to work upon the imagination of the audience and thereby effect a kind of magic upon the stage: "I must go seek some dewdrops here," one fairy says, "And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear" (II.i.14–15). The fairies conjure many of the play's most evocative images: Oberon, for instance, describes having heard

*a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's music
(II.i.150–154)*

and seen

*a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight
(II.i.249–254).*

This technique extends even to the suggestive names of some of the characters, such as the craftsmen Snug, Starveling, Quince, Flute, and Snout, and the fairies Cobweb, Mustardseed, Mote, and Peaseblossom.

Scene II

As Puck flies off to seek the flower, Demetrius and Helena pass through the glade. Oberon makes himself invisible so that he can watch and hear them. Demetrius harangues Helena, saying that he does not love her, does not want to see her, and wishes that she would stop following him immediately. He curses Lysander and Hermia, whom he is pursuing, hoping to prevent their marriage and slay Lysander. Helena repeatedly declares her adoration for, and loyalty to, Demetrius, who repeatedly insults her. They exit the grove, with Helena following closely behind Demetrius, and Oberon materializes. He declares that before the night is out, Demetrius will be the one chasing Helena.

Puck appears, carrying the flower whose juice will serve as the love potion. Oberon takes the flower and says that he knows of a fragrant stream bank surrounded with flowers where Titania often sleeps. Before hurrying away to anoint Titania's eyelids with the flower's juice, Oberon orders Puck to look for an Athenian youth being pursued by a lady and to put some of the juice on the

disdainful youth's eyelids, so that when he wakes he will fall in love with the lady. He informs Puck that he will know the youth by his Athenian garb. Puck agrees to carry out his master's wishes.

After her dancing and revelry, Titania falls asleep by the stream bank. Oberon creeps up on her and squeezes the flower's juice onto her eyelids, chanting a spell, so that Titania will fall in love with the first creature she sees upon waking. Oberon departs, and Lysander and Hermia wander into the glade. Lysander admits that he has forgotten the way to his aunt's house and says that they should sleep in the forest until morning, when they can find their way by daylight. Lysander wishes to sleep close to Hermia, but she insists that they sleep apart, to respect custom and propriety. At some distance from each other, they fall asleep.

Puck enters, complaining that he has looked everywhere but cannot find an Athenian youth and pursuing lady. He is relieved when he finally happens upon the sleeping forms of Lysander and Hermia, assuming that they are the Athenians of whom Oberon spoke. Noticing that the two are sleeping apart, Puck surmises that the youth refused to let Hermia come closer to him. Calling him a "churl," Puck spreads the potion on Lysander's eyelids, and he departs.

Simultaneously, Helena pursues Demetrius through the glade. He insults her again and insists that she no longer follow him. She complains that she is afraid of the dark, but he nonetheless storms off without her. Saying that she is out of breath, Helena remains behind, bemoaning her unrequited love. She sees the sleeping Lysander and wakes him up. The potion takes effect, and Lysander falls deeply in love with Helena. He begins to praise her beauty and to declare his undying passion for her. Disbelieving, Helena reminds him that he loves Hermia; he declares that Hermia is nothing to him. Helena believes that Lysander is making fun of her, and she grows angry. She leaves in a huff, and Lysander follows after her. Hermia soon wakes and is shocked to find that Lysander is gone. She stumbles into the woods to find him.

Analysis of Scene II

Act II, scene ii introduces the plot device of the love potion, which Shakespeare uses to explore the comic possibilities inherent in the motif of love out of balance. Oberon's meddling in the affairs of humans further disrupts the love equilibrium, and the love potion symbolizes the fact that the lovers themselves will not reason out their dilemmas; rather, an outside force—magic—will resolve the love tangle.

The ease with which characters' affections change in the play, so that Lysander is madly in love with Hermia at one point and with Helena at another, has troubled some readers, who feel that Shakespeare profanes the idea of true love by treating it as inconstant and subject to outside manipulation. It is important to remember, however, that while *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains elements of romance, it is not a true love story like *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's aim is not to comment on the nature of true love but rather to mock gently the melodramatic afflictions and confusions that love induces. Demetrius, Helena, Hermia, and Lysander are meant not to be romantic archetypes but rather sympathetic figures thrown into the confusing circumstances of a romantic farce.

Like much farce, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies heavily on misunderstanding and mistaken identity to create its humorous entanglements. Oberon's unawareness of the presence of a second Athenian couple—Lysander and Hermia—in the forest enables Puck's mistaken application of the flower's juice. This confusion underscores the crucial role of circumstance in the play: it is not people who are responsible for what happens but rather fate. In *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, oppositely, Shakespeare forces his characters to make crucial decisions that affect their lives.

Much of the comic tension in this scene (and throughout the rest of the play, as the confusion wrought by the love potion only increases) stems from the fact that the solution to the love tangle seems so simple to the reader/audience: if Demetrius could simply be made to love Hermia, then the lovers could pair off symmetrically, and love would be restored to a point of balance. Shakespeare teases the audience by dangling the magic flower as a simple mechanism by which this resolution could be achieved. He uses this mechanism, however, to cycle through a number of increasingly ridiculous arrangements before he allows the love story to arrive at its inevitable happy conclusion.

Act III

Scene I

The craftsmen meet in the woods at the appointed time to rehearse their play. Since they will be performing in front of a large group of nobles (and since they have an exaggerated sense of the delicacy of noble ladies), Bottom declares that certain elements of the play must be changed. He fears that Pyramus's suicide and the lion's roaring will frighten the ladies and lead to the actors' executions. The other men share Bottom's concern, and they decide to write a prologue explaining that the lion is not *really* a lion nor the sword *really* a sword and assuring the ladies that no one

will *really* die. They decide also that, to clarify the fact that the story takes place at night and that Pyramus and Thisbe are separated by a wall, one man must play the wall and another the moonlight by carrying a bush and a lantern.

As the craftsmen rehearse, Puck enters and marvels at the scene of the “hempen homespuns” trying to act (III.i.65). When Bottom steps aside, temporarily out of view of the other craftsmen, Puck transforms Bottom’s head into that of an ass. When the ass-headed Bottom reenters the scene, the other men become terrified and run for their lives. Delighting in the mischief, Puck chases after them. Bottom, perplexed, remains behind.

In the same grove, the sleeping Titania wakes. When she sees Bottom, the flower juice on her eyelids works its magic, and she falls deeply and instantly in love with the ass-headed weaver. She insists that he remain with her, embraces him, and appoints a group of fairies—Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed—to see to his every wish. Bottom takes these events in stride, having no notion that his head has been replaced with that of an ass. He comments that his friends have acted like asses in leaving him, and he introduces himself to the fairies. Titania looks on him with undisguised love as he follows her to her forest bower.

Analysis of Scene I

The structure of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is roughly such that Act I introduces the main characters and the conflict; Act II sets up the interaction among the Athenian lovers, the fairies, and the craftsmen (the lovers wander through the forest, the fairies make mischief with the love potion); and Act III develops the comical possibilities of these interactions. As Act III is the first act in which all three groups appear, the fantastic contrasts between them are at their most visible.

The craftsmen’s attempt at drama is a comedy of incongruity, as the rough, unsophisticated men demonstrate their utter inability to conceive a competent theatrical production. Their proposal to let the audience know that it is night by having a character play the role of Moonshine exemplifies their straightforward, literal manner of thinking and their lack of regard for subtlety. In their earthy and practical natures, the craftsmen stand in stark contrast to the airy and impish fairies.

The fairies’ magic is one of the main components of the dreamlike atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and it is integral to the plot’s progression. It throws love increasingly out of balance and brings the farce into its most frenzied state. With the youths’ love tangle already affected by the potion, Shakespeare

creates further havoc by generating a romance across groups, as Titania falls in love with the ass-headed Bottom. Obviously, the delicate fairy queen is dramatically unsuited to the clumsy, monstrous craftsman. Shakespeare develops this romance with fantastic aplomb and heightens the comedy of the incongruity by making Bottom fully unaware of his transformed state. Rather, Bottom is so self-confident that he finds it fairly unremarkable that the beautiful fairy queen should wish desperately to become his lover. Further, his ironic reference to his colleagues as asses and his hunger for hay emphasize the ridiculousness of his lofty self-estimation.

Scene II & III

Lord, what fools these mortals be!

In another part of the forest, Puck tells Oberon about the predicament involving Titania and Bottom. Oberon is delighted that his plan is working so well. Hermia, having discovered Demetrius after losing Lysander, enters the clearing with Demetrius. Puck is surprised to see the woman he saw earlier with a different man from the one he enchanted. Oberon is surprised to see the man he ordered Puck to enchant with a different woman. He realizes that a mistake has been made and says that he and Puck will have to remedy it. Hermia presses Demetrius about Lysander's whereabouts, fearing that he is dead, but Demetrius does not know where Lysander has gone, and he is bitter and reproachful that Hermia would rather be with Lysander than with him. Hermia grows angrier and angrier, and Demetrius decides that it is pointless to follow her. He lies down and falls asleep, and Hermia stalks away to find Lysander.

When Hermia is gone, Oberon sends Puck to find Helena and squeezes the flower juice onto Demetrius's eyelids. Puck quickly returns, saying that Helena is close behind him. Helena enters with Lysander still pledging his undying love to her. Still believing that he is mocking her, Helena remains angry and hurt. The noise of their bickering wakes Demetrius, who sees Helena and immediately falls in love with her. Demetrius joins Lysander in declaring this love. Lysander argues that Demetrius does not really love Helena; Demetrius argues that Lysander is truly in love with Hermia. Helena believes that they are both mocking her and refuses to believe that either one loves her.

Hermia reenters, having heard Lysander from a distance. When she learns that her beloved Lysander now claims to love Helena, as does Demetrius, she is appalled and incredulous. Helena, who is likewise unable to fathom that both men could be in love with her, assumes that Hermia is involved in the joke that she believes the men are playing on her, and she chides Hermia

furiously for treating their friendship so lightly. Lysander and Demetrius are ready to fight one another for Helena's love; as they lunge at one another, Hermia holds Lysander back, provoking his scorn and disgust: "I will shake thee from me like a serpent" (III.ii.262). Hermia begins to suspect that Helena has somehow acted to steal Lysander's love from her, and she surmises that, because she is short and Helena is tall, Helena must have used her height to lure Lysander. She grows furious with Helena and threatens to scratch out her eyes. Helena becomes afraid, saying that Hermia was always much quicker than she to fight. Demetrius and Lysander vow to protect Helena from Hermia, but they quickly become angry with each other and storm off into the forest to have a duel. Helena runs away from Hermia, and Hermia, reannouncing her amazement at the turn of events, departs.

Oberon dispatches Puck to prevent Lysander and Demetrius from fighting and says that they must resolve this confusion by morning. Puck flies through the forest hurling insults in the voices of both Lysander and Demetrius, confusing the would-be combatants until they are hopelessly lost.

Scene III

Eventually, all four of the young Athenian lovers wander back separately into the glade and fall asleep. Puck squeezes the love potion onto Lysander's eyelids, declaring that in the morning all will be well.

Analysis of Act III

The confusion in Act III continues to heighten, as the Athenian lovers and the fairies occupy the stage simultaneously, often without seeing each other. The comedy is at its silliest, and the characters are at their most extreme: Helena and Hermia nearly come to blows as a result of their physical insecurities, and Lysander and Demetrius actually try to have a duel. The plot is at its most chaotic, and, though there is no real climax in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the action is at its most intense. With the falling action of Acts IV and V, however, matters will sort themselves out quickly and order will be restored.

Like Act III, scene i, Act III, scene ii serves a mainly developmental role in the plot structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, focusing on the increasing confusion among the four Athenian lovers. Now that both men have been magically induced to switch their love from Hermia to Helena, the vanities and insecurities of both women become far more pronounced. Helena's low self-esteem prevents her from believing that either man could really be in love with her. Hermia, who is used to having both men

fawn on her, has her vanity stung by the fact that they are suddenly cold and indifferent toward her. She reveals a latent insecurity about her short stature when she assumes that Helena has used her height (“her personage, her tall personage”) to win Lysander’s love, and her quick temper is revealed in Helena’s fear that Hermia will attack her (III.ii.293). The men’s exaggerated masculine aggression leads them to vow to protect Helena from the dreaded Hermia—a ridiculous state of affairs given that they are two armed men whereas Hermia is a tiny, unarmed woman. Their aggression betrays Helena, however, as the men refocus it on their competition for her love.

The potion is responsible for the confusion of the lovers’ situation; thus, Shakespeare links the theme of magic to the motif of imbalanced love, which dominates the scene. Had the love potion never been brought into play, the Athenian lovers would still be tangled in their romantic mess, but they would all understand it, whereas the fairies’ meddling has left both Hermia and Helena unable to comprehend the situation. Additionally, Puck’s magical ventriloquism is what prevents Lysander and Demetrius from killing each other at the end of the scene. Thus, magic both brings about their mutual hostility (to this point, Lysander has not been antagonistic toward Demetrius) and resolves it.

Act IV

Scene I

[M]an’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.

As the Athenian lovers lie asleep in the grove, Titania enters with Bottom, still with the head of an ass, and their fairy attendants. Titania tells Bottom to lie down with his head in her lap, so that she may twine roses into his hair and kiss his “fair large ears” (IV.i.4). Bottom orders Peaseblossom to scratch his head and sends Cobweb to find him some honey. Titania asks Bottom if he is hungry, and he replies that he has a strange appetite for hay. Titania suggests that she send a fairy to fetch him nuts from a squirrel’s hoard, but Bottom says that he would rather have a handful of dried peas. Yawning, he declares that he is very tired. Titania tells him to sleep in her arms, and she sends the fairies away. Gazing at Bottom’s head, she cries, “O how I love thee, how I dote on thee!” and they fall asleep (IV.i.42).

Puck and Oberon enter the glade and comment on the success of Oberon’s revenge. Oberon says that he saw Titania earlier in the woods and taunted her about her love for the ass-headed Bottom; he asked her for the Indian child, promising to

undo the spell if she would yield him, to which she consented. Satisfied, Oberon bends over the sleeping Titania and speaks the charm to undo the love potion. Titania wakes and is amazed to find that she is sleeping with the donkeylike Bottom. Oberon calls for music and takes his queen away to dance. She says that she hears the morning lark, and they exit. Puck speaks a charm over Bottom to restore his normal head, and he follows after his master.

As dawn breaks, Theseus, his attendants, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter to hear the baying of Theseus's hounds. They are startled to find the Athenian youths sleeping in the glade. They wake them and demand their story, which the youths are only partly able to recall—to them, the previous night seems as insubstantial as a dream. All that is clear to them is that Demetrius and Helena love each other, as do Lysander and Hermia. Theseus orders them to follow him to the temple for a great wedding feast. As they leave, Bottom wakes. He says that he has had a wondrous dream and that he will have Peter Quince write a ballad of his dream to perform at the end of their play.

Analysis of scene I

Barely 300 lines long, Act IV is the shortest and most transitional of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* five acts. The first three serve respectively to introduce the characters, establish the comic situation, and develop the comedy; Act IV ends the conflict and leads to the happy ending in Act V. What is most remarkable, perhaps, is the speed with which the conflict is resolved and the farce comes to an end; despite the ubiquity of chaos in Act III, all that is necessary to resolve matters is a bit of potion on Lysander's eyelids and Oberon's forgiveness of his wife. The climactic moment between Titania and Oberon, during which she agrees to give him the Indian boy, is not even shown onstage but is merely described. Though Demetrius's love of Helena is a by-product of the magic potion rather than an expression of his natural feelings, love has been put into balance, allowing for a traditional marriage ending. As is often the case with Shakespeare, the dramatic situation is closely tied to the circumstances of the external environment; just as the conflict is ending and a semblance of order is restored among the characters, the sun comes up. There is no real climax in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; rather, as soon as the scenario has progressed to a suitable degree of complication and hilarity, Shakespeare simply invokes the fairies' magic to dispel all conflict. As the sun comes up, the reappearance of Theseus and Hippolyta, who symbolize the power and structure of the outside world, begins to dispel the magical dream of the play.

Theseus and Hippolyta are extremely important figures both at its beginning and at its end, but they disappear entirely during

the main action in the magical forest. The duke and his Amazon bride are romanticized in the play, but they belong solely to the nonmagical waking world, where they remain wholly in control of their own feelings and actions. An important element of the dream realm, as the lovers come to realize upon waking in a daze, is that one is in control of neither oneself nor one's surroundings. In this way, the forest and fairies contribute to the lovers' sense of their experience as a dream, even though the action happens largely while they are awake.

Scene II

At Quince's house, the craftsmen sit sombrely and worry about their missing friend Bottom. Having last seen him shortly before the appearance of the ass-headed monster in the forest, the craftsmen worry that he has been felled by this terrifying creature. Starveling suspects that the fairies have cast some enchantment on Bottom. Flute asks whether they will go through with the play if Bottom does not return from the woods, and Peter Quince declares that to do so would be impossible, as Bottom is the only man in Athens capable of portraying Pyramus. The sad craftsmen agree that their friend is the wittiest, most intelligent, and best person in all of Athens.

Snug enters with an alarming piece of news: Theseus has been married, along with "two or three lords and ladies" (presumably Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena), and the newlyweds are eager to see a play (IV.ii.16). Flute laments Bottom's absence, noting that Bottom would certainly have won a great deal of money from the admiring duke for his portrayal of Pyramus.

Just then, Bottom bursts triumphantly into the room and asks why everyone looks so sad. The men are overjoyed to see him, and he declares that he has an amazing story to tell them about his adventure in the forest. Quince asks to hear it, but Bottom says that there is no time: they must don their costumes and go straight to the duke's palace to perform their play. As they leave, Bottom tells them not to eat onions or garlic before the play, as they must be prepared to "utter sweet breath" (IV.ii.36).

Analysis of Scene II

This brief comic scene returns the focus of the play to the subplot of the Athenian craftsmen. Structurally, Act IV, scene ii represents something of a new beginning for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: the main conflict of the play has been resolved, but rather than ending with the weddings of the lovers, as is customary in an Elizabethan comedy (the weddings do not even occur onstage here), Shakespeare chooses to include an extended epilogue

devoted to sheer comedy. The epilogue takes up all of Act V and centers around the craftsmen's performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* for the Athenian crowd. Act IV, scene ii transfers the focus of the play from magic and unbalanced love to a play-within-a-play, in which the themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, not too heavy to begin with, are recycled into a form so ridiculous and garbled that the play draws to a wholly untroubled conclusion.

Though the preceding events of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have been far from tragic, many of the characters have experienced unpleasant emotions, such as jealousy, lovesickness, and insecurity. Act IV, scene ii makes a basic transition from sadness to joy as Bottom's return transforms his fellow craftsmen's sorrow and confusion into delight and eagerness. It is no coincidence that Bottom's reappearance occurs almost simultaneously with the audience being told that the lovers have been married. Just as the marriages dispel the romantic angst of the play, so does Bottom's return dispel the worry of his comrades. Similarly, the arrival in the forest of Theseus and Hippolyta, representatives of order, coincides with the Athenian lovers' waking from their chaotic, dreamlike romp of the previous night.

Act V, Scene I- epilogue

At his palace, Theseus speaks with Hippolyta about the story that the Athenian youths have told them concerning the magical romantic mix-ups of the previous night. Theseus says that he does not believe the story, adding that darkness and love have a way of exciting the imagination. Hippolyta notes, however, that if their story is not true, then it is quite strange that all of the lovers managed to narrate the events in exactly the same way.

The youths enter and Theseus greets them heartily. He says that they should pass the time before bed with a performance, and he summons Egeus (or, in some editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Philostrate) to read him a list of plays, each of which Theseus deems unacceptable. Egeus then tells him of the Pyramus and Thisbe story that the common craftsmen have prepared; warning that it is terrible in every respect, he urges Theseus not to see it. Theseus, however, says that if the craftsmen's intentions are dutiful, there will be something of merit in the play no matter how poor the performance.

The lords and ladies take their seats, and Quince enters to present a prologue, which he speaks haltingly. His strange pauses put the meaning of his words in question, so that he says, "Our true intent is. All for your delight / We are not here. That you should here repent you," though he means to communicate that "Our true intent is all for your delight. / We are not here that you should here repent

you". The other players then enter, including two characters performing the roles of Wall and Moonshine. They act out a clumsy version of the story, during which the noblemen and women joke among themselves about the actors' strange speeches and misapprehensions. Bottom, in particular, makes many perplexing statements while playing Pyramus, such as "I see a voice...I can hear my Thisbe's face" (V.i.190–191). Pyramus and Thisbe meet at, and speak across, the actor playing Wall, who holds up his fingers to indicate a chink. Snug, as the lion, enters and pours forth a speech explaining to the ladies that he is not really a lion. He roars, scaring Thisbe away, and clumsily rends her mantle. Finding the bloody mantle, Pyramus duly commits suicide. Thisbe does likewise when she finds her Pyramus dead. After the conclusion of the play, during which Bottom pretends to kill himself, with a cry of "die, die, die, die, die," Bottom asks if the audience would like an epilogue or a bergamask dance; Theseus replies that they will see the dance (V.i.295). Bottom and Flute perform the dance, and the whole group exits for bed.

scene II–epilogue

*Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.*

Puck enters and says that, now that night has fallen, the fairies will come to the castle and that he has been "sent with broom before / To sweep the dust behind the door" (V.ii.19–20). Oberon and Titania enter and bless the palace and its occupants with a fairy song, so that the lovers will always be true to one another, their children will be beautiful, and no harm will ever visit Theseus and Hippolyta. Oberon and Titania take their leave, and Puck makes a final address to the audience. He says that if the play has offended, the audience should remember it simply as a dream. He wishes the audience members good night and asks them to give him their hands in applause if they are kind friends.

Analysis

The structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is somewhat compacted in that the first four acts contain all of the play's main action, with the height of conflict occurring in Act III and a happy turn of events resembling a conclusion in Act IV. Act V serves as a kind of joyful comic epilogue to the rest of the play, focusing on the craftsmen's hilariously bungling efforts to present their play and on the noble Athenians' good-natured jesting during the craftsmen's performance. The heady tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe* becomes comical in the hands of the craftsmen. The bearded Flute's portrayal of the maiden Thisbe as well as the melodramatic ("Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall") and nonsensical ("Sweet

moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams”) language of the play strips the performance of any seriousness or profound meaning.

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe, which comes from an ancient Babylonian legend often reworked in European mythology, would have been familiar to educated members of Shakespeare’s audiences. The story likely influenced *Romeo and Juliet*, although Shakespeare also pulled elements from other versions of the Romeo and Juliet tale. In both stories, two young lovers from feuding families communicate under cover of darkness; both male lovers erroneously think their beloveds dead and commit suicide, and both females do likewise when they find their lovers dead.

Insofar as the fifth act of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has thematic significance (the main purpose of the play-within-a-play is to provide comic enjoyment), it is that the Pyramus and Thisbe story revisits the themes of romantic hardship and confusion that run through the main action of the play. Pyramus and Thisbe are kept apart by parental will, just as Lysander and Hermia were; their tragic end results from misinterpretation—Pyramus takes Thisbe’s bloody mantle as proof that she is dead, which recalls, to some extent, Puck’s mistaking of Lysander for Demetrius (as well as Titania’s misconception of Bottom as a beautiful lover). In this way, the play-within-a-play lightheartedly satirizes the anguish that earlier plagued the Athenian lovers.

Given the title *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, it is no surprise that one of the main themes of the play is dreams, particularly as they relate to darkness and love. When morning comes, ending the magical night in the forest, the lovers begin to suspect that their experience in the woods was merely a dream. Theseus suggests as much to Hippolyta, who finds it strange that all the young lovers would have had the *same* dream. In the famous final speech of the play, Puck turns this idea outward, recommending that if audience members did not enjoy the play, they should assume that they have simply been dreaming throughout. This suggestion captures perfectly the delicate, insubstantial nature of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: just as the fairies mended their mischief by sorting out the romantic confusion of the young lovers, Puck accounts for the whimsical nature of the play by explaining it as a manifestation of the subconscious.

8.2. THEMES OF THE PLAY

The play deals with various themes. Here are some major themes explored by Shakespeare in this play.

8.2.1. True and False Love

The overriding theme of the play deals with the nature of love. Though true love seems to be held up as an ideal, false love is mostly what we are shown. Underneath his frantic comedy, Shakespeare seems to be asking the questions all lovers ask in the throes of their confusion: How do we know when love is real? How can we trust ourselves when we are so easily swayed by passion and by romantic conventions? Some readers sense a bitterness behind the comedy. But it seems to be the truth behind Shakespeare's satire. Often, love leads us down blind alleys and makes us do things we regret later. The lovers in the play—especially the men—are made to seem rather shallow. They change the objects of their affections, all the time swearing eternal love to one or the other. Though marriage is held up at the end as a kind of unifying sacrament, and so gives a picture of a true, sensible, and socially sanctioned love, some critics have found its order a little hollow. The confusion that precedes the weddings seems, somehow, much more to the point.

8.2.2. Seeing and Being Blind

From the opening scene, "eyes" and "seeing" are shown to be at the core of how we perceive things in love. Helena says that "love looks not with the eyes but with the mind." In Shakespeare's terms, when lovers are led astray by their feelings they aren't seeing correctly; their eyes are "blind," in the same way we now say that love is blind. Lovers frequently see what they want to, not what is really there. When lovers look with such self-charmed eyes, they are said to be "doting," a key term in the play.

8.2.3. Waking and Dreaming

All four lovers, plus Bottom and Titania, fall asleep in the course of the play, and all wake up to have themselves or their situations changed. An opposition between waking and dreaming is continually enforced, starting, of course, with the very title of the play. After waking from their final sleep, the lovers feel that their experiences were just dreams. Puck also offers us this explanation in his final monologue: that the play itself was a dream, and that we were its slumbering dreamers. Moonlight is associated with dreaming, and daylight with waking. So all the fairy experiences, which take place during the moonlit night, may be just dreamlike hallucinations.

8.2.4. Reality and Illusion

All of the oppositions point toward our perception of reality. And nowhere can that perception be more interestingly tricked than

in the theatre, which is entirely built on the tension between illusion and reality, shadow and light. Shakespeare teases the audience about its gullibility at the same time he tests it. He makes fun of those who don't think we'd be able to tell the difference between a real or fake lion. He simultaneously charms the audience with a fairy world breathtaking in its magical beauty, making them want to believe in the preposterous. The theatre is called a place of shadows, but with the right lighting it can come into a life of its own, challenging all our notions about what is real and what illusionary.

8.2.5. Reason and Imagination

Theseus is continually aligned with reason. Sometimes he seems to be held up as a model for social man, clear-sighted (not doting) and responsible. He intentionally sets himself in opposition to the imagination when he compares the lover, the lunatic, and the poet to each other. Their similarity, he says, comes from the fact that they are all swayed by their imaginations. Looking at the sad plight of the lovers, we might agree with Theseus's conclusions. But we can also see that a reliance on reason makes Theseus blind in a different way. The world of the fairies, of magic, mystery, and creative power, is closed to him. Shakespeare says, through Theseus, that the poet "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and name." Though Theseus seems to say it with scorn, this is exactly what Shakespeare does for us by presenting the airy, spectral fairy world in detailed form. In that case, the workings of the imagination can be seen as something valuable, indeed. Bottom, waking from his dream, seems somehow able to hold the two worlds together. His immediate plan is to make his dream into a song. Perhaps, then, art is the bridge between the world of reason and the world of the imagination. Bottom says this is the power of "vision."

8.2.6. Change and Transformation

People are changing their minds, their hearts, and their images throughout the play. The woods become a special arena in which these changes take place. Demetrius and Lysander both change the objects of their affection, triggered by that excellent agent of change, the love juice of Cupid. So love itself is seen as an agent of transformation. It turns people around, and sometimes makes asses of them. That is, of course, exactly what happens to Bottom, though it may seem at times that Titania is the one who has made an ass of herself.

As day changes to night and back again, the fairies present a world transformed by magic, where nothing is what it seems, and everything may evolve into something else.

8.2.7. The Difficulty of the Love

“The course of true love never did run smooth,” comments Lysander, articulating one of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream’s* most important themes—that of the difficulty of love. Though most of the conflict in the play stems from the troubles of romance, and though the play involves a number of romantic elements, it is not truly a love story; it distances the audience from the emotions of the characters in order to poke fun at the torments and afflictions that those in love suffer. The tone of the play is so lighthearted that the audience never doubts that things will end happily, and it is therefore free to enjoy the comedy without being caught up in the tension of an uncertain outcome.

The theme of love’s difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—that is, romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman, leaving one woman with too many suitors and one with too few. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome, and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers’ tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship between Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon’s coveting of Titania’s Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later, Titania’s passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

8.2.8. Magic

The fairies’ magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander’s eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play’s tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom’s head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen’s attempt to stage their play.

8.2.9. Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout. The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters are involved: "I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what / dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream," Bottom says, unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected him as anything but the result of slumber.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama.

8.2.10. Contrast

The idea of contrast is the basic building block of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The entire play is constructed around groups of opposites and doubles. Nearly every characteristic presented in the play has an opposite: Helena is tall, Hermia is short; Puck plays pranks, Bottom is the victim of pranks; Titania is beautiful, Bottom is grotesque. Further, the three main groups of characters (who are developed from sources as varied as Greek mythology, English folklore, and classical literature) are designed to contrast powerfully with one another: the fairies are graceful and magical, while the craftsmen are clumsy and earthy; the craftsmen are merry, while the lovers are overly serious. Contrast serves as the defining visual characteristic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the play's most indelible image being that of the beautiful, delicate Titania weaving flowers into the hair of the ass-headed Bottom. It seems impossible to imagine two figures less compatible with each other. The juxtaposition of extraordinary differences is the most important characteristic of the play's surreal atmosphere and is thus perhaps the play's central motif; there is no scene in which extraordinary contrast is not present.

8.2.11. Theseus and Hippolyta

Theseus and Hippolyta bookend *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, appearing in the daylight at both the beginning and the end of the play's main action. They disappear, however, for the duration of the action, leaving in the middle of Act I, scene i and not reappearing until Act IV, as the sun is coming up to end the magical night in the forest. Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta, the ruler of Athens and his warrior bride, to represent order and stability, to contrast with the uncertainty, instability, and darkness of most of the play. Whereas an important element of the dream realm is that one is not in control of one's environment, Theseus and Hippolyta are always entirely in control of theirs. Their reappearance in the daylight of Act IV to hear Theseus's hounds signifies the end of the dream state of the previous night and a return to rationality.

8.2.12. The Love Potion

The love potion is made from the juice of a flower that was struck with one of Cupid's misfired arrows; it is used by the fairies to wreak romantic havoc throughout Acts II, III, and IV. Because the meddling fairies are careless with the love potion, the situation of the young Athenian lovers becomes increasingly chaotic and confusing (Demetrius and Lysander are magically compelled to transfer their love from Hermia to Helena), and Titania is hilariously humiliated (she is magically compelled to fall deeply in love with the ass-headed Bottom). The love potion thus becomes a symbol of the unreasoning, fickle, erratic, and undeniably powerful nature of love, which can lead to inexplicable and bizarre behavior and cannot be resisted.

8.2.13. The Craftsmen's Play

The play-within-a-play that takes up most of Act V, scene i is used to represent, in condensed form, many of the important ideas and themes of the main plot. Because the craftsmen are such bumbling actors, their performance satirizes the melodramatic Athenian lovers and gives the play a purely joyful, comedic ending. Pyramus and Thisbe face parental disapproval in the play-within-a-play, just as Hermia and Lysander do; the theme of romantic confusion enhanced by the darkness of night is rehashed, as Pyramus mistakenly believes that Thisbe has been killed by the lion, just as the Athenian lovers experience intense misery because of the mix-ups caused by the fairies' meddling. The craftsmen's play is, therefore, a kind of symbol for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* itself: a story involving powerful emotions that is made hilarious by its comical presentation.

8.3. CRITICS ON THE PLAY

The various eminent critics have perceived the following aspects of the play; they are:

8.3.1. On the Play

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" shines like "Romeo and Juliet" in darkness, but shines merrily. Lysander, one of the two nonentities who are its heroes, complains at the beginning about the brevity of love's course...: So quick bright things come to confusion.

This, however, is at the beginning. Bright things will come to clarity in a playful, sparkling night while fountains gush and spangled starlight betrays the presence in a wood near Athens of magic persons who can girdle the earth in forty minutes and bring any cure for human woe. Nor will the woe to be cured have any power to elicit our anxiety.... There will be no pretence that reason and love keep company, or that because they do not death lurks at the horizon.

Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, 1939

8.3.2. On Characterization

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then, Shakespeare defines his characters according to what they represent, according to their labels. The lovers are not individuals, they are "lovers," and the definition of that word will determine their behaviour; Puck's actions too are predicated by the definition of "Puck." Nor is the process restricted to characters; even places stand for something, are labels. Athens, established in literary tradition as the legendary seat of reason (in Boccaccio's *Teseida* and "The Knight's Tale") is here almost a byword for rational order. The wilderness outside Athens is called a "wood" and not a forest, as is the corresponding locale in *As You Like It*, because it must also be a label for "mad," and in case we miss the point, Demetrius is made to pun on "wood" (for "mad" and "forest") and "wooded"; "And here am I, and wood within this wood...." With everything so clearly defined and with the infinite complexities of realistic character and "real life" settings so firmly excised, no wonder those who came looking for realism go away convinced that the play is a little too simple.

Stephen Fender, Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1968

8.3.3. On the End of the Play

If ever the son of man in his wanderings was at home and drinking by the fireside, he is at home in the house of Theseus. All

the dreams have been forgotten, as a melancholy dream remembered throughout the morning might be forgotten in the human certainty of any other triumphant evening party; and so the play seems naturally ended. It began on the earth and it ends on the earth. Thus to round off the whole midsummer night's dream in an eclipse of daylight is an effect of genius. But of this comedy, as I have said, the mark is that genius goes beyond itself; and one touch is added which makes the play colossal. Theseus and his train retire with a crashing finale, full of humour and wisdom and things set right, and silence falls on the house. Then there comes a faint sound of little feet, and for a moment, as it were, the elves look into the house, asking which is the reality. "Suppose we are the realities and they the shadows." If that ending were acted properly any modern man would feel shaken to his marrow if he had to walk home from the theatre through a country lane.

G. K. Chesterton, Chesterton On Shakespeare, 1971

8.3.4. On Shakespeare's Poetic Speeches

No, his heart was in these passages of verse, and so the heart of the play is in them. And the secret of the play- the refutation of all doctrinaire criticism of it- lies in the fact that though they may offend against every letter of dramatic law they fulfil the inmost spirit of it, inasmuch as they are dramatic in themselves. They are instinct with that excitement, that spontaneity, that sense of emotional overflow which is drama. They are as carefully constructed for effective speaking as a messenger's speech in a Greek drama. One passage in particular, Puck's "My mistress with a monster is in love," is both in idea and form, in its tension, climax, and rounding off, a true messenger's speech. Shakespeare, I say, was from the first a playwright in spite of himself. Even when he seems to sacrifice drama to poem he- instinctively or not- manages to make the poem itself more dramatic than the drama he sacrifices.

Harley Granville-Barker, More Prefaces to Shakespeare, 1974

8.3.5. On Bottom's "vision"

By contrast "vision," as it is introduced into the play, is a code word for the dream understood, the dream correctly valued. Often the user does not know that he knows; this is another of the play's thematic patterns, supporting the elevation of the irrational above the merely rational. As a device it is related to a character type always present in Shakespeare, but more highly refined in the later plays, that of the wise fool. Thus Bottom, awakening, is immediately and intuitively impressed with the significance of his

"dream," which we of course recognize as not a dream at all, but rather a literal reality within the play.

Marjorie B. Garber, Dream In Shakespeare, 1974

8.3.6. On the Fairies

What is true of the moon applies to the fairies. They are a curious mixture of wood spirits and household gods, pagan deities and local pixies. They inhabit the environs of Athens and follow the fortunes of Theseus and Hippolyta, but they are clearly the spirits whom we can consider "almost essential to a Midsummer Play," detectably English in character and habit. Through Titania and her train, Shakespeare emphasizes their innocence and delicacy; in Oberon and Puck, he expresses their darker side, potentially malevolent in the lore of the time.

David P. Young, Something of Great Constancy: The Art of A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1966

8.3.7. On the Comedy of Language

The Dream's comedy of language attains its peak of extravagance in "Pyramus." One favourite effect is continued from the play proper: the misassignment of sense-experience- Pyramus sees a voice, hopes to hear his Thisby's face, and bids his tongue lose its light. In the rehearsal-scene he is supposed to have gone "but to see a noise that he heard," and the effect has been taken to its highest point in Bottom's garbling of St. Paul: "The eye of man hath not heard...." That parody would not have been possible in anything but comic prose; and prose, as is normal in Shakespeare, is the vehicle for the scenes of plebeian comedy. Bottom's adherence to it in fairyland, while Titania speaks verse, adds to the characterization and the comic effect, emphasizing how unshakeably he remains himself, and how out of touch, inhabiting still their disparate worlds, they are with each other.

Harold F. Brooks, Introduction to Arden, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1979

8.4. LET'S SUM UP

The unit covers the plot-summary of each scene in the five Acts. After recounting the plot of scenes in nutshell, it critically comments on the events and incidents in the play and analyses it. After plot summary and discussion on each scene the unit critically explores various themes traced in the play. The unit concludes with the important views on the various aspects of the play. The critics' opinions, along with the textual quotations, on the play will help the students to quote while answering the questions in the examination.

8.5. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Trace the major themes of the play, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*
2. Compare and contrast the treatment of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. How do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrate the difference between comedy and tragedy?
4. What role do Theseus and Hippolyta play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? What is the significance of the fact that they are absent from the play's main action?
5. In *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* characters are not individuals they are "lovers". Elaborate this statement.
6. Write short notes on the following:
 - I. Role of the play-within-a-play in Act V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
 - II. Thematic contrasts in the play
 - III. Supernatural and Magical elements



CRITICAL STUDY OF WYCHERLEY: THE COUNTRY WIFE PART I

Unit Structure

- 9.0. Objectives
- 9.1. Introduction to Wycherley
- 9.2. Background to the Restoration Comedy
 - 9.2.1. Love and Marriage in three Restoration Comedies
 - 9.2.2. Social and Historical Context
 - 9.2.3. The Rakish Hero
 - 9.2.4. Changing Ideals of the Feminine
- 9.3. Background to the Play
- 9.4. Let's Sum up

9.0. OBJECTIVES

To make the students aware with the general view of the restoration comedies, this unit will focus on the background to the Restoration Comedy and its various strands: love and marriage in the three restoration comedies, social and historical context, the rakish hero of the Restoration comedies and changing ideals of the feminine characters in those plays. The unit also consists of the introductory knowledge about William Wycherley and the background to the play, The Country Wife which we are going to study thoroughly in the next unit.

9.1. INTRODUCTION TO WYCHERLEY

William Wycherley was born in 1640 Shropshire. He came of an old family sojourned as a young man in France and frequented the salon of Duchess de Montausier where he found an atmosphere full of the spirit of Hotel de Rambouillet. Returning to England at the Restoration, he earned upon the life of pleasure in London. The success of his first play Love in a Wood that was staged in 1671. This play brought him to the touch with the court. The Gentleman Dancing Master, The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer followed very soon as the successful plays. Then he retired from the stage and contracted a rich marriage which proved

disappointed, traversed a period of financial embarrassment and lived until 1715 enjoyed literary friendship. During the last period of his life, he was connected to Pope to whom he submitted his poems for correction.

The effort of Wycherley's to bring to Buckingham's notice the case of Samuel Butler, so shamefully neglected by the court which he had served, shows that even the writer of such heartless plays as *The Country Wife* was familiar with generous impulses, while his uncompromising lines in defence of Buckingham, when the duke in his turn fell into trouble, show that the inventor of so shameless a fraud as that which forms the pivot of *The Plain Dealer* may in actual life possess the passion for fair-play which is believed to be a specially English quality. But among the ninety-nine religions with which Voltaire accredited England there is one whose permanency has never been shaken--the worship of gentility. To this Wycherley remained faithful to the day of his death; and if his relations to "that other world beyond," which the Puritans had adopted, were liable to change with his environment, it was because that other world was altogether out of fashion.

Wycherley's university career seems also to have been influenced by the same causes. As a fellow-commoner of Queen's college, Oxford, he was entered only as a "student of philosophy," which meant a student of nothing in particular; and he does not seem to have matriculated or to have taken a degree.

Wycherley's highest delights were in pleasure and the stage, and in 1672 he produced at Drury Lane theatre his *Love in a Wood*. With regard to this comedy he told Pope, and repeated his statement until Pope believed him that he wrote it the year before he went to Oxford. But we need not believe him; for the worst witness against a man is often himself. To pose as the wicked boy of genius has been the foolish ambition of many writers, but on inquiry it will generally be found that these ink-born Lotharios are not nearly so wicked as they would have us suppose. When Wycherley charges himself with having written scenes so callous and so depraved that even Barbara Palmer's appetite for profligacy was satisfied. Indeed, there is every reason to discredit him; for the whole air and spirit of the piece belong to an experienced and hardened man of the world, and not to a boy who would fain pose as such. Not only in depravity of moral tone, but in real dramatic ripeness, some of the scenes are the strongest to be found among Wycherley's plays. If, indeed, a competent critic were asked to point out the finest touch in all his writings, he would probably select a speech in the third scene of the third act of this very comedy, foolish and boastful rake Dapperwit, having taken his friend to see his mistress for the express purpose of advertising his lordship over her, is coolly denied and insolently repulsed. "I think," says

Dapperwit, "women take inconstancy from me worse than from any man breathing." The remark is worthy of the hand that drew Malvolio; and certain it is that no mere boy could have described, by this quiet touch, a vanity as impenetrable as the chain-armor which no shaft can pierce.

That the writer of such a play should at once become the talk of King Charles' court was inevitable; equally inevitable was it that the author of the song at the end of the first act, in praise of harlots and their offspring, should touch to its depth the soul of the duchess of Cleveland. Possibly Wycherley intended this famous song as a glorification of her Grace and her profession, for he seems to have been more delighted than surprised when, as he passed in his coach through Pall Mall, he heard the duchess address him from her carriage window as a "rascal," a "villain" and as a son of the very kind of lady his song had lauded. His answer was in perfect readiness: "Madame, you have been pleased to bestow a title on me which belongs only to the fortunate." Perceiving that she received the compliment in the spirit in which it was meant, he lost no time in calling upon her, and was from that moment the recipient of those favors to which he alludes with pride in the dedication of the play to her. Voltaire's story that the titled dame used to go to Wycherley's chambers in the Temple disguised as a country wench, in a straw hat, shod with pattens and a basket in her hand, may be in part apocryphal, for certain it is that disguise was quite superfluous in the case of the mistress of Charles II. At least it shows how general was the opinion that, under such patronage, Wycherley's fortune as a poet and dramatist, "eminent for his quality and politeness," was now assured.

In *The Relapse*, the third of Wycherley's plays the mistake of introducing the element of farce damages a splendid comedy, but leaves it a capital play still. In *The Gentleman Dancing Master* this mingling of discordant elements destroys a piece that would never, under any circumstances, have been strong, but which abounds in animal spirits and is luminous here and there with true dramatic points. It is, however, on his two last comedies, *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, that Wycherley's fame must rest as a master of that comedy of repartee which, inaugurated by Etherege. And afterward the comedy of repartee was brought to perfection by Congreve and Vanbrugh.

The Country Wife

The Country Wife is so full of wit, ingenuity, animal spirits and lively humor that it would probably have survived as long as the acted drama retained a literary form in England. So strong, indeed, is the hand that could draw such a character as Marjory Pinchwife, as Sparkish and Horner. Horner is the undoubtedly original of all

those cool, impudent rakes with which the English stage has since been familiar. In order to do justice to the merits of *The Country Wife* we have only to compare it with *The Country Girl*, afterward made famous by the acting of Mrs. Jordan, the play in which Garrick endeavoured to free Wycherley's comedy of its load of licentiousness by altering and sweetening the motive, and as Voltaire afterward endeavoured to purify the motive of *The Plain Dealer* in *La Prude*.

The Plain Dealer

About *The Plain Dealer* Voltaire said: "I know of no comedy, ancient or modern, that has so much spirit." It is, indeed, impossible to overestimate the immense influence of this comedy upon all subsequent comedies of repartee, from those of Congreve and Vanbrugh to those of Douglas Jerrold and T.W. Robertson. If the comedy itself is extinct, this is because a play whose motive is monstrous and intolerable can only live in a monstrous and intolerable state of society. It is because Wycherley's genius was followed by Nemesis, who always dogs the footsteps of the defiler of literary art. But while we can excuse Macaulay's indignation at what he terms this "satyr-like defilement of art," the literary richness of the play almost nullifies the value of the criticism.

Probably none of the plays of this period have been so frequently quoted and adapted. Take, for instance, Manly's fine saying to Freeman in the first act: "I weigh the man, not his title, 'tis not the king's stamp can make the metal better or heavier." And in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne says: "Honors, like impressions upon a coin, may give an ideal and local value to a bit of base metal, but gold and silver will pass the world over without any other recommendation than their even weight." But it is in the fourth and fifth acts that the coruscations of Wycherley's comic genius are the most dazzling. It is there, also, that the licentiousness is most astounding. Not that the worst scenes in this play are really more wicked than those from other dramatists, but they are more seriously imagined, and they are more terribly and earnestly realistic. They form a striking instance of the folly of the artist who selects a story which cannot be dramatized without hurting the finer instincts of human nature.

The great dream of all the men about town, as is shown in Wycherley's plays, was to marry a widow, young and handsome, a peer's daughter if possible, but in any event rich, and spend her money upon wine and women. While talking to a friend in a bookseller's shop at Tunbridge, Wycherley heard *The Plain Dealer* asked for by a lady who, in the person of the countess of Drogheda, answered all the above requirements. An introduction ensued, then love-making, then a secret marriage, for, fearing to lose the king's

patronage and the income therefrom, Wycherley still thought it politic to pass as a bachelor.

Love in a Wood had proclaimed the writer to be the kind of husband whose virtue prospers best when closely guarded at the domestic hearth. Wherever he went the countess followed him, and when she did allow him to meet his boon companions it was in a tavern in Bow Street, opposite his own house, and even there under certain protective conditions. In summer or in winter he was obliged to sit with the window open and the blinds up, so that his wife might see that the party included no member of a sex for which her husband's plays had advertised his partiality. She died at last, however, and left him the whole of her fortune.

At the age of seventy-five he married a young girl, and is said to have done so in order to spite his nephew, the next in succession, knowing that he himself must shortly die and that the jointure would impoverish the estate. No doubt it is true enough that he married the girl and died a few days afterward; but, if we consider that the lady was young and an heiress, or supposed to be an heiress, and if we further consider how difficult it was for an old gallant of Wycherley's personal vanity to realize his physical condition, we may well suppose that, even if he talked about "marrying to spite his nephew," he did so as a cloak for other impulses, such as senile desire or senile cupidity, or a blending of both.

9.2.BACKGROUND TO THE RESTORATION COMEDY

The comedy of manners is a genre of comedy that flourished on the English stage during the Restoration period. Plays of this type are typically set in the world of the upper class, and ridicule the pretensions of those who consider themselves socially superior, deflating them with satire. With witty dialogue and cleverly constructed scenarios, comedies of manners comment on the standards and mores of society and explore the relationships of the sexes. Marriage is a frequent subject. Typically, there is little depth of characterization; instead, the playwrights used stock character type. The stock character is the fool, the schemer, the hypocrite, the jealous husband, the interfering old parents. The plots were constructed with rapid twists in events, often precipitated by miscommunications. The roots of the comedy of manners can be traced back to Molière's seventeenth-century French comedies and to the "humours" comedy of Ben Jonson. Indeed, certain characteristics can also be found as far back in time as ancient Greek plays.

Critics agree that the masters of the comedy of manners were George Etherege (1635-1692), William Wycherley (1640-

1716), John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), William Congreve (1670-1729), and George Farquhar (1678-1707). Etherege's *The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub* (1664) and *She Wou'd If She Cou'd* (1668) are often seen as inaugurating the genre of the comedy of manners, and his characters, including Sir Frederick Frollick and Sir Fopling Flutter, were favourites with audiences and became standard character types.

Wycherley's comedies are pointed and relatively harsh. *The Country Wife* deals with the jealousy experienced by an old man, Bud Pinchwife, married to a young woman, Margery. Margery's affair with another man, and her concealment of it, is accepted as proper and understandable in light of Bud's abusiveness. Wycherley's masterpiece, *The Plain Dealer* (1676), is based on Molière's *Le Misanthrope* and follows the relationship problems of a sea-captain, Manly.

Congreve is considered by many critics to have been the greatest wit of the dramatists writing in this vein; William Hazlitt declared Congreve's dialogue brilliant and his style perfect. *The Old Bachelour* (1693) was a great popular success, as was *Love for Love* (1695). His last comedy, *The Way of the World* (1700), is now considered his masterpiece but was not successful upon its premier. Although marriage is at its center, the preoccupation is with contracts and negotiation of terms, not passionate love.

Vanbrugh's *The Relapse: Or Virtue in Danger* (1696) has two plots, only slightly connected, and includes seduction, infidelity, impersonation, and the attempt to gain another's fortune. Vanbrugh's masterwork, *The Provoked Wife* (1697), became notorious because it was given special attention by critic Jeremy Collier in his case against the immorality of the stage. In keeping with the plays of the time, the names of the characters often reflect their type: Heartfree, Sir John Brute, Constant, Lady Fanciful, and Colonel Bully.

Farquhar's comedies were written at the end of the period and serve as a transition to later comedies, noticeable in their greater sensitivity to characters as individuals rather than types. *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) makes fun of some of the foibles of military heroes, while *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) includes a remarkably modern-style divorce, due to the couple failing to make each other happy.

While they wrote in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, after the Restoration period, and after sentimental comedy had become the dominant comedic form, Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith composed plays that revived and renewed the comedy of manners genre. Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*

(1777) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), in particular, received popular and critical acclaim when first produced, and have been continuously staged to the present day.

The scholars find the study of Restoration Comedy rewarding because the comedy of manners so readily presents a view into the attitudes of society of the past. Newell W. Sawyer has traced the development of the genre and relates it to the changes occurring in society at large. John Palmer has focused on the changes in comedy wrought by Collier, whose criticism of what he deemed moral lapses in certain plays affected what playwrights produced thereafter. Attitudes toward youth and old age have been examined by Elisabeth Mignon, who noted the comedy of manners' reflection of society's preoccupation with aging. Margaret Lamb McDonald and Pat Gill have analyzed the comedy of manners for what it reveals about attitudes toward women, particularly in regards to their intelligence, independence, and sexuality. Not all critics have devoted their time solely to its treatment of society's mores. Some critics, such as David L. Hirst, have performed close readings of the texts themselves in order to judge the comedies on their merits as comedies.

9.2.1. Love and Marriage in Three Restoration Comedies

The Restoration comedies can be a window into a unique period of English history. Following the political and social turmoil of the English Civil War, the Restoration Age was characterized by a sense of loss and cultural disillusion coupled with efforts to restore social stability and cohesion. These conditions were associated with a diminishment in the influence of traditional institutions such as religion and the aristocracy and the rise of new institutions to replace them. *The Country Wife* and *The Rover* were both produced during this period of uncertain social structures and transformations, and *The Wives' Excuse* heralds the period's end and the beginning of a new age with new dominant values. This study will examine this progression in terms of the portrayal of each play's hero, a look at each play's heroine and minor female characters, and how the plays comment on marriage and gender to see how, if at all, art and life intersect.

Joseph Wood Krutch contends that Restoration comedy "was derived from the union of certain elements of the old comedy of Humours with certain elements in the romantic plays of the same period. From the former it took its realism, and from the latter hints in the handling of dialogue...Ben Jonson had given a picture of the bottom of society, so that we may call his plays comedies of bad manners. Fletcher had elaborated the play of courtly characters...The writers of the Restoration borrowed from both, presenting a picture as realistic as that of Jonson, but of a society

as cultivated as that in the imaginary courts of Fletcher". Though other critics may dispute Krutch's lineage, the point is that Restoration comedy did have its antecedents in English drama and was not an aberration, reflective of earlier forms as well as being a product of its time.

Restoration comedy had a vogue of approximately fifty years, from 1668 to the 1710's. Built around a central group of young men and women, "its essential ingredients are wit, urbanity and sophistication. The scene is almost invariably London-its streets, parks and coffee houses. The themes are, almost exclusively, love, sexual intrigue and cuckoldry". Also referred to as the Comedy of Manners because the chief characters are usually members of high society, the Restoration comedy tends to feature recurring types- "the graceful young rake, the faithless wife, the deceived husband, and perhaps, a charming young heroine who is to be bestowed in the end on the rake". Finally, great emphasis is placed on witty dialogue and repartee for its own sake. Morrah remarks, "It was in this emphasis on wit, the insistence on elegance in writing, on tidiness of mind that the age differed from its predecessor". Witty repartee is often operative in these plays, used as a device to ridicule and reveal the flaws of others as well as an aid in attaining one's own goals. As Krutch remarks, "The technique of wit [can] become that of rationalizing debauchery into a philosophical system and producing a great corpus of mock casuistry whose fine points are expounded with zeal worthy of a theologian". Wit is also a comic and clever way to woo a member of the opposite sex, and one critic credits Dryden with first popularizing "the battle of wits between the emancipated young couple". The Country Wife, The Rover, and The Wives' Excuse collectively share a number of these themes, attributes and character types, and the degree and significance of these commonalities will form the basis of my analysis.

9.2.2. Social and Historical Context

Yet before proceeding to the plays themselves, I would like to "set the stage" as it were. No matter how realistic a work of art, its nature AS art prevents one from making a direct comparison with the particular society in which it is produced. Yet art and society do intersect and often a work can be more appreciated when considered in its historical context. The Restoration comedies in particular intersect with Restoration society at a number of vital points. Many critics remark on the efforts of the contemporary playwrights "to represent the actual manners of the times, and to show real characters in a familiar setting". Wilkinson concurs "that certain essential property of the plays are derived directly and barely altered from gallant society". The three areas of Restoration society need to be investigated for their possible effects and

influences on the characters and content of the Restoration comedies. These areas are King Charles II and his court, audience composition, and economic and cultural changes that pertain to audience and theme.

Charles II ascended the throne of England in 1660 at age thirty and reigned until his death in 1685. Charles himself was considered a "rake," a successful and skilled pursuer of women, and he boasted a string of beautiful mistresses throughout his reign. Patrick Morrah writes that Charles was especially influenced by the French Court of Louis XIV and wanted his own court to imitate its elegance and sophistication; thus, the emphasis was on fashion, art, wit, and love. Morrah qualifies that though "there was as much womanizing at the Louvre (and perhaps at the Vatican) as there ever was at Whitehall, certainly at this palace it was openly practiced for all to see", and goes on to point out that "royal mistresses were a phenomenon new to even the oldest of English observers; not since the far-off days of Henry VIII had there been so much as a mention of extra-marital adventures". Thus, the King and his mistresses helped to make the pursuit of love, and particularly sexual love, the main preoccupation of the gallant lords and ladies who made up Court society. The King's mistresses set the tones in women's dress which tended to emphasize sexual suggestiveness and sensuality and "the king set an example of promiscuity, and his followers emulated him with enthusiasm".

In consequence, Burns' charge rings true: "The atmosphere of the plays corresponded very closely with the atmosphere of a portion of society, that their heroes were drawn from the characters of Sedley, Rochester, and Charles himself, and that however shocking the incidents and speeches might be, they are to be matched in dissoluteness by what is to be found in the histories and memoirs". This allusion to Sedley, etc. draws attention to another vital connection between the Court and Restoration theatre: many playwrights of the age were also associated with the Court. "Of the five great comedy writers, Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, four were distinguished men of fashion, and two were, in addition, knights". In fact, many were part of a loosely knit group of amateur writers known as the Court Wits and these included Sir George Etherege, Sir Robert Howard, his brother-in-law John Dryden, Sir Charles Sedley, and the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Rochester. Hume declares that Wycherley was a fringe member and Aphra Behn was a close friend of Rochester. Obviously most of these writers knew each other and moved within the same social set so their "realistic" representations of fashionable characters and situations were certainly informed by actual knowledge and experience.

Two licensed theatres were opened in 1662 under the special patronage of the King and the Duke of York, and it was in "the theatre that the talents of the Restoration wits found their most prolific output" and became the center of fashionable life. Professional actresses were allowed on the stage for the first time, and Morrah claims that the Restoration wits, and indeed the London theatrical scene, revolved around these beautiful ladies. Many became mistresses of playwrights, and an actress named Nell Gwyn became mistress to King Charles himself. In these various ways it is clear that the relationship between the Restoration Court and the theatre was an intimate one.

Not only were character portrayals and dramatic plotting influenced by the playwrights' close association with the Court, but it was to a large extent the society of the Court for which the plays were written. There are many reasons for this. King Charles was an enthusiastic patron of the theatre, and he saw over four hundred professional performances during his twenty-five year reign (Roberts, 120). Naturally, his entourage followed suit. As a center of fashionable life, the theatre was a place to see fashionable people and to be seen and also a forum to pursue sexual intrigues. Yet of the ten or fifteen licensed theatres operating before the War, only two were reopened, and they became consolidated in 1682. Obviously, the Restoration audiences were both much smaller and more homogeneous, composed disproportionately of the upper classes of London. Thus, audience composition may also provide an insight into some of the recurrent themes of Restoration comedy: pursuit of love and pleasure, cynical manipulation of others, and condemnation of marriage. The playwrights obviously wanted to please their audiences and the Court social set espoused rather different values than the majority of the British population; thus, they are reflected in the plays.

Krutch asserts the debauchery practiced at Court was due in part to a reactionary backlash against Puritan repressiveness, and Wilkinson highlights how the War promoted general anxiety regarding previously stable traditional institutions. But rather than clinging more tightly to tradition as much of the lower and middle classes seemed to do, court society was characterized by a rejection of traditional values. Both Wilkinson and Birdsall point out that philosophers like Machiavelli and Hobbes (who was also reacting to the Civil War) had an impact within the educated classes and that they "were worldly realists who understood force and compulsion to be the only efficacious means for attaining personal security and social order [who] preferred not to trust unless compelled by necessity". Hobbes characterized all human behavior as arising from basic self-interest and a will to power. Hobbes' philosophy was individualistic and materialistic, and these same attitudes towards sensual enjoyment and manipulation of

others can certainly be detected in Restoration Court society and in many of the heroes and heroines of the Restoration comedies they went to see.

In general, the Restoration was a time of both political and social uncertainty and transformation. In addition to the factors above, the rise of a merchant middle-class and its aspirations of social mobility also threatened social hierarchies. The bourgeois values of personal acquisition, private judgment, and subjective self-assessment began to filter into the society and the literature of the period. Individual self-expression became an increasingly popular value among educated men and women, and there was a growing awareness of the problems of arranged marriage. The Restoration comedies of manners both dealt with many of these new issues yet "the search for novelty, the ready resort to laughter, the conscious reducing of the significance of traditional codes" also helped the audience to evade them.

9.2.3. The Rakish Hero

One of the features unique to Restoration comedy is the figure of the rake as romantic hero. Birdsall points out that the rake-hero is a descendant of earlier comedic male characters who were rogues, "shrewd, double-dealing rascals dedicated to the cause of their own freedom and prosperity", but he is a sign of the times in that during this period he supplanted the traditional romantic hero in many of the age's theatrical productions. The rake-hero exhibits a number of attitudes and characteristics that one can detect in Horner, Willmore, and Lovemore. He is unmarried, cynical, coarse but with the manners of a gentleman, witty, manipulative, and self-serving. He tends to create his own brand of morality which includes a belief in the open pursuit of sensual pleasure and a dismissal of marriage. His "wit consists not so much in his defiance of traditional notions of right conduct, as in the casual and unruffled manner in which he expresses the 'shocking' sentiments" since "the first major requirement for a reputation for wit is the appearance of being in complete control of one's feelings and/or of one's circumstances, whether one is or not" .

Horner, the rake-hero of *The Country Wife*, illustrates this ideal more fully than either Willmore or Lovemore. The dominant plot is set in motion through his experiment: pretending impotence in order to discover which ladies of his acquaintance like sex and are willing to cuckold their husbands by having sex with him: "If I can but abuse the husbands, I'll soon disabuse the wives" . His manipulation of the other characters and control of the situations is nearly total, only faltering in the last scene when the maid, Lucy, must step in and maintain his deception. Within the context of the play, his social power derives from an awareness of 'real' human

nature; he 'knows' that 'ladies of quality' want to have sex with men other than their husbands if they will not be found out, and he 'knows' enough about the hypocrisy of men like Pinchwife and Sir Jasper to conclude that they deserve to be cuckolded. He assumes people's inner motives are opposite to their outer behaviour: "Ay, your arrantest cheat is your trustee or executor; your jealous man, the greatest cuckold; your churchman, the greatest atheist; and your noisy, pert rogue of a wit, the greatest fop". Horner mirrors this social 'insight' in his own behavior by feigning impotence to act out his lechery. The fact that he doesn't suffer any adverse consequences supports the idea that his knowledge must be valid.

Horner is also presented as smarter than the other male characters, presumably due to his wit. He knows how to outsmart the husbands, as when he sees through the disguise of Margery dressed as a boy and kisses and fondles her in front of her husband. His witty superiority informs his social insights and makes his social power possible. He aggressively uses his wit to undermine and reveal the foolishness and hypocrisy of the other characters. Sparkish's vanity and Pinchwife's jealousy make them vulnerable to ridicule, and the lesson is "to be invulnerable one must be a wit". He expresses his superiority when he mocks and rails at anything that could be considered socially restrictive or dishonest, "Affectation is [nature's] greatest monster" but ironically uses affectation to get what he wants. He rails against marriage because it is conventional and limits one's freedom, and he makes cuckolds to express his hostility to marriage gone wrong. Horner illustrates the "social power and witty superiority" of the gallant wit.

Yet Horner's wit and social power are dedicated almost exclusively to the goal of sexual conquest for its own sake, and his intrigues are as much about power as they are about any genuine feeling he has for the women he sleeps with. His opinion of Lady Fidget and her friends, "pretenders to honour" does not deter him from having sex with them. All women appear the same to him, "Now I must wrong one woman for another's sake. But that's no new thing with me" and he only "converse[s] with 'em...to laugh at 'em and use 'em ill". One of the consequences of the sexual and power impulses coming together in the rake-hero is that since men hold the power in Restoration society, the 'male fantasy' that is played out in which he has sex without the traditional restraints of society and marriage is as much to prove his superiority over other men as it is about sexual freedom and enjoyment. Though Horner ostensibly outwits the foolish and reveals the pretentious, he becomes limited and caught in his own game when he is used by the women he seeks to use, when he becomes the commodity, and becomes as much defined by the game's rules as the others.

Willmore, the rake-hero of *The Rover*, exemplifies many of the same traits as Horner, but he differs in significant ways. He too is cynical about love and is the most insightful of the characters when it comes to seeing through disguises; he recognizes Helena dressed as a boy in Act IV and gives away Belville's disguise earlier in the same scene. He refuses to buy into Angelica's self-deception and instead castigates her for "the Vanity of that Pride, which taught you how to set such a Price on Sin". Especially with Angelica, his purpose, like Horner's, is to reveal her illusions and hypocrisy. But unlike Horner, he doesn't practice deceit to reveal it. This is probably because his goal is to have sex rather than to cuckold. Thus, the balance between sex and power in Willmore's personality leans more towards the enjoyment of sex, and his manipulation extends only to the women in service of this goal.

Willmore epitomizes the libertine ideal of sexual freedom more so than Horner. He likes Naples where there is "a kind of legal authoriz'd Fornication, where the Men are not chid for 't, nor the Women despis'd". He frankly asks both Helena and Angelica to sleep with him when he first meets each of them and declares to Belville, "Thou know'st there's but one way for a Woman to oblige me". But like Horner, all women seem the same to him. He declares, "Oh for my Arms full of soft, white, kind-Woman!" and accosts Florinda in the garden for no other reason than that she is there and "'tis a delicate shining Wench". After the attempted rape is stopped by Belville, Willmore recalls Angelica lives nearby and blithely goes to her house. All this occurs after he has promised Hellena to be faithful, and he only renews his pursuit of Hellena when Angelica throws him over. Yet, though Willmore is careless and irresponsible (and sometimes dangerous) and his drunken and sexual excesses outstrip Horner's, he is less consciously manipulative than Horner. He also genuinely admires Helena for her wit and recognizes and appreciates she is as cynical as he: "We are so of one Humour, it must be a Bargain". Thus, he takes a step that Horner would never consider, he marries.

One can see the diminution of the popularity of the witty rake-hero when one reads *The Wives' Excuse* published in 1691. From the ideal of Horner in *The Country Wife* to its variation in Willmore (1677), the power and influence of the rake in Restoration comedy can be seen waning in the portrayal of Lovemore. Like Horner, he conspires to cuckold Mr. Friendall and sleep with Mrs. Friendall. He perceives that Friendall is a coward and so arranges him to be publicly challenged to a duel. When Friendall wriggles out of it, Lovemore hopes that Mrs. Friendall will be so disgusted with her husband that she will sleep with him. Again like Horner, he has an insight into the society: it is a formula that has worked for him before, "Thus, who a married woman's love would win/ Should with the husband's failings first begin:". But when Lovemore finally

succeeds in publicly exposing Friendall with Mrs. Witwoud (and consequently humiliating Mrs. Friendall), she still frustrates Lovemore's designs and refuses to have sex with him. Thus, Lovemore's social power as the witty rake in the style of Horner is diminished. He can disrupt but not control; his vision of society cannot account for everyone in it.

The character of the rake-hero is a product of Restoration society. Taking their clue from the activities and ideas that prevailed in the Restoration Court, the Restoration playwrights fashioned a character type who could be successful in an uncertain society by outwitting others without being hampered by an outmoded morality. "In a world in which honor is but a word and virtue but a pose, whoever dissimulates most successfully will acquire most power and will least likely be a victim of others' ruthless schemes". The audience was doubtless meant to admire Horner's resourcefulness and Willmore's freedom from convention, yet by the time Lovemore mounts the stage, the rake appears weak and rather pathetic, mechanically pursuing pleasure without knowing why. The rake's currency with the audience lessened with the change in the times, a new monarch, and changes in social and cultural values and mores.

9.2.4. Changing Ideals of the Feminine Characters

The heroines of the three plays, Margery, Hellena, and Mrs. Friendall, also seem to chart the times with regard to the changing attitudes about proper female behavior and the nature of women in general. Like her rake counterpart, each heroine is to a certain extent frank about her sexual needs and desires. Margery sighs over Horner in her room and a "hot fit comes and [she] is all in a fever" (IV.iv: 7). Hellena declares to her sister that she has a healthy sexual appetite and curiosity and knows "how these ought to be employ'd to the best Advantage", and the fact that Mrs. Friendall acknowledges that she is tempted by Lovemore makes her rejection of him more admirable. This acknowledgment of normal female sexual desire on the part of the playwrights indicates a shift from ideas found in earlier dramas of the century, (like *The Revenger's Tragedy*) that female expressions of sexual appetite automatically made a woman a whore. It is also a way for the heroines themselves to challenge the social limitations imposed by husbands, fathers, and brothers that parallels and competes with the rake-heroes' desire for freedom of sexual expression.

Independence of spirit is expressed rhetorically by many of the female characters but only Hellena does so through her use of wit. The other two heroines express themselves through their choices, but these lack little force beyond the rhetorical. Horner declares that "wit is more necessary than beauty; and [he] thinks no

young woman ugly that has it", but Margery is too honest and ignorant to banter with Horner, and he later laments this lack in her and all that it implies in terms of a practical knowledge of the world. Likewise, Mrs. Friendall's dialogue is consistently sentimental, and her declarations of virtue are too serious and prosaic to be witty. Yet, these two women both make moral choices, and they reflect their times in choosing opposite outcomes. Margery chooses to lie to her husband and protect Horner and Mrs. Friendall chooses to reject Lovemore although she separates from her husband. Margery's choice reflects her newly discovered understanding that she must practice deceit in order to survive in a hypocritical and repressive society. Thus, the vision of society that *The Country Wife* presents remains enclosed for women and there is little questioning of the dominant values espoused by Horner. In *The Wives' Excuse*, Mrs. Friendall's choice and the play itself tend to undermine Restoration assumptions about women, marriage and the society. Regardless, both women still remain trapped in an unhappy marriage.

Of the three, only Hellena exemplifies the independent and witty Restoration comic heroine, a suitable counterpart to her rake-hero. She resourcefully pursues Willmore and wins him. Hellena aspires to the control of a Horner in displaying an equal ability to outwit other characters and determine plot as when she disguises herself as a boy and disrupts the relationship between Angelica and Willmore (Iv.ii). Her use of wit helps her win her man by eliciting his admiration. Willmore muses, "I cannot get her out of my Head; Pray Heaven...she prove damnable ugly that I may fortify myself against her Tongue" and praises her, "Ah Rogue! such black Eyes, such a Face, such a Mouth, such Teeth,-and so much Wit!" . She also wins the battle of the sexes, played out in the arena of wit in which his aim is seduction and hers is matrimony. Yet, as Wilkinson points out, the hero "accepts marriage often with witty excuses, if she proves resolutely chaste," so in fact chastity is still the basis of female survival and the price of female victory in the battle of the sexes. Even Hellena, the most independent and aggressive of these three Restoration heroines, cannot free herself from the social necessities of female chastity and conventional marriage. Thus, for all three women, increased awareness of and ability to talk about their respective situations does not translate into increased freedom to act.

The minor female characters also illustrate some of these same contradictions. Both Alithea and Florinda, who conform to the more traditionally idealized heroine figures, must undergo some kind of education that involves disillusion. Alithea, witty and independently minded in a way that prefigures Hellena, discovers her extreme idealism is out-of-place and even dangerous in this new era in which traditional values are inverted or abandoned. She

betrays her naive understanding of the realities of marriage when she says of Sparkish, her betrothed, "Love proceeds from esteem; he cannot distrust my virtue. Besides he loves me, or he would not marry me". Her overly zealous ideal of honoring her pledge to Sparkish almost leads to a disastrous match, and she learns that her ideals must be tempered by a practical evaluation of the society around her though she never slips into the deep cynicism of Lady Fidget and her cohorts. Alithea contrasts with Margery in that though both start out innocent, Alithea is lucky enough, albeit through the manipulations of Harcourt, to avoid an unhappy match like the Pinchwifes'.

Florinda too is characterized as an ideal heroine, chaste, modest, and beautiful. She is also independent, willing to defy her brother through intrigue and disguise in order to marry Belville. Yet, just as Alithea's reputation is temporarily endangered when Margery impersonates her, Florinda is physically endangered when both Willmore and Blunt nearly rape her. Though Florinda does not acknowledge these experiences as having a lasting or negative effect upon her, I think the audience is meant to take note of the level of male violence directed towards her. Perhaps she encounters danger because she cannot defend herself with wit like her sister, but perhaps it is also an indication that the ideal of woman as a morally elevated being as portrayed in *The Broken Heart* is also losing currency in the society. Women are no longer automatically respected if they cannot prove they are of a certain class.

In these dramatic presentations, all of these female characters seem to reflect an effort by women in Restoration society to both step up from the moral gutter and down from the pedestal and no doubt corresponds with the slow but continuing move in Britain from a religious society (with their dogmatic views on the nature of women) to a secular society. They also echo the male heroes in their desires for freedom and self-expression which may be linked to the growing popularity of middle-class values. Yet, as pointed out above, women's growing awareness of their limitations and their aspirations for more freedom in expression does not in the plays, and did not in society; translate into a change of female legal status until the following century. The problem of aspiration and limitation, as with appearance and reality, is dealt with by the female use of masks and disguises which generalizes the female experience in all three plays. Through disguise Margery achieves her desire of meeting with Horner, and the carnival masks enable Hellena and Florinda to move freely around the city without male supervision in pursuit of their lovers. Mrs. Witwoud in *The Wives' Excuse* uses a mask when having sex with Mr. Friendall, but it also serves to reveal his true character to Mrs. Friendall. The use of disguise allows many of the female characters to skirt societal

restrictions but it also reveals how repressive their conventional roles actually are. Representations of Marriage

The dramatic representations of male and female characters come together in the way the three plays comment on marriage. Many critics take the view that marriage as an institution is more vilified in Restoration comedy than in the drama of other periods but this is not generally true. The rake-heroes and their friends do express the Hobbesian views of freedom to follow natural impulses and their raillery against marriage is due to it often being seen as a restriction on these impulses, all the more since divorces were practically impossible to obtain. Yet *The Country Wife* ends with one marriage and *The Rover* ends with two and though *The Wives' Excuse* ends bleakly with a failed marriage, the institution itself is still supported. One also has to bear in mind that the rake-hero's inversion of values was also a source of laughter and would not have been had the audience been meant to take his views completely seriously.

The kinds of marriages that are satirized and condemned are those based on economic or other considerations rather than love and mutual affection. Pinchwife marries Margery specifically because of her ignorance and youth since, as he asks Horner, "What is wit in a wife good for, but to make a man a cuckold?". But Horner does cuckold him and Pinchwife's selfishness and jealousy are presented as reasons that he deserves to be. Willmore, in response to Angelica's charge that men never ask anything about a Lady proposed to them for marriage except the size of her fortune, responds, "It is a barbarous Custom, which I will scorn to defend in our Sex". Hellena rails at her brother for wanting to marry Florinda off to an old man for economic and political gain. The Pinchwife marriage and Hellena's comments refer to a specific result of arranged marriage which was the high incidence of young women being married to older, sometimes much older, men. Hume maintains that "by the standards of comedies written after about 1670 old husbands with young wives are fair game for horning, especially if the wife entered the marriage under duress. Cuckoldom is punishment". This is the attitude expressed in *The Country Wife* by Horner and such a marriage is avoided for Florinda thanks to the manipulations of Belville and Willmore. Though not significantly older than his intended, Sparkish's economic motives for marrying Alithea are revealed and the marriage is likewise prevented by Harcourt. Unfortunately the same motives led to Mr. Friendall marrying Mrs. Friendall and even though they agree to part, Mrs. Friendall must still be his wife "and still unhappy". All three plays explore the fact that such marriages rarely have a happy outcome. What Gills says of Behn, that her plays focus on "the contending claims of love and money" can rightly be said of *The Country Wife* and *The Wives' Excuse* as well.

Instead, the kind of marriages endorsed is those based on love in which each partner chooses the other freely. Florinda and Belville are portrayed as a love match from the first. Harcourt chooses Alithea and she responds when he believes in her innocence. Interestingly, Harcourt is something of a rake and in *The Rover*, of the three plays, we see the fully developed rake, Willmore, also succumb to marriage. Indeed, Hellena and Willmore provide the most full example of a type of match peculiar to the Restoration comedies because they both seek freedom but when they find each other and are mutually attracted, (as Hellena says to Willmore, "I see our Business as well as Humours are alike", they express an attempt to establish a new kind of paradigm for marriage in which male and female meet on a more equal footing. Hellena's and Willmore's lack of illusions regarding each other and marriage can help them avoid many of the pitfalls and disappointments encountered by couples enacting traditional roles and expectations. Yet, the fact that they do marry nevertheless reinstates a social order and it is Mrs. Friendall's situation, still so common at the end of the century that restates the argument that some marriages may never work and may be best dissolved.

What is perhaps more interesting than their comments on marriage are the plays' treatment of male and female gender roles. In many ways, gender roles appear more rigidly defined than in the earlier plays. The rake-hero's activities have been narrowed to exclude the traditional romantic hero's roles of soldier, son, etc. (i.e., Hamlet, Philaster) and feature only social manipulations in the service of sexual conquest. Likewise, female characters may perhaps have more rhetorical freedom, but their goals are also primarily sex and pleasure-oriented (Alithea, Margery, Hellena) and when the goals are not, as with Mrs. Friendall, the woman finds there is no role for her within the society.

But the plays also contain gender uncertainty, ambiguity, and reversal. Horner's pretended emasculation leads him to be viewed as feminized by the men and, as he is treated more familiarly and demandingly by the women he wishes to dominate, they feminize him as well; they treat him more like an object or pet and pass him around like a "whore". Yet, the play itself seeks to portray Horner as the "superior man" who exposes and groups with the "defective" females like Lady Fidget the "young fops and old lechers...in obvious ways to feminize them also"; they are lesser men than the rake-hero. The *Rover* also subverts gender roles as when both Hellena and Florinda skillfully pursue their lovers as would a male rake though their goals must be marriage; yet the male is object and the female is subject, and the play concludes with Willmore being presented to Hellena as a prize she has won. Finally, at the conclusion of *The Wives' Excuse*, though Lovemore delivers the last lines, Mrs. Friendall speaks the epilogue, a speech

which deflates male vanity, and the audience is left with the impression that her situation is more interesting and significant to the future society than Lovemore's repititious round of philandering; the play concludes with her replacing him on center stage.

Remarking on Restoration drama, Hume claims that "social commentary is an altogether common phenomenon in these plays" (29) and neither *The Country Wife*, nor *The Rover*, nor *The Wives' Excuse* presents an exception. As I think has been made clear, these three plays reflect the age in a number of ways. The increasing awareness of arranged marriages as a social problem paralleled a growing concern with women's rights since once a woman was married she had almost no legal recourse against a tyrannical or unfaithful husband. This is represented by a body of writing in books, newspapers, and magazines of the time, and the Restoration comedy's preoccupation with marriage reflected these concerns. The increasing representation in drama of the urban gentry and middle class rather than royalty or aristocracy also corresponded to shifts in the society in which the merchant middle-class was growing in numbers and wealth and introducing into the culture the middle-class values of private ownership and individual rights. The class and power structure was shifting downward, making possible the opening scene in *The Wives' Excuse* in which the servants all know what their employers are up to. Yet the plays also reflect the society during these volatile times in promoting "reactionary" sentiments. Hume believes the rake-hero illustrates the upper class rebellion against the repressive morality of the puritans and the bourgeois middle-class which Gill also credits with trends towards a hardening of binary gender roles. Nevertheless, the rise of the gentleman from the new gentry contributed to the diminishment of influence of the court gallant, and the parallel can be seen in the rake's loss of influence from Horner to Lovemore. By the 1690's, the wit and explicit sexuality of *The Country Wife* and *The Rover* was being superceded by the beginning of the portrayal of more idealized figures like Mrs. Friendall, staid and virtuous, and these kinds of figures would become increasingly prevalent in the new sentimental comedies of the new century.

9.3. BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

After the eighteen year Puritan stage ban was lifted at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the theatrical life of London recreated itself quickly and abundantly. During the reign of Charles II (1660–1685), playwrights such as John Dryden, George Etherege, Aphra Behn, and William Wycherley wrote comedies that triumphantly reassert aristocratic dominance and prestige after the years of middle class power during Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth. Reflecting the atmosphere of the Court, these plays celebrate a lifestyle of sexual intrigue and conquest,

especially conquest that served to humiliate the husbands of the London middle classes and to avenge, in the sexual arena, the marginalization and exile suffered by royalists under Cromwell. Charles' personal interest in the stage nourished Restoration drama, and his most favoured courtiers were poets, playwrights, and men of wit, such as John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, and William Wycherley. Wycherley had no title or wealth, but had by 1675 already recommended himself by two well-received comedies and had been admitted to the inner circle, sharing the conversation and sometimes the mistresses of Charles, who "was extremely fond of him upon account of his wit" In 1675, at age 35 (at the time the portrait top right was painted), he created a sensation with *The Country Wife*, greeted as the bawdiest and wittiest play yet seen on the English stage.

Like Charles II, Wycherley had spent some Commonwealth years in France and become interested in French drama, and throughout his short playwriting career (1671–1676) he would borrow plotlines and techniques from French plays, particularly Molière. However, in contrast to the French, English audiences of the 1670s had no enthusiasm for structurally simple comedies or for the neoclassical unities of time, place, and action, but demanded fast pace, lots of complications, and above all "variety." To achieve the much denser texture and more complex plotting that pleased in London, Wycherley would combine several source plays to produce bustling action and clashing moods, ranging from farce through paradox to satire.

A Restoration novelty of which Wycherley took advantage was the readiness of public opinion to accept women on stage, for the first time in British history. Audiences were fascinated to see real women reverse the cross-dressing of the Elizabethan boy actors and appear in tight-fitting male outfits in the popular breeches roles, and to hear them match or even outdo the rake heroes in repartee and double entendre. Charles' choice of actresses as mistresses, notably Nell Gwyn, helped keep the interest fresh, and Wycherley plays on this interest in *The Country Wife* by having Mr. Pinchwife disguise his wife (the eponymous 'country wife') in a boy's outfit. It has also been suggested that he uses the allure of women on display to emphasize in an almost voyeuristic way Margery's provocative innocence, as well as the immodest knowingness of "town" wives like Lady Fidget.

9.4. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have studied William Wycherley dramatic career along with his contribution to the Restoration Comedy of Manners. We have also seen the Restoration Comedy through

different perspective which has not covered in the background unit of this module. This information on the Restoration comedy not only enables the students to know the nature of the contemporary comedies but also helps in locating Wycherley's art of drama and his influence on the later writers in the history of world drama. It covers the themes of comedy of manners, concept of rakish hero is discussed thoroughly which is a very much important to study *The Country Wife* because it revolves around the rakish hero, Horner.

This unit will help to study *The Country Wife* holistically, and analyse the various aspect of the play, though there may not be direct question on the background covered in this unit. This, however, helps to attempt question on the background which is covered in the beginning units of this module.



CRITICAL STUDY OF WYCHERLEY: THE COUNTRY WIFE PART II

Unit Structure:

- 10.0. Objectives
- 10.1. Introduction to the Play
- 10.2. Characters and Characterisation in the Play
- 10.3. Plots and Subplots in the Play
 - 10.3.1. Horner's Impotence Trick Plot
 - 10.3.2. Pinchwife-Margery-Horner Plot
 - 10.3.3. Harcourt-Alithea Plot
- 10.4. Summary of the Play
- 10.5. Stage History of the Play
- 10.6. Critique of the Play
- 10.7. Let's Sum up
- 10.8. Important Questions

10.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce the students with the play, its characters, its background, its summary, importance of the play and the critique of the play. The play is studied in detail and the study is followed by a list of the important questions which will help the pupils to prepare for the examination.

10.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

The Country Wife is a Restoration comedy written in 1675 by William Wycherley. A product of the tolerant early Restoration period, the play reflects an aristocratic and anti-Puritan ideology, and was controversial for its sexual explicitness even in its own time. Even its title contains a lewd, bawdy, or vulgar pun. It is based on several plays by Molière. However, Wycherley added other features for 1670s London audiences who demanded colloquial prose dialogue in place of Molière's verse, a complicated, fast-paced plot tangle, and many sex jokes. It turns on two indelicate plot devices: a rake's trick of pretending impotence in order to safely have clandestine affairs with married women, and the arrival in London of an inexperienced young "country wife", with her

discovery of the joys of town life, especially the fascinating London men.

The scandalous trick and the frank language have for much of the play's history kept it off the stage and out of print. Between 1753 and 1924, *The Country Wife* was considered too outrageous to be performed at all and was replaced on the stage by David Garrick's cleaned-up and bland version *The Country Girl*, now a forgotten curiosity. The original play is again a stage favourite today, and is also acclaimed by academic critics, who praise its linguistic energy, sharp social satire, and openness to different interpretations.

10.2. CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION IN THE PLAY

CHARACTERS

10.2.1. MR HORNER

Horner calls himself a eunuch or impotent so that he would play the sexual games with the wives of many business men.

10.2.2. SIR JASPER FIDGET

Sir Jasper is married to Lady Fidget and he is a brother of Dainty Fidget

10.2.3. MR HARCOURT

Harcourt is in love with Alithea

10.2.4. MARGERY PINCHWIFE

Margery is a main character; the play is titled after her, *The Country Wife*. She is married to Mr Pinchwife

10.2.5. MR PINCHWIFE

Mr. Pinchwife is a whoremaster and jealous husband. Alithea's brother and married to the country wife.

10.2.6. ALITHEA

Alithea is engaged to Sparkish, but she is in love with Mr Harcourt

10.2.7. MRS SQUEAMISH

Mrs. Squeamish is charmed by Horner.

10.2.8. DAINTY FIDGET

Dainty Fidget is Jasper Fidget's sister and is also charmed by Horner.

10.2.9. QUACK

This is only other character other than Horner who knows the 'eunuch' plan of Horner to woo ladies and who announces Horner as an impotent around the town so that.

10.2.10. LADY FIDGET

Lady Fidget is married to Jasper Fidget, but is charmed by Horner

10.2.11. DORILANT

Dorilant is a friend of Horner and Harcourt

10.2.12. Lucy

Alithea's maid

CHARACTERIZATION**I. Realism and stereotypes**

The play is clearly not realistic, not naturalistic or psychologically realistic like the work of later dramatists such as Chekhov. We do not see characters whose every minute nuance or mannerism is depicted with accuracy. Nor do we see characters on whose life history, psychology and inner motivation the playwright has lavished great attention. In general these tendencies belong to more recent times.

The play is, however, a Restoration comedy in general which is a realistic in some other senses: Firstly, it depicts characters who are recognizably from the same social background as the audience, and who share the same ideas and preoccupations. Secondly, it depicts types who, nonetheless, are representative or who correspond to familiar stereotypes.

Wycherley uses such stereotypes to present on stage a portrayal of social relations that is both critical and unambiguous. The exaggeration of Pinchwife's jealousy and Horner's cuckolding instinct reveals the play's ideological territory. The play is not "realistic" in character delineation complying with a late 19th century definition. It is realistic in depicting with clarity vexed questions about social morality by means of clear, representative types in familiar social situations.

II. Caricatures

In *The Country Wife*, Wycherley exaggerates various characters like Pinchwife, Sparkish, Sir Jasper and the "Virtuous Gang" as a means of depicting them critically. Pinchwife's jealousy and Sparkish's foppishness are caricatured to point their failings. How far they should be lampooned will vary with the taste of the times and with the nature of the production. Today conventions of realism are so regularly overthrown in the theatre, television and film, that self-conscious over-the-top acting by a Sparkish would have considerable comic potential. On the other hand, while we know Alithea does not love Sparkish, it ought, in the performance, to be at least plausible that she should be ready to marry him. Sparkish might be played as fairly ridiculous and very obnoxious rather than very silly and slightly objectionable.

"The Virtuous Gang" is a term Horner uses to describe three women: Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish. It is blatantly ironic, but also convenient as a label for three characters who are not clearly distinguished. Lady Fidget has a quite substantial part in the play, but the other two are much less fully developed. Their virtue is a matter of public reputation only. They take care to guard this, but have no conception of inner or private morality, such as is seen in Alithea.

III. Straight Characters

In a modern sense many of the characters are very "straight": they create comedy by making us laugh at others, who are the butts of the humour. In this sense, Alithea, Harcourt, Lucy and Dorilant may be lively and interesting, but should not draw too much attention to themselves nor have any silly characteristics of their own.

Margery Pinchwife :

Margery Pinchwife's case is more difficult. Perhaps Wycherley intends the audience to misjudge her, but she is also the character in the play who changes most. Frank Harcourt changes in the opposite direction. While she is losing her virtue, Harcourt is recovering his.

She is delineated as a kind of social and sexual simpleton, but her education is rapid and she is largely self-taught by observation of London ways. Some of her comic mannerisms, such as her quaint turn of speech, may gradually appear as cover for a rather deep cunning and resourcefulness. This appears in a series of episodes in the later part of the play. On her husband's orders, she has written a letter to Horner, repudiating his advances. When Pinchwife briefly leaves the room, Margery takes charge. Firstly in

Act IV. Scene II, she takes advantage of her husband's absence to write Horner a second letter, in which she declares her true feelings of love. Then, on Pinchwife's return, she shows him the first hostile letter. And finally, pretending that she is piqued at her husband's belief in her stupidity, she uses the pretext of proving she can seal a letter, to substitute the one for the other.

In her next appearance in Act IV, Scene IV and Act V, Scene I, when she is caught in the act of writing Horner a love letter, she surpasses even this performance. She pretends that she is writing the letter for Alithea. It is in her hand, so Alithea can disown it if spurned by its recipient, Horner. Margery then contrives, as Pinchwife has doused the candle: first, to enter her room noisily and leave it silently, so her husband believes, in locking the door, that he has locked her in, and then to pretend to be Alithea, with whom, Pinchwife goes out.

In both scenes by her words and actions Margery makes Pinchwife appear stupid. To show this more clearly to the audience she employs asides when he is on stage, and speaks aloud when he is offstage, to inform the spectator of her intention.

IV. Asides

Wycherley's stage directions indicate extensive use of the aside. This is an anti-naturalistic device but is useful as a means of commenting on what is occurring on stage and pointing its significance.

Wycherley sees, however, that in the case of Horner asides, alone, will not suffice. Horner's "English-French disaster" is so much of a tour-de-force that a full explanation is needed. Action could not be interrupted long enough for all this to be in asides. The playwright's solution is to introduce a figure, the doctor, who is solely an earpiece for Horner's explanation of his plot, and a mouthpiece for the obvious objections to the plot's chances of success.

Mr. Horner

Horner's name implies not just the horns of the cuckold but also the idea which lies behind this: diabolical punishment of the fool and sinner. Pinchwife's sin and folly lie in his insane jealousy; and Sir Jasper's sin and folly lie in his arrogant complacency, his smug sense of security with Horner.

Despite his general lustfulness, and despite Margery's claim that Horner desires her sister-in-law, Horner has no designs on Alithea because she is in a decent relationship. The cuckolding is not presented as corruption of the women, but a just deserved

punishment of the men. In any case, the women are themselves fallen and hypocritical, with the possible exception of Margery but it is hinted she may become as the others.

Thus it makes sense for Horner to show delight and a sense of power and control in the manipulation and deception of others. The audience does not have to like him, but the audience should like, and enjoy, his torment of Pinchwife and his deception of Sir Jasper. Thus, the fact that he does what he does under people's very noses, in broad daylight (the New Exchange) and, in many cases, with the doctor as concealed witness is very important to the actor's portrayal of Horner as a kind of nemesis figure. The play is not celebrating free love but condemning, and showing punishment of, mercenary and loveless marriages.

Two scenes are, therefore, of great importance for a proper portrayal of Horner: the New Exchange scene Act III, Scene II, the whole story explained in Act IV, Scene II; and the next scene is the "China" scene (Act IV, Scene III).

In both of these, Horner not only manipulates and deceives but he also does so with dazzling effrontery. The actor should not appear nervous and fearful of detection, but revelling in his complete mastery of the situation. So a diabolical, rather than naturalistically human, demeanour is required. A normal man would worry, but a normal man would not be doing such things anyway. Horner is not a normal man. He is closer to a madman or demon or both. As well as his many asides, the actor playing Horner may use frequent gestures to, and eye contact with the audience

10.3. PLOT OF AND SUBPLOTS OF THE PLAY

The Country Wife is more neatly constructed than most Restoration comedies, but is typical of its time and place in having three sources and three plots. The separate plots are interlinked but distinct, each projecting a sharply different mood. They may be schematized as Horner's impotence trick, the married life of Pinchwife and Margery, and the courtship of Harcourt and Alithea.

10.3.1. Horner's Impotence Trick Plot

Horner's impotence trick provides the play's organizing principle and the turning-points of the action. The trick, to pretend impotence in order to be allowed where no complete man may go, is (distantly) based on the classic Roman comedy *Eunuchus* by Terence. The upper-class town rake Harry Horner mounts a campaign for seducing as many respectable ladies as possible and thus cuckolding or "putting horns on" their husbands: Horner's

name serves to alert the audience to what is going on. He spreads a false rumour of his own impotence, in order to convince married men that he can safely be allowed to socialize with their wives. The rumour is also meant to assist his mass seduction campaign by helping him identify women who are secretly eager for extramarital sex, because those women will react to a supposedly impotent man with tell-tale horror and disgust. This diagnostic trick, which invariably works perfectly, is one of *The Country Wife's* many running jokes at the expense of hypocritical upper-class women who are rakes at heart.

Horner's ruse of impotence is a great success, and he has sex with many ladies of virtuous reputation, mostly the wives and daughters of citizens or "cits", i.e. upwardly mobile businessmen and entrepreneurs of the City of London, as opposed to the Town, the aristocratic quarters where Horner and his friends live. Three such ladies appear on stage, usually together: Lady Fidget, her sister-in-law Mrs Dainty Fidget, and her tag-along friend Mrs Squeamish—names that convey both a delicate sensitivity about the jewel of reputation, and a certain fidgety physical unease or tickle—and the dialogue gives an indefinite impression of many more. The play is structured as a farce, driven by Horner's secret and by a succession of near-discoveries of the truth, from which he extricates himself by aplomb and good luck. A final hair-raising threat of exposure comes in the last scene, through the well-meaning frankness of the young country wife Margery Pinchwife. Margery is indignant at the accusations of impotence directed at "poor dear Mr. Horner", which she knows from personal experience to be untrue, and is intent on saying so at the traditional end-of-the-play public gathering of the entire cast. In a final trickster masterpiece, Horner averts the danger, joining forces with his more sophisticated lovers to persuade the jealous Pinchwife to at least pretend to believe Horner impotent and his own wife still innocent. Horner never becomes a reformed character but is assumed to go on reaping the fruits of his planted misinformation, past the last act and beyond.

10.3.2. Pinchwife-Margery-Horner Plot

The married life of Pinchwife and Margery is based on Molière's *School For Husbands* (1661) and *School For Wives* (1662). Pinchwife is a middle-aged man who has married an ignorant country girl in the hope that she will not know to cuckold him. However, Horner teaches her, and Margery cuts a swath through the complexities of London upper-class marriage and seduction without even noticing them. Restoration comedies often contrast town and country for humorous effect, and this is one example of it. Both Molière in the *School For Wives* and Wycherley in *The Country Wife* get a lot of comic business out of the meeting

between, on the one hand, innocent but inquisitive young girls and, on the other hand, the sophisticated 17th-century culture of sexual relations which they encounter. The difference, which would later make Molière acceptable and Wycherley atrocious to 19th-century critics and theatre producers, is that Molière's Agnes is naturally pure and virtuous, while Margery is just the opposite: enthusiastic about the virile handsomeness of town gallants, rakes, and especially theatre actors, she keeps Pinchwife in a state of continual horror with her plain-spokenness and her interest in sex. A running joke is the way Pinchwife's pathological jealousy always leads him into supplying Margery with the very type of information he wishes her not to have.

10.3.2. Harcourt-Alithea Plot

The courtship of Harcourt and Alithea is a comparatively uplifting love story in which the witty Harcourt wins the hand of Pinchwife's sister Alithea from the hands of the Upper-class town snob and dandy Sparkish whom she was engaged to until she discovered he only loves her for her money and nothing else, the foppish Sparkish ends up alone at the end of the play with only his riches and beauty for comfort.

The play, *The Country Wife* can have following two strands of all three plots: Deception and Reality.

I. The Wrong Way Plot: Deception and Pretence

The two main strands of *The Country Wife's* plot are built on deception; deception of appearance sold as the truth. The pretenders to virtue and the pretenders to intelligence guard their reputation by seeming virtuous. All the characters in *The Country Wife* pretend to virtue but there is no substance. Throughout the play there is a gap between appearance and reality: Pinchwife is deceiving himself; Margery is deceiving Pinchwife; Horner prides himself in deceiving the husbands; and The Ladies of honour deceive their husbands and each other.

All the characters in the play seem unable to control their passions and emotions. They want to pretend to virtue but they are tyrannized by their passions. Harcourt affirms that "men are contrary to what they seem, they pretend to love but their ruling passion is appetite". In *The Country Wife* men pretend to wit but turn out to be fops (Sparkish, Pinchwife). Women pretend to honour and reputation but this is usually pretence to hide their false honour.

II. The Right Way Plot: The True Love Plot

The third plot of *Alitheia* and Harcourt contrasts with the other characters of the play. Alitheia gradually learns not to accept appearances. In the beginning of the play Alitheia is engaged to Sparkish, a fop, whom she likes because he does not seem to be jealous. However she later learns he is not marrying her for love but for material reasons. She moves away from foppish Sparkish to true love rather than lack of jealousy.

Alitheia is educated and learns to distinguish between indifference and true love. She becomes aware that Harcourt offers her true love. He believes in her virtue and manages to prove his earlier statement that he is in fact unlike Sparkish: "could no more suspect your virtue than his own constancy in his love to you".

One of the critics took Wycherley's morality into innovative seriousness and interpreted the play as representing two bad kinds of masculinity represented in Horner's liberalism and Pinchwife's possessiveness. In contrast Harcourt represents the golden mean, the true lover who advocates truth and constancy as the crux of true love. Constancy in love is ridiculed and undermined in *The Country Wife* but ultimately Harcourt spells out the meaning of true love.

10.4 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

ACT I, SCENE I

This Act consists of only one scene in which Horner explains his plan to the Quack, doctor. The Quack is a useful stage device rather than a character as such. He is there to allow Horner to give information in a plausible manner. It has to be the Quack, for to tell anyone else (male) would ruin Horner's plan. Also, the Quack can voice objections to the plan. Sir Jasper, clearly taken in, invites Horner to attend his wife. Sparkish is insulting to Horner but he himself is more laughable. Pinchwife begins his ruse or wile to drive Horner away from Margery, his country wife. His ruse is an invitation to Horner to cuckold him.

The stagecraft of the play features the quality of the dialogue. There is good dry comment from Horner but also "acting" the misogynist eunuch for Sir Jasper. Sparkish is wonderfully fixed by his windiness and lack of self-consciousness. Pinchwife is torn by fear of cuckolding yet he inevitably invites it. Physical action is limited to entrances and exits.

ACT II, SCENE I

Pinchwife warns Margery of the vices of London. In doing so, he arouses her curiosity. On Harcourt's entry, Margery is sent away. Harcourt flirts with Alithea but Sparkish is happy to allow this, as it proves how generous a friend he is to Harcourt. We see how mistaken Sparkish is in his belief that he has Harcourt's friendship. The "Virtuous Gang", Lady Fidget, Mrs. Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish, arrive to take Margery to the theatre. Soon Sir Jasper, Horner and Dorilant join them. Pinchwife goes inside. Sir Jasper begs the ladies to go to the theatre with Horner, who now explains to them that he is not really impotent; His whispers reassure the ladies of his virility, but the men must not know of it. While Sir Jasper is amused at Horner's supposed incapacity, the audience sees how Horner has got the better of him.

The action is mainly exits and entrances but the following stagecraft is noteworthy: Margery's crying, Pinchwife's locking her in, Sparkish's struggle with Pinchwife, Pinchwife's aborted offer to draw on Harcourt, and a stage grouping which allows Horner to speak apart to Lady Fidget.

ACT III, SCENE I

This scene mirrors Act II, Scene I where Pinchwife, Margery, Alithea are all present. But now Margery has been to the play. It is the day following that in the previous act. The next day is to be Alithea's wedding day, and on the day after that, Pinchwife and Margery are to leave London before daybreak. Margery has heard that a gallant at the play has admired her. Pinchwife agrees to take Margery to the Exchange, evidently a 17th century shopping arcade and place of social gathering where people go to see and be seen. However, she is to go in boy's clothing. This is Pinchwife's foolish stratagem to thwart male admirers.

ACT III, SCENE II

This takes place evidently at the same time as Act III, Scene I, but the action here is in the New Exchange, where Margery, Pinchwife and Alithea eventually arrive. First we meet the three gallants, Horner, Harcourt and Dorilant. Harcourt surprises the two cynics by announcing his love for the mistress of Sparkish (Alithea) who now appears. Sparkish gives an account of his experience at the play. He has tried to match the wit of the author but the actors it seems have got the better of him. Wycherley's skill lies in the way that Sparkish protests his success, but convinces the audience of the opposite. The discussion of realism in theatre and painting is very interesting. Sparkish tries to hide from Alithea on her arrival, as he wishes to ingratiate himself with the King. The audience sees how he prefers wealth and ambition to love. But Harcourt

persuades Sparkish to reconcile Alithea to him. Before and after this, the audience sees brief glimpses of Pinchwife and Margery. As in his earlier wooing of Alithea in Sparkish's presence, Harcourt again manages to let Alithea see his meaning and deceive Sparkish. However, Alithea begins to review Sparkish's supposed generosity. The audience sees what Harcourt is doing, and how Alithea also sees it, while Sparkish does not. Pinchwife enters and rebukes Sparkish again, who leaves for Whitehall. Before Pinchwife can take Alithea and Margery away, Horner and Dorilant join them. Pinchwife's ruse fails. Horner clearly recognises Margery. Dorilant seems to be in on this secret, though he certainly does not know that Horner's impotence is feigned. Now Horner is able to praise the absent wife of Pinchwife. He is able, in doing so, to show Margery his attraction to her, and he taunts Pinchwife who can do nothing. Pinchwife is angry to find himself in the same plight as Sparkish is. Sparkish is unaware of his condition, while Pinchwife is aware of it. Thus the play raises the question whether it is worse to be an unconscious fool, like Sparkish, or a self-conscious one, like Jack Pinchwife. They appear to leave. Pinchwife, thinking it safe, goes to call a coach. At once the three gallants return, Horner taking Margery away to buy her a present. The other two beaux hold back Lucy and Alithea. Pinchwife returns and again leaves in distraction to find Margery, if he can. Harcourt once more entreats Alithea who now holds back out of pity. Dorilant meanwhile holds Lucy who may not object to the treatment. Pinchwife returns again and blames Alithea for her unfairly behaviour that has happened. When Margery reappears she has oranges in her hat. Presumably Horner is taunting Pinchwife without having really yet done anything, but Pinchwife feels for his cuckold's horns. Oranges, sold in the theatres by whores, for the playgoer to wet his whistle, are commonly associated with promiscuous behaviour. This is a coded message which Wycherley's own audience well understands, as much as does Pinchwife.

Sir Jasper now appears, and takes away the supposed eunuch, Horner. He leaves Harcourt and Dorilant to bemoan their lack of opportunity. It seems that Pinchwife does not notice the description of Horner as impotent or he discounts it. Dorilant says farewell in his lowliest manner to Lucy while Harcourt does so romantically to Alithea. Wycherley has another use for Dorilant to make up the trio of very different couples: the satyr and the innocent (Horner, Margery Pinchwife); the reformed lecher and the honourable woman (Harcourt, Alithea); and the unreformed lecher and the lusty maid (Dorilant, Lucy).

This is a brilliant scene in which the exits and entrances are often bewildering, but they contain several gems: Sparkish speaking about the stage; Harcourt's wooing of Alithea; and Horner's wooing of Margery. And again, the audience does not see

what happens between Harcourt and Margery. She, therefore, tells her husband later in Act IV, Scene II.

ACT IV, SCENE I

It is the day after Act III. The scene is in two parts. In the first part, Lucy forces Alithea to see the folly of loving Harcourt yet marrying Sparkish. Alithea remains resolute for she has given her word. Lucy's view of mercenary marriage is clearly the dramatist's view. In the second part, Sparkish's credulity is exposed again as Harcourt pretends to be Ned, twin brother of Frank, who is in the outfit of a parson. This disguised appearance enables him to make a last appeal to Alithea who is not fooled, to make a series of weak puns about marrying her, and to prevent her marriage because he is not in holy position though a ceremony in due religious form might be binding. All three characters go off with Lucy to solemnize the marriage.

ACT IV, SCENE II

This scene also falls into two parts. In the first, Margery tells Pinchwife of Horner's advances. She is very candid. It becomes clear that Horner has not been fooled by the disguise of boy's outfit. In the second, Pinchwife dictates a letter from Margery to drive Horner away. When he goes to fetch a sealing wax, she writes another encouraging letter to Horner, whose name she has just now learned. Again, Pinchwife attempts to guard Margery's virtue, but, in doing so, he gives her more information which will lead to his cuckolding. She shows the first letter to Pinchwife but substitutes the second, when she seals it.

ACT IV, SCENE III

This scene opens with Horner's persuading the doubtful Quack of the swift success of his ruse. He demonstrates while the Quack hides behind a screen. Lady Fidget, having taken assurance for her honour, embraces Horner, only to be interrupted by her husband, whom she assures that she is trying to tickle Horner. She then pretends to be angry with Horner who feigns anger at her, too because he does not wish to show her the "china" she has come to buy of him. She storms off into his chamber and locks the door. He goes off, by another exit, ostensibly to drag her back.

This allows Sir Jasper to utter innocently what is, for the audience, a filthy double entendre:

"Wife! my Lady Fidget! wife! he is coming into you the back way."

Lady Fidget's reply spells out the joke:

"Let him come, and welcome, which way he will".

Mrs. Squeamish and her mother arrive also seeking "china" but fail to locate Horner before he emerges with Lady Fidget who is bearing a piece of real china. He is now unable to supply Mrs. Squeamish, but promises her plenty next time. At this point "china" becomes a euphemism for sexual pleasure. All the characters on stage and the audience share the code only Sir Jasper is excluded.

The deceived Pinchwife now arrives to insist on the accuracy of the letter and to demand that Horner should do as it requests. Horner is amazed, but the audience enjoys knowing both why Pinchwife believes he is keeping Horner at bay, and why Horner cannot understand Pinchwife's enthusiasm for Margery's declaration of love. The exit of Pinchwife enables the Quack to admit the success of Horner's ruse. But Pinchwife returns with Sparkish, whom Alithea has left, claiming that the marriage has no validity. Harcourt has not followed the rubric, the order of service, and he is not a priest in holy orders.

Horner does not, it seems, know of Harcourt's ruse. Sparkish requests Horner's company for dinner. He insists that Sparkish should arrange for Margery to be there.

ACT IV, SCENE IV

In this brief connecting scene, Pinchwife discovers Margery writing Horner another letter. He locks her up, and refuses Sparkish's request to dine.

ACT V, SCENE I

This scene seems to continue directly from Act IV, Scene IV, but Sparkish has gone. In this interval Margery has hit upon the ruse of writing Alithea's name at the bottom of the letter and pretending she, as Alithea's confidante, has written at her dictation. Why would Alithea do this? It is because she could disown a letter written in another's hand. This is why she has, according to Margery, asked her sister-in-law to write in her behalf. Since he thinks Margery too stupid to devise this ruse, Pinchwife is fooled. He is glad to satisfy Horner with Alithea. This "confirms" his groundless suspicions of his sister's lewdness. Margery says Alithea is within, but she will only see her brother if she is masked, and the light is out. He readily agrees.

So Margery turns back on Pinchwife the device of using disguise, which he has earlier taught her. Margery reappears, pretending to be Alithea. Even her husband does not detect the

device. The succession of explicit deceptions of appearance is noteworthy in the play: Margery pretending to be her brother, "little Sir James", Harcourt pretending to be his twin brother, Frank, and Margery pretending to be her sister-in-law.

ACT V, SCENE II

Horner, not needed now to squire anyone's wife, is conveniently alone with the Quack. He cannot believe his luck when Pinchwife brings Margery to him. Horner recognises her though she quickly whispers her explanation to him while Pinchwife leaves to undeceive Sparkish of the invalidity of his "marriage" and to bring a parson to "marry" Horner and "Alithea" (Margery). Once more he is doing the same as Sparkish, whom he repeatedly ridicules. Sir Jasper brings notice that his wife and others are to visit Horner, as they are so "virtuous". Horner, as Sir Jasper leaves, invites the Quack to be his guest later, not as a guest at the "private feast" (on Margery) to which he is now going. He will not expose her to the same publicity as the "virtuous gang".

It is clear that the cuckolding of Pinchwife happens now. In Act V, Scene IV, Horner remarks that he has had no time to "have sent back" his "new mistress". His thinking of sending her back and his calling her his "mistress" indicates that he has love for her.

ACT V, SCENE III

Pinchwife has discovered to Sparkish the alleged love of Alithea and Horner. This provokes Sparkish into a bitterly jealous reproach of Alithea. Lucy points this out to her. When Alithea says she wishes Sparkish to have the title of cuckold, Lucy suggests that she should make him deserve it. Alithea shows her virtue by reproving Lucy for this.

ACT V, SCENE IV

This scene holds a brilliantly farcical resolution and Lucy, abetted by the "virtuous gang", saves the day. That is how she saves Pinchwife's public reputation and Margery's honour. Pinchwife is very certain that he has been cuckolded, but he is prepared to accept Lucy's version of events because it allows him to preserve some dignity. In the first section the ladies, free to speak frankly, admit to all their deceits. Finding not very surprising that all of them share Horner's secret and his favours, they agree amicably to share him, too. Sir Jasper and old Lady Squeamish are quite happy to find the three women with Horner. In the second part, Horner is confronted by Pinchwife and Alithea whom he claims to have just brought to Horner. To save Margery he affirms this. Harcourt has come with her, as have Sparkish, Lucy and a real Parson. He now confers with Horner, who resigns to Harcourt his

supposed "claim" to Alithea's hand. Margery now appears and virtually gives the game away.

When Sir Jasper and others arrive they ridicule Pinchwife's claim that he has been cuckolded by Horner. Lucy explains that she encouraged Margery to tell lies and pretend to be Alithea to further Alithea's match with Harcourt.

Unfortunately by denying Lucy's claim that she does not at all love Horner, Margery again threatens to expose the truth. So Horner now calls on the Quack to affirm that he is indeed impotent. All the "virtuous" ladies support this, as does Dorilant who whispers to Margery. She has just alluded to her "certain knowledge" of Horner's virility, evidently but it's been cut short. Pinchwife is ready to accept this version of events, but is not really convinced. Margery recognises that she cannot be rid of her "musty husband" and do as she chooses. Lucy finally gets Margery off the hook by saying that all her claims to love Horner and to know him to be potent were lies to upset a jealous husband.

In an epigrammatic quatrain Pinchwife states his readiness to deceive himself for his own peace of mind.

Now comes a "dance of cuckolds". Whether the others take part is not clear as only Sir Jasper and Mr. Pinchwife have been cuckolded in the course of the play.

Horner has the last word, as he follows with his own quatrain stating that a man must be ready to be despised by his fellow man, if he is to win women's love.

10.5. STAGE HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The Country Wife was first performed in January 1675, by the King's Company, at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. This luxurious playhouse, designed by Christopher Wren and with room for 2000 spectators, had opened only the year before. It was of compact design, retaining in spite of its large seating capacity much of the intimate actor/audience contact of the Elizabethan theater, still with an almost Elizabethan-size forestage or apron stage, on which actors would come forward for maximum audience contact.

The original cast was listed in the first edition of *The Country Wife* and modern scholars have suggested that this information throws light on Wycherley's intentions. Wycherley wrote with the original actors in mind, tailoring the roles to their strengths. Also, since the audience consisted mostly of habitual playgoers, authors

and directors could use the associations of an actor's previous repertoire to enrich or undercut a character.

Several of the actors were specialised comedians, notably Joseph Haines who played the false-wit character Sparkish. At the outset of his high-profile career as comedian and song-and-dance man, young Haines already had a reputation for eccentricity and dominant stage presence, suggesting that Sparkish is not merely a comic butt for the true wits Horner, Harcourt, and Dorilant to mock, but also a real threat to the romance of Harcourt and Alithea.

Pinchwife was played by the elderly Michael Mohun, who was best known for playing menacing villains, such as Volpone and Iago. Mrs. Pinchwife was Elizabeth Boutell or Bowtel, a young actress who had "a childish look. Her voice was weak, though very mellow; she generally acted the *young innocent lady* whom all the heroes are mad in love with" Boutell's previous recorded roles had in fact all been unmarried as well as innocent girls, and Margery was her first married role Matching Boutell and Mohun as a couple would emphasize "her youth and innocence against Mohun's age and violence". The other husband to be cuckolded by Horner, Sir Jasper Fidget, was played by another elderly actor, William Cartwright, best known for comic parts such as Falstaff. This casting suggests that Sir Jasper was played as a straightforwardly comic part, while Pinchwife would be "alarming as well as funny".

The male leads, Horner and Harcourt, were played by the contrasted actors Charles Hart and Edward Kynaston. The forcefully masculine 45-year-old Hart "was celebrated for superman roles, notably the arrogant, bloodthirsty Almanzor in John Dryden's *Conquest of Granada*", and also for playing rakish comedy heroes with nonchalance and charisma. Many critics credit the personalities and skills of Hart and Nell Gwyn with creating the famous flirting/bantering Restoration comedy couple. The beautiful androgynous Kynaston was a different kind of hero. He had started his career in 1660 as the outstanding Restoration female impersonator—"the prettiest woman in the whole house"—before real women entered the profession in 1662.

John Harold Wilson argues that the famously virile stage presence of Hart as Horner must be taken into account when interpreting the play. As personified by Hart, Horner will have won women not so much through clever trickery as "the old-fashioned way", by being "dangerously attractive", and it is only fools like Sir Jasper Fidget who really believe him harmless. Harcourt/Kynaston, a well-regarded and skilful actor of male roles, would clearly have been overshadowed by Horner/Hart. The actresses associated with each hero must also have tended to make the Horner plot more striking on the stage than the true-love plot. Horner's primary

mistress Lady Fidget was played by the dynamic Elizabeth Knepp, who Samuel Pepys declared "the most excellent, mad-humoured thing, and sings the noblest I've ever heard", talents that the famous drinking scene in Horner's lodging seems designed to do justice to. By contrast, the choice of the bit-part actress Elizabeth James as Alithea would have de-emphasized the Harcourt-Alithea plot. Such historical considerations have made modern critics sceptical of Norman Holland's classic 1959 "right way/wrong way" interpretation of the play, which positions the true-love plot as the most important one.

The play had a good initial run, although Horner's trick and the notorious china scene immediately raised offense. Wycherley laughed off such criticisms in his next play, *The Plain Dealer* where he has the hypocritical Olivia exclaim that the china scene in *The Country Wife* "has quite taken away the reputation of poor china itself, and sullied the most innocent and pretty furniture of a lady's chamber". Olivia's sensible cousin Eliza insists that she'll go see *The Country Wife* anyway: "All this will not put me out of conceit with china, nor the play, which is acted today, or another of the same beastly author's, as you call him, which I'll go see." Writing himself into *The Plain Dealer* as the "beastly author" of the china scene, Wycherley seems more amused than repentant. *The Country Wife* did in fact survive the complaints to become a dependable repertory play from 1675 till the mid-1740s, but by then public taste had changed too much to put up with the sex jokes any longer. Its last eighteenth century performance in 1753 was followed by a hiatus of 171 years, until the successful Phoenix Society production in 1924 at the Regent Theatre in London. The first-ever American performance of Wycherley's original *Country Wife* took place in 1931.

During its long banishment from the stage, *The Country Wife* continued a shadowy existence in the form of David Garrick's cleaned-up version *The Country Girl* (1766), where Margery is a virgin and Horner her romantic lover. This play was very popular, going through at least twenty editions, reaching the New York stage in 1794, and surviving in both London and New York into the twentieth century. The few modern critics who have read Garrick's version typically dismiss it as "sentimental and boring, where *The Country Wife* is astringent and provocative" Wycherley's original is now again a stage classic, with countless professional and amateur performances, an actors' favourite because of the high number of good parts it offers. The movie *Shampoo* (1975), with Warren Beatty as the Horner character, is a somewhat distant version of *The Country Wife* after exactly 300 years, reportedly inspired by the Chichester Festival production of 1969.

"The Country Wife" was also restaged as a musical - "Lust". Written by the Heather Brothers, it was first performed at the Queens Theatre in Hornchurch, Essex in 1992. It later transferred to the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London's West End, starring Denis Lawson as Horner. The production & Lawson then moved to the John Houseman Theatre in New York in 1995.

From its creation until the mid-20th century, *The Country Wife* was subject to both aesthetic praise and moral outrage. Many critics through the centuries have acknowledged its linguistic energy and wit, including even Victorians such as Leigh Hunt, who praised its literary quality in a selection of Restoration plays that he published in 1840 (itself a daring undertaking, for reputedly "obscene" plays that had been long out of print). However, in an influential review of Hunt's edition, Thomas Babington Macaulay swept aside questions of literary merit, claiming with indignation that "Wycherley's indecency is protected against the critics as a skunk is protected against the hunters. It is safe, because it is too filthy to handle and too noisome even to approach." Margery Pinchwife, regarded in Wycherley's own time as a purely comic character, was denounced by Macaulay as a scarlet woman who threw herself into "a licentious intrigue of the lowest and least sentimental kind".

It was Macaulay, not Hunt, who set the keynote for the 19th century. The play was impossible equally to stage and to discuss, forgotten and obscure.

Academic critics of the first half of the 20th century continued to approach *The Country Wife* gingerly, with frequent warnings about its "heartlessness", even as they praised its keen social observation. At this time nobody found it funny, and positive criticism tried to rescue it as satire and social criticism rather than as comedy. Macaulay's "licentious" Mrs. Pinchwife becomes in the 20th century a focus for moral concern: to critics such as Bonamy Dobrée, she is a tragic character, destined to have her naiveté cruelly taken advantage of by the "grim, nightmare figure" of Horner.

10.6. CRITIQUE OF THE PLAY

The past fifty years have seen a major change, and academic critics have acknowledged the play as a powerful and original work. Norman Holland's widely influential proposal in 1959 of a "right way/wrong way" reading took Wycherley's morality with innovative seriousness and interpreted the play as presenting two bad kinds of masculinity - Horner's libertinism and Pinchwife's possessiveness - and recommending the golden mean of Harcourt, the true lover, the representative of mutual trust in marriage. A

competing milestone approach of the same generation is that of Rose Zimbardo (1965), who discusses the play in generic and historical terms as a fierce social satire.

Both these types of reading have now fallen out of favour; there is little consensus about the meaning of *The Country Wife*, but its "notorious resistance to interpretation" is having an invigorating rather than damping effect on academic interest. The play's ideological dimension has been emphasized recently. It was written by a courtier for a courtly and aristocratic audience, and Douglas Canfield has pointed to an unusual complication for a courtly play. Horner's acts of cuckolding aggression are directed not only at disrupting middle-class families of "the City", in the usual way of the aristocratic Restoration rake, but also at his own, upper, class, the inhabitants of "the Town"—the new and fashionable quarters (the future West End) that had sprung up west of the medieval City walls after the Great Fire of London in 1666. The courtier code proposed by Wycherley is of a sexual game. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued in *Between Men* that the game is played not between men and women, but between men by means of women, who are merely the "conduits" of homosexual desire between men. The hierarchy of wits meant that the wittiest and most virile man would win at the game. Thus Horner, as Canfield puts it, "represents not just class superiority, but that subset of class represented by the Town wits, a privileged minority that ... is the jet set identified with the Town and the Court as the loci of real power in the kingdom." The aggressive attack mounted in the china scene against the class and the generation by which Wycherley was patronized with the expectation that he would defend it (against Sir Jasper Fidget and Lady Fidget), suggests Canfield, would only let an audience of that class laugh comfortably if Horner were punished by actual impotence in the end, which he is not. "When the play concludes with no poetical justice that makes Horner really impotent", writes Canfield, "leaving him instead potent and still on the make, the audience laughs at its own expense: the women of quality nervously because they have been misogynistically slandered; the men of quality nervously because at some level they recognize that class solidarity is just a pleasing fiction."

10.7. LETS SUM UP

This unit begins with the introduction to the play and continues to introduce the characters in the play. The unit instead of sketching the characters, it merely introduces the characters, discusses the art of characterisation employed by Wycherley that will help the students to understand the play critically. It also speaks of the other dramatic techniques predominantly used by the playwrights. The plots and subplots of the plays are outlines. These

plots are not just the separate parts of the play but they are deftly intermingled by Wycherley. The play's plot is, perceived by one critic, split into good and bad plot; the unit also takes cognisance of this interpretation of the play's plot.

The next part of the unit is devoted to the Act wise summary. It surveys and summarised the incidents happening in each scene of the play that would help the students understand the original text of the play that is in the 17th century English. It is followed by the historical survey of the stage history of *The Country Wife*. The unit ends with the critique on the play.

10.8. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. *The Country Wife* is a typical Restoration comedy. Illustrate with examples.
2. "The Country Wife is concerned with self-deception and hypocrisy." Discuss.
3. Consider the play *The Country wife* as a debate about love and marriage and sexual politics.
4. Sketch the characters of the following:
 - I. Horner, a rakish hero of *The Country Wife*
 - II. Margery Pinchwife
 - III. Mr. Pinchwife
 - IV. Harcourt
 - V. Alithea
 - VI. Sparkish
5. Write short notes on the following:
 - I. Significance of title
 - II. Plot and subplots
 - III. Theme of love and marriage
 - IV. Characterization in the play



CRITICAL STUDY OF POET: EDMUND SPENSER

Unit Structure :

- 11.0. Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction to the Poet
- 11.2 Introduction to the Poem
- 11.3 Text and Summary of the Poem: March Eclogue
 - 11.3.1. The Text of the March Eclogue
 - 11.3.2. Summary of the March Eclogue
- 11.4 Text and Summary of the Poem: December Eclogue
 - 11.4.1. The Text of the December Eclogue
 - 11.4.2. Summary of the December Eclogue
- 11.5. Let's Sum up
- 11.6. Important Questions

11.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will make you familiar with the Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser, his important contribution to English literature and his position in the literary history of English Literature. You will be introduced with his March and December Eclogues from Shepherd's Calendar which are prescribed in your syllabus. We attempt to make you clear the prescribed poems by summarizing the meanings of the poems followed by the texts with their glossary. After studying this unit will be able to study the original texts and analyze and interpret them.

11.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

Edmund Spenser was born in London, of Middle-class parents, and attended Merchant Taylors' School. In 1569, the school body had translations from Du Bellay, in unrhymed verse in the first English "emblem book", *The Theatre for Worldings*. In the same year he went up to Pembroke College, Cambridge for doing M.A., where the ambitious Don, Gabriel Harvey, became his friend and mentor. In 1578-79 Spenser was a Secretary to John Young, Bishop of Rochester (ex-Master of Pembroke). In 1579-80, in

London in the service of the great Earl of Leicester, he became acquainted with court life and Sir Philip Sidney and other poet Sir Edward Dyer. In 1579 Spenser dedicated to Sidney his first book, the pastoral, *Shepherd's calendar* which is regarded as an inauguration of the Golden Age, Elizabethan Age. He also married Machabyas Chyld apparently his "Rosalind". Spenser left Leicester's service in 1580 and went to Ireland as a secretary to Lord Grey, the Lord Deputy. Most of his life thereon, he remained in Ireland till 1593 as a busy official. From 1588-89 he owned the estate of Kilcolman near Cork. In 1589, along with Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser returned to England for publication of the first three books of *Faerie Queene*. The voyage, the world of the court, has been described in pastoral, *Colin Clouts Comes Home Again*. Spenser's first wife had died by 1591 and in 1594, he remarried with Elizabeth Boyle. His marriage is celebrated in his other sonnets, *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*. The Books IV-VI of *Faerie Queene* published in 1596. He died in 1599 and buried in Westminster Abbey.

His *Shepherd's Calender* is modelled on the artificial pastoral popularised by Renaissance and inspired by Virgil and Theocritus. In this poem Spenser blends his humanistic tastes with his love for the soil. There are twelve eclogues, each of them corresponding to each month of the year having its appropriate atmosphere and season. The principles of unity and variety are blended; the rude eclogues alternate with those loftier in tone. The matter of eclogues is less important. They comprise of their chief themes: love, poetry and religion. This work is noteworthy for its four aspects. One, It makes the appearance of the first national poet in two centuries; two, treatment of melody in poetry; three, pastoarial compositions modelled on Virgil; and it marks the real beginning of great Elizabethan poetry.

11.2. INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM

The Shepherd's Calendar was published anonymously in 1579 by Hugh Singleton. It consisted of twelve eclogues named for the seasons, of the whole of human life. The work is greatly expanded by introductory matter and glosses. Each eclogue is preceded by a carefully designed woodcut and followed by a motto or "emblem" which sums up the attitude of each speaker. Models for the poem include Theocritus, Virgil, Mantuan, and Marrot, and the style is influenced by, among others, Chaucer and Skelton. Chaucer, indeed, is the one poet to whom Spenser acknowledges a direct debt. He strives for a language more purely English. Although Spenser's language and rhythm attempts to be that of Chaucer, his precedent for the pastoral form is that of debut efforts

of antiquity: Virgil, for example, whose *Aeneid* begins by acknowledging the pastoral apprenticeship.

Five editions of *The Shepherd's Calendar* appeared in the years 1579-1597. The work has provoked considerable critical disagreement, with contrary estimations of its success. The meaning of its arrangement, the identities of the voices of the eclogues and of the protagonists of their fables are noteworthy in the poem. The poem reaches beyond topical allegory into expression of Spenser's poetical and patriotic vision.

Although its mode is classical pastoral, the arrangement of *The Shepherd's Calendar* has two sources: one is the ancient almanac, *The Kalender of Sheepehards*. The other source is the vogue for Emblem Books in Elizabethan times. Each of the twelve woodcuts forms part of a whole impression of the year, yet each easily stands alone with its eclogue as an enclosed work. The cyclical pattern of the "monethes" -- name, woodcut, argument, "eclogue," gloss-- is enhanced by the repetition of graphic elements: argument in italics, eclogue in black letter, glosses in roman type. All this local variation helps to unify the whole, as it is the same throughout. The effect is to bring you simultaneously to awareness of the present moment and of the cycle of months and years throughout eternity. In this way, even the weakest moments of the verse are vested with the grandeur of timelessness.

Paul E. McLane, writing in 1961, sought to identify dozens of Spenser's allegorical figures and topical allusions. In *Januarye*, for example, he sees the famous Rosalind as Elizabeth I herself. Colin represents not merely Spenser the poet, but the people of England, rejected by her in her apparently reckless consideration of the French marriage. In *Februarie*, the oake is Leicester, the Brier the Earl of Oxford, the Husbandman is Elizabeth I. *Maye's* Foxe is Esme Stuart, Duc D'Aubigny, the kidd is King James of Scotland, and the Gate (Scottish for goat) is George Buchanan, the young King's tutor. *October's* Cuddie is Edward Dyer, a member of the Areopagus, whose poetry finds try composing epics starring the Queen and the Earl of Leicester, is John Piers, bishop of Salisbury and friend of Leicester. The "mayden of great bloud" in *November*, called Dido, is Elizabeth I, "dead" to her people because of the impending French marriage; Lobbin the chief mourner is the Earl of Leicester.

McLane's analysis presents *The Shepherd's Calendar* as another in the long series of propaganda pieces originating with the Leicester faction, including works by Sidney, Gascoigne and Dyer. Like Sidney's *May Lady* entertainment, Spenser's cautionary tales may be read as concerned mainly with the danger of the Queen's proposed marriage to a Catholic Frenchman. A strong piece of

evidence supporting McLane's interpretation is the anonymous publication of Spenser's book. If the point of the allegory is to warn against Catholicism generally, it can hardly be dangerous for the author to be known. Yet it was not generally known that Spenser was the author for nearly a decade after his book first appeared.

It was Edmund Spenser who has first of all revealed his poetic duties to his generation for the England. In 1575 *The Shepherd's Calendar* appeared as a major work of poem. Spenser's language and the tone of the verse is superb. Spenser both as an original poet and translator has been modeled himself with Geoffrey Chaucer. It is true that Spenser was the first architect of pastoral poetry in his times, more particularly in his most celebrated verse poem "The Shepherd's Calendar". The poem has an element of humanism combined with his love for the soil'. The merits of this poem are its style and flow of language and the sentences which provide sheer enjoyment. The poem is archaic with an artistic intention. The impression of artistry has been enhanced by his hands as he was equally a great scholar too. The rhymes in the poem are varied and they vary. In *The Shepherd's Calendar* there are as many as different types of stanzas in heroic lines. In the songs the lines are of unequal length. These songs are the gems of the Calendar. It was he who is considered to be the first among ancient poets who has composed songs on the themes of eclogues. The principles of unity and variety are skillfully blended in eclogues. The pastoral element in the poetry makes them more matured and appealing. Spenser was famous among his European rival poet & friends for this seminal work of art during 16th century. The pastoral poetry of Spenser begins with Eclogues which subsequently got transformed into an epic. Even some of his pastoral poems have been transformed to epic poetry. From country life he had tried to enter the house hold of the elites. The "Fairie Queen" is equally and like "The Shepherd's Calendar" was a great work of his life. In these poems Spenser has shown us earthly beauty of women which inspires love, what Spenser calls as 'love for divine beauty' Spenser's "mother Hubbard's tale" is a rich satire. It is based on a fable and highly imaginative. The theme of the poem is like a reverse side of idealism which has contempt for reality through out his life. Spenser was a judge of society of his times in a true sense of the term. The personal disappointment had also contributed to the blackness of his outlook. He always thought of the role of a poet bringing order in the society. The 'Amoretti' and 'Epithalamion' are important sonnets penned by Spenser. These poems express his lone voice and feelings in a pastoral tone. He longs for his past with glorious 'Astrophel and Stella'. The chastity of these sonnets is beautifully expressed by the poet with a great sensual wealth of detailed and colour. Fairie Queen is certainly a typical Elizabethan masterpiece. He worked at it for 20 long years and left it unfinished at his death. It was his old ambition

and supreme pride of England which he presents confidently in his poems at the backdrop of famous epics of ancient times. The varied characters he has presented serve more than one purpose. The characters are both moral and historical persons. The plot construction of the Fairie Queen has been anthologized in allegorical devices. Spenser at the outset had planned 12 Books dealing with the adventure of a particular knight who had to represent some virtues.

Spenser has been regarded as the poets like Cowley a Dryden who have been inspired by Spenser at a later period show their literary artistry in their writings. Milton has paid his warm tributes to Spenser.

11.3. TEXT AND SUMMARY OF THE POEM MARCH ECLOGUE

11.3.1. Text of the March Eclogue

Ægloga Tertia.

ARGUMENT.

IN eclogue two shepherds boyes taking occasion of the season, beginner to make purpose of loue and other pleasance, which to springtime is most agreeable. The speciall meaning hereof is, to giue certaine markes and tokens, to know Cupide the Poets God of Loue. But more particularlye I thinke, in the person of Thomalin is meant some secrete freend, who scorned Loue and his knights so long, till at liength him selfe was entangle, and unwares wounded with the dart of some beautifull regard, which is Cupides arrowe.

Willye Thomalin.

Thomalin, why sytten we soe,
As weren ouerwent with woe,
Vpon so fayre a morrow?
The ioyous time now nighest fast,
That shall alegge this bitter blast,
And slake the winters sorowe.

Thomlin.

Sicker Willye, thou warned well:
For Winters wrath beginnes to quell,
And pleasant spring appeareth.
The grasse now ginnes to be refresht,
The Swallow peepes out of her nest,
And clowdie Welkin cleareth.

Willye.

Seest not thilke same Hawthorne stude,
How bragly it beginnes to budde,
And vtter his tender head?

Flora now calleth forth eche flower,
And bids make ready *Maias* bowre,
That newe is vpryst from bedde.

Tho Shall we sporten in delight,
And learne with Lettice to wexe light,
That scornefully looks askaunce,
Tho will we little Loue awake,
That nowe sleepeth in *Lethe* lake,
And pray him leaden our daunce.

Thomalin.

Willye, I wene thou bee assott:
For lustie Loue still sleepth not,
But is abroad at his game.

Willye.

How kenst thou, that he is awoke?
Or hast thy selfe his slomber broke?
Or made preuie to the same?

Thomallin.

No, but happily I hym spyde,
Where in a bush he did him hide,
With wihges of purple and blewe.
And were not, that my sheepe would stray,
The preuie marks I would bewray,
Whereby y chaunce I him knewe.

Willye.

Thomalin, haue no care for thy,
My selfe will haue a double eye,
Ylike to my flocke and thine:
For als at home I haue a syre,
A stepdame eke as whott as fyre,
That dewly adayes counts mine.

Thomalin.

Nay, but thy seeing will not serue,
My sheepe for that may chaunce to swerue,
And fall into some mischiefe.
For sithens is but the third morowe,
That I chaunst to fall a sleepe with sorowe,
And waked againe with grieffe:
The while thilke same vnhappye Ewe,
Whose clouted legge her hurt doth shewe,

Fell headlong into a dell.
 And there vnioynted both her bones:
 Mought her necke bene ioybted attones,
 She shoulde haue neede no more spell.
 Thelf was so wanton and so wood,
 (But now I trowe can better good)

She mought ne gang on the greene,

Willye.

Let be, as may be, that is past:
 That is to come, let be forecast.
 Now tell vs, what thou hast seene.
 Thomalin.
 It was vpon a holiday,
 When shepheardes groomes han leaue to playe,
 I cast to goe a shooting.
 Long wandring vp and downe the land,
 With bowe and bolts in weither hand, for birds in bushes tooting:
 At length within an Yuie todde
 (there shruded was the little God)
 I heard a busie bustling.
 I bent my bow against the bush,
 Listening if any thing did rushe,
 But then heard no more rustling.
 Tho peeping close into the thicke,
 Night see the mouing of some quicke.
 Whose shape appeared not:
 But were it faerie, feend, or snake,
 My courage earned it to awake,
 And manfully threat shootte.
 With that sprong forth a naked swayne,
 With spotted winges like Peacocks trayne,
 And laughing lope to a tree.
 His gyldenn quiuer at his backe,
 And silver bowe, which was but slacke,
 Which lightly he bent at me.
 That seeing, I leuede againe,
 And shott at him with might and maine,
 As thicke, as it had hayled.
 So long I shott, that al was spent:
 Tho pumie stones I hastily hent,
 And threwe: but nought auailed:
 He was so wimble, and so wight,
 From bough he lepped light,
 And oft the pumies latched.
 Therewith affrayd I ranne away:
 But he, that earst seemd but to playe,
 A shaft in earnest snatched,

And hit me running in the heele:
 For then I little smart did feele:
 But soone it soone is sore encreased.
 And now it ranckleth more and more,
 And inwardly it festreth sore,
 Ne wote I, how to cease it.

Willye.
 Thomalin, I pittie thy plight.
 Perdie with loue thou diddest fight:
 I know him by a token.
 For once I heard my father say,
 How he him caught vpon a day,
 (Whereof he for carrion Crowes had set,
 That in our Peeretree haunted.
 Tho sayd, he wad a winged lad,
 But bowe and shafts as then none had:
 Els had he sore be daunted.
 But see the Welkin thicks apace,
 And stouping *Phebus* steepes his face:
 Yts time to hast vs homeward.

Willyes Embleme.

*To be wise and eke to loue,
 Is graunted scarce to God aboue.*

Thomalins Embleme.

*Of Hony and of Gaule in loue there is store:
 The Honye is much, but the Gaule is more.*

11.3.2. Summary of March Eclogue

The March eclogue presents two shepherd boys who begin to make purpose of love and other related pleasures. It is spring time and therefore the season provides a beautiful setting for love making for their two young hearts. Spenser also provides certain marks and token to know Cupid, the poets God of love. Thomalin's Secret friend who has initially scorned love and his Knights ironically unaware at length himself falls in love and gets wounded with the weapon of Cupid's arrow.

This Eclogue seems to somewhat resembles to that of Theocritus where the boy likewise tells the old man that he has shot at a winged boy in a tree and as a result he has been warned to be aware of misfortunes to come for his deed. The elegiac tone of the poem at a pastoral setting makes it more enjoyable. The poem begins with a dialogue between the two Shepherd boys (Willye and

Thomalin). When their young spirits are at high, Willye begins addressing Thomalin telling him that why does he sit alone as if he has been afflicted with remorse (sorrow). To make him feel happy with the beautiful spring season, he argues that their sorrows of yesterdays have ended at last with the inspiration of beautiful tomorrows full of promise and happiness. Since the joyous moments also pass away fast, they must bid adieu (farewell) to the winter's Sorrows and instead welcome the joys of spring Thomalin agrees with Willye's warning that they must enjoy their youth to a hilt with the pleasant spring – when even the grass now look so refreshed and the swallows (who are considered to be the messengers of spring) have come out of their nests and even the clouds have vanished making the sky so unusually beautiful.

Willye says that the buds of some wild trees and bushes have appeared by giving a sign of new life. He makes a reference to Flora the Goddess of all flowers reigns over the pleasant fields (Maia is a Goddess and the mother of Mercurie, in honour of whom the month of May has been named after). It is also attributed to Flora during spring and to her yearly solemn Sacrifice. So they must not waste this rare pleasant moments which has seized both their minds and bodies in delight, they must convey their love to the country lasses. The spirit of love makes their awake forever they need not remain in their sleep at hake Lethe (Signifies forget fullness). The winter's forty and wrath is over and they can afford to forget the past and embrace the present. They are indeed possessed by love and wanton pleasures. It is time for fun and games, all sorts of merry making. They resolve to break the number or else they would lose the opportunities. They love to go deep down the woods often hide themselves behind the bushes but also scared at the idea that their sheep would go stray. At this moment Willye assures Thomalin to enjoy as he would keep a watch over the flock of sheep for both of them. Thomalin is not convinced and he narrates his experience. He fears that his sheep might fall into ditches and break their legs or some other mischiefs might fall upon them. Now time passes away as usual. It is the third day they have been spending their time. Willye believes that for any kind of calamities they must look at the Goddess of forest. Thomalin has another experience to share with Willye. It runs like this. It was a holiday when the flock of sheep was grazing on the forest land and the Shepherds were busy at play, he also went to a shooting. He wondered up and down the land with his bow and arrow in hands. On his mission to shoot a bird he by chance came across the little God shrouded the heard some resulting and peeped close in to the thickness of the bushes to as certain the cause of the noise to his surprise these were to his guess, perhaps, either fairies, Snakes or some pretensive creatures. He felt threatened. It was a naked Swan with spotted wings like peacocks. It used to jump laughing from one tree to another. Here was a

strange hunter with his golden arrow at his back and silver bow. When Thomalin saw him slightly bending towards him he scarred at his advances he not only shot back at him with his strength and stamina but it was in vain – all his arrows were exhausted and he hurled stones at him. It was of no use as he (the hunter) used to move from one branch of a tree to another. At last Thomalin runs away but (he the hunter boy) shot an arrow that hit him in his feels while he was running away. It made a sore at his heels and he has not been healed of this sore yet.

Willye having listened to Thomalin's plight gives a sign and comments that he had change their priorities. This creates announce and self hatred. Now the youth's flower also withers away and we find our bodies and don't respond to vain lustful pleasures. Now he has a similar story to narrate and tells how once his father had narrated him such a story. It was his father who once caught winged lad with bow and shafts and ultimately had a sore in his heels as the arrow pierced. Suddenly they realize it is night and late night they must now they must move homewards. The poet Edmund Spenser means well and makes these shepherd boys to be wounded by love in the heel.

Emblem (Symbolic proof) Justification of both of them here it means that all the delights of love, wherein wanton youth follow and in their pursuit of love their follies may be mixed with bitterness and sorrow leading to repentance. But the very affection of love (as the saying goes "Love affects") Love torments the mind and vexes (angers) the body many ways. Love makes the lovers unrestful all night and wearisome all day along. The lovers seek something that they cannot have and they find and they find something that they would not like to have even things they like the must before don't please any more. In course of change and as years pass by, our wanted liking (desires) and former fantasizes.

11.4. TEXT AND SUMMARY OF THE POEM DECEMBER ECLOGUE

11.4.1. The Text of the December Eclogue

Ægloga Duodecima.

A R G V M E N T.

This Æglogue (euen as the first beganne) is ended with a complaynte of Colin to God Pan. Wherein as weary of his former wayes, he proportioneth his life to the foure seasons of the yeare, comparing hys youthe to the spring time, which he sayth, was consumed with greate heate and excessive drouth caused through a Comet or blasinge starre, by which he meaneth loue, which

passion is comenly compared to such flames and immoderate heate. His riper yeares hee resembleth to an vnyseasonable haruest wherein the fruites fall ere they be ripe. His age to winters chyll & frostie season, now drawing neare to his last ende.

The gentle shepheardes sattle beside a springe,
 All in the shadowe of a bushy brere,
 That *Colin* hight, which wel could pype and singe,
 For he of *Tityrus* his songs did lere.
 There as he sattle in secrete shade alone,
 Thus gan he make of loue his piteous mone.

O soueraigne *Pan* thou God of shepherds all,
 Which of our tender Lambkins takest keepe:
 And when our flocks into mischaunce mought fall, doest save from
 mischeife the vnwary sheepe:
 Als of their maisters hast no lesse regardes, then of the floucks,
 which and watsh and ward:

I three beseche (so be thou deigne to heare,
 Rude ditties tund to shepheardes Oaten reede,
 Or it I euer sonnet song so cleare,
 As it with pleasaunce mought thy fancie feede)
 Harken awhile from thy greene cabinet,
 The rurall song of carefull colinet.

Whilome in youth, when flowed my ioyfull spring,
 Like Swallow swift I wandred here and there:
 For heate of heedlesse lust me so did sting,
 That I of doubted daunger had no feare.
 I went the waterfull woodes and forest wyde,
 Withouten dreade of Wolues to bene espied.

I wont to raunge amydde the mazie thickette,
 And gather nuttes to makes me Christmas game:
 And ioyed oft to chace the trembling pricket,
 Or hunt the hartlesse hare, til shee were tame.
 What wreaked I of wintrye ages waste,
 Tho deemed I, my spring would euer laste.

How often haue I scaled the craggie Oke,
 All to dislodge the Rauen of her neste:
 Howe haue I wearied with many a stroke,
 The stately Walnut tree, the while the rest

Vnder the tree fell all for nuts at strife:
For ylike to me was liberate and lyfe.

And for I was in thilke same looser yeares,
(Whether the Muse so wrought me from my birth,
Or I tomuch beleued my shepheardes peres)
Somedele ybent to song and musicks mirth,
A good olde shepheard, *Wrenock* was his name,
Made me by arte more cunnig in the same.

Fro thence I durst in derring [doe] compare
With shepheardes swayne, what euer fedde in field:
And if that *Hobbinol* right iudgement bare,
To *Pan* his owne selfe pype I neede not yield.
For if the flocking Nymphes did follow *Pan*,
The wiser muses after *Colin* ranne.

But ah such pryde at length was ill repayde,
The shepheardes God (perdie God was he none)
My hurtlesse pleasaunce did me ill vpbraide,
My freedome lorne, my life he left to mone.
Loue they him called, that gaue me checkmate,
But better mought they haue behote him Hate.

Tho gan my louely Spring bid me farewell,
And Sommer season sped him to display
(For loue then in the Lyons house did dwell)
The raging fyre, that kindled at his ray.
A commett stird vp that vnkindly heate,
That regined (as men sayd) in Venus Seate.

Forth was I ledde, Not as I wont afore,
When choice I had to choose my wandring waye:
But whether luck and loues vnbridled lore
Would leade me forth on Fancies bitte to playe:
The bush my bedde, the bramble was my bowre,
The Woodes can witnesse many a wofull stowre.

Where I was wont to seeke the honey Bee,
Working her formall rowmes in Wexen frame:
The grieslie Todestool growne there mought I se
And loathed Paddocks lording on the same.
And where the chaunting irds lud me a sleepe,
The ghastlie Owle her grieuous ynne doth keepe.

Then as the springe giues place to elder time,
 And brigeth forth the fruite of sommers pryde:
 Also my age now passed youngthly pryde,
 To thinges of lighter timber cotes to frame,
 Such as might saue my sheepe and me fro shame.

To make fine cages for the Nightingale,
 And Baskets of bulrushes was my wont:
 Who to entrappe the fish in winding sale
 Was better sene, or hurtful beastes to hont?
 I learned als the signes of heauen to ken,
 How *Phoebe* sayles, where *Venus* sittes and when.
 And tried time yet taught me greater things,
 The sodain rysing of the raging seas:
 The soothe of byrds by beating of their wings,
 The power of herbs, oth which can hurt and ease:
 And which be wont tenrage the restlesse sheepe,
 And which be wont to worke etenall sleepe.

But ah vnwise and witlesse *Colin cloute*,
 That kydst the hidden kinds of many a wede:
 Yet kydst not ene to cure thy sore hart roote,
 Whose ranckling wound as yet does riely bleede.
 Why liuest thou stil, and yet hast thy deathes wound?
 Why dyest thou stil, and yet aliue art founde?
 Thus is my sommer worne away and wasted,
 Thus is my haruest hastened all to rathe:
 The eare that budded faire, is turned to scathe.
 Of all the seede, that in my youth was sowne,
 Was but brakes and brambles to be mowne.

My boughs with bloosmes that crowned were at firste, and promised
 of timely fruite such store,
 Are left both bare and barrien now at erst:
 The flattring fruite is fallen to grownd before.
 And rotted, ere they were halfe mellow ripe:
 My haruest wast, my hope away dyd wipe.

The fragrant flowers, that in my garden grewe,
 Bene withered, as they had bene gathered long.
 Theyr rootes bene dried vp for lacke of dewe,
 Yet dewed with teares they han be euer among.
 Ah who has wrought my Ro[s] alind this spight

To spil the flowres, that should her girlond dight,
 And I, that whilome wont to frame my pype,
 Vnto the shifting of the shepheards foote:
 Sike follies nowe haue gathered as too ripe,
 And cast hem out, as rotten an vnsoote.
 The loser Lasse I cast to please nomore,
 One if I please, enough is me therefore.

And thus of all my haruest hope I haue
 Nought reaped but a weedye crop of care:
 Which, when I thought haue thresht in swelling sheaue,
 Cockel for corne, and chaffe for barley bare.
 Soone as the chaffe should in the fan be fynd,
 All was blowne away of the wauering wynd.

So now my yeare drawes to his latter terme,
 Myspring is spent, my sommer burnt vp quite:
 My harueste haste to stiree vp winter sterne,
 And bids him clayme with rigorous rage hys right.
 So nowe he stormes with many a sturdy stoure,
 So now his blustering blast eche coste doth scoure.

The carefull cold hath bypt my rugged rynde,
 And in my face deepe furrowest eld hath pight:
 My head besprent with hoary frost I fynd,
 And by myne eie the Crow his clawe dooth wright.
 Delight is layd abedde, and pleasure past,
 No sonne now shines, cloudes han all ouercast.

Now leaue ye shepheards boyes yo[u]r meery glee,
 My Muse is hoarse and weary of thys stounde:
 Here will I hang my pype vpon this tree,
 Was neuer pype of reede did better sounde.
 Winter is come, that blowes the bitter blaste,
 And after Winter dreerie death does hast.

Gather ye together my little flocke,
 My little flock, that was to me so liefe:
 Let me, ah lette me in your folds ye lock,
 Ere the breme Winter breede you greater grieffe.
 Winter is come, that blowes the balefull breath,
 And after Winter commeth timely death.

Adieu delightes, that lulled me asleepe,
 Adieu my deare, whose loue I bought so deare:
 Adieu my little Lambes and loued sheepe,
 Adieu ye Woodes that oft my witsse were:
 Adieu good Hobbinol, that was so true,
 Tell Rosalind, her Colin bids her adieu.

Colins Embleme
 [Vivitur ingenio, caetera mortis erunt.]

11.4.2. Summary of the December Eclogue

This Eclogue (as the first line runs) is ended with a complaint of Colin to God pan. As weary of his former wares (things he had possessed) he proportions his life to the four season of the year comparing his youth to the spring time when he was fresh and free from loves follies. His manhood has been compared with the summer which he says that was consumed with great heat and excessive drought caused through a comet or blasting star, by which he means love, the passion of love is commonly compared to such flames and immoderate heat. He resembles his riper years to an unseasonable (unseasonal) harvest where in the fruits fall before they are naturally ripe. He compares his later age to winter's chill and frosty Season, now drawing near to his last end (i.e. past phase of life).

This poem has also a typical pastoral setting – a gentle Shepherd sits beside a spring under a bushy berry tree. He is Colin; he plays the pipe (flute) and sings as well. His songs resemble that of Chaucer's as it has been often said. There as he sits in Secret shade alone perhaps he begins to make purpose of love and he pities himself too. But in this moment of nostalgia he also does invoke to pan the God of Shepherds by appealing him to take care of the young lambs and bless the Shepherds as well. He would like to urge upon the God by stating that if by chance if his flocks would face any sort of misfortune. He could save the lambs from their distress and thereby really help the Shepherds (the masters) in their better watching and up keeping of the animals. He also appeals to the God to respond to his song and music; he must listen to him instantly from his dwelling place. He dwells in his green chamber and since the Colin's song is too rustic so that it would please him well.

He had gone deep down without any fear of the wolves he had gathered various nuts to make his Christmas game he had chased the trembling (Scared) Pricket and hunted heartless hares having reached at the wintry age. He is also convinced that his spring would last forever. He is his wild mission has climbed the

Oaks and dislodged the Raven of her nest. He has made the walnut tree at rest worried over his strokes.

The nuts fallen under the trees to be gathered has inspired him of his freedom and life. Some number of years have passed away without much significance whether this way were due to the Muses blessings or his trust in his Shepherd friends he has always been bent towards music and its effect (feel).

He has been made a little cunning in his art as a Shepherd and for this he owes his allegiance to an old Shepherd named Wrenock. He admits his own supremacy in terms of Self pride and compares his status by stating that if the Nymphs did follow pan the miser miser also did the same to him. But such pride at length did fall and the Shepherd God did punish him dearly for this defiance. In place of Love he got only hate. His lonely spring bid him farewell and summer him to display his suffering. He imagines simply that cupid which is love, had his abode which is in the midst of summer. It is poetic allegory that love in him wrought an extraordinary heat of lust. Cupids beans of has aroused flames of love in him. Similarly a comet, a blasting star which stands for beauty was also the cause of love. Venus the Goddess of beauty or pleasure was also the cause of uniqueness of his love where he was a fine description of the change of his life for all things now seen to him to have altered their course. He had the bushes as his bed, the bramble was his bower, he used to seek the honey Bee. But now as luck would have been paddocks and Frogs sitting there are lording over the scene where he used to get sleep with the chanting birds now he listens to the ghastly owl and her moaning.

Now, the spring (youth) gives place to elder i.e. manhood. It brings the fruit of summer pride. His prime youthful days are over and it has brought him to riper reasons. He has learnt to make Frances to save his sheep and himself for shame he has made fine cages for the mighting ales he has been inspired. He has learnt a lot by time, the sudden rising and falling of the sea due to moon the beating wings soothing by the birds, the power of herbs.

The third part where in is set forth his ripe years as an untimely harvest, that brings little fruit.

She last part where in described his age by comparison of winter storms.

He achieves delights, where in six verses he comprehends briefly all that was touched in this book. In the first verse his delights of youth generally, in the second the love of Rosaline, in the third, the keeping of sheep which is the argument of all

Eclogues, in the fourth his complaints and in the last two his professed friendship and goodwill to his good friend Hobbinol.

Emblem

The meaning where if that all things perish and come to their last end, but works of learned wits and monuments of poetry abide forever, and therefore Horace of his odes a work full of great wit and learning, yet of no so great or important.

Therefore, that this poet in his Epilogue says he has made a calendar that shall endure as long as time.

Epilogue – Short concluding section of a book or play.

11.5. LET'S SUM UP

This unit introduces the literary career of not only the poet, Edmund Spenser but also his individual contribution to the development of English literature during a period of time, when English language was not standard; rather it was treated as a vernacular language. Spenser experimented on the thematic, and structural and formal levels of English language and eventually directed the poetic ways in English language for the successive poets. He is, therefore, aptly called as “poets’ poet”. The unit continues with introduction of The Shepherd’s Calendar.

The later part of the unit gives the original texts of March and December Eclogues from The Shepherd’s Calendar which are prescribed in your syllabus. The original texts are supported by the summary of each eclogue.

11.6. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Shepherd’s Calendar as a pastoral poem with reference to March and December eclogues.
2. How does Spenser’s Shepherd’s calendar correspond to the cycle of life? Discuss.
3. Write a note on the theme of love and friendship as they have been depicted in the poem March eclogue.



CRITICAL STUDY OF A POET: SHAKESPEARE

Unit Structure :

- 12.0. Objectives
- 12.1. Introduction of the Poet
- 12.2. Locating Shakespeare in the History of Sonnet
- 12.3. Critical Study of Shakespeare' Sonnet No. 2
 - 12.3.1. Text of the Poem
 - 12.3.2. Summary of the Poem
 - 12.3.3. Analysis of the Poem
- 12.4. Critical Study of Shakespeare' Sonnet No. 26
 - 12.4.1. Text of the Poem
 - 12.4.2. Summary of the Poem
 - 12.4.3. Analysis of the Poem
- 12.5. Critical Study of Shakespeare' Sonnet No. 116
 - 12.5.1. Text of the Poem
 - 12.5.2. Summary of the Poem
 - 12.5.3. Analysis of the Poem
- 12.6. Critical Study of Shakespeare' Sonnet No. 141
 - 12.6.1. Text of the Poem
 - 12.6.2. Summary of the Poem
 - 12.6.3. Analysis of the Poem
- 12.7. Basics of Shakespearean Sonnet
- 12.8. Let's Sum up
- 12.9. Important Questions

12.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit intends to make you aware of the sonnet form in general and Shakespearean sonnet in particular. You will also be familiar with the various elements of poetry employed by Shakespeare in his sonnets. The conceptual and historical study of sonnet form will help you understand and critically evaluate the

prescribed sonnets of Shakespeare. Moreover the prescribed poems are treated in this module under three important heads: summary of the poem, text of the poem and the critical appreciation of the poem.

12.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

It's difficult to introduce William Shakespeare in a short space and time. For the convenience, let's see major events in his life that shaped his literary career as a playwright and poet.

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. He was a son of a successful middle-class glove-maker. He attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582, he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway. He had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and traveled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558 – 1603) and James I (ruled 1603 – 1625).

He was a favorite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by endowing them with the status of king's players. Shakespeare retired to Stratford, and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two.

Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the 37 plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture even after.

Shakespeare has written 154 sonnets. 126 sonnets are addressed to a man and 28 sonnets are address to a woman. Though Shakespeare handled the age old form of poetry called sonnet in European Literature, he deftly handled it and devised the some changes in the form which was later followed by other English sonneteers and this form of sonnet is known after his own name: Shakespearean Sonnet.

Shakespeare's sonnets are very difficult from Shakespeare's plays, but they do contain dramatic elements and an overall sense of story. Each poem deals with a highly personal theme and each can be taken on its own or in relation to the poems around it. The sonnets have the feel of autobiographical poems, but we don't know whether they deal with real events or not, because no one

knows enough about Shakespeare's life to say whether or not they deal with real events and feelings, so we tend to refer to the voice of the sonnets as "the speaker".

The first hundred and twenty-six sonnets in Shakespeare's volume appear to be addressed to a beautiful young man. Although there is an erotic underlying theme running through them that doesn't seem to be their main subject. They express a wide range of topics from poetry, painting and music, to nobility, the breeding of children, sexual betrayal, and the ravages of Time.

The next batch, 127 to 152, moves away from the young man to a shady, mysterious, dark woman who is fascinating but treacherous. The poet's passions become more personal and intense compared with the friendship displayed in the first batch – his adulterous obsession with her; his feelings of inadequacy; and the disgust and revulsion he feels when she proves false. Reading them through in sequence offers an awesome emotional experience.

The last two sonnets seem inconsequential. They are imitations of Greek epigrams devoted to Cupid, a young votress of the goddess Diana, and a hot therapeutic spring. At first glance they seem separate from the dark lady sonnets but they form a poetic summing up of the poet's relationship with her and the reflections on love that are dealt with in detail in the other sonnets.

Of all the questions about Shakespeare's life, the sonnets are perhaps the most intriguing. At the time of their publication in 1609, they were dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.," who is described as the "onlie begetter" of the poems. Like those of the young man and the dark lady, the identity of this Mr. W.H. remains an alluring mystery because he is described as "begetting" the sonnets, and because the young man seems to be the speaker's financial patron. Some people have speculated that the young man is Mr. W.H. If his initials were reversed, he might even be Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, who has often been linked to Shakespeare in theories of his history. But all of this is simply speculation: ultimately, the circumstances surrounding the sonnets, their cast of characters and their relations to Shakespeare himself, are destined to remain a mystery. Whatever controversies rose on the identities of both the addressees, we may take these addressees as Shakespeare's beloved and his best friend with whom he must shared his personal and intimate feelings.

12.2. LOCATING SHAKESPEARE IN THE HISTORY OF SONNET

A sonnet is a fourteen-line lyric poem, traditionally written in iambic pentameter. It is written in 14 lines. Each line contains ten syllables. Each line has a short and a long syllable pattern as in: “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

The sonnet from first became popular during the Italian Renaissance, when the poet Petrarch published a sequence of love sonnets addressed to an idealized woman named Laura. Taking firm hold among Italian poets, the sonnet spread throughout Europe to England. In Elizabethan England the sonnet was the form of choice for lyric poets, particularly lyric poets seeking to engage with traditional themes of love and romance. Sonnets were also written during the height of classical English verse, by Dryden and Pope, among others. And they were written again during the heyday of English Romanticism, when Wordsworth, Shelley, and particularly John Keats created wonderful sonnets. Today, the sonnet remains the most influential and important verse form in the history of English poetry.

Two kinds of sonnets have been most common in English poetry. They take their names from the greatest poets to utilize them: the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet. The Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two main parts, called the octave and the sestet. The octave is eight lines long, and typically follows a rhyme scheme of ABBAABBA, or ABBACDDC. The sestet occupies the remaining six lines of the poem, and typically follows a rhyme scheme of CDCDCD, or CDECDE. The octave and the sestet are usually contrasted in some key way: for example, the octave may ask a question to which the sestet offers an answer.

The Shakespearean sonnet, the form of sonnet utilized throughout Shakespeare’s sequence, is divided into four parts. The first three parts are each four lines long, and are known as quatrains, rhymed ABAB. The fourth part is called the couplet, and is rhymed CC. The Shakespearean sonnet is often used to develop a sequence of metaphors or ideas, one in each quatrain, while the couplet offers either a summary or a new take on the preceding images or images or ideas. In Shakespeare’s Sonnet 147, for instance, the speaker’s love is compared to a disease. In the first quatrain, the speaker characterizes the disease. In the second, he describes the relationship of his love-disease to its “physician”, his reason. In the third, he describes the consequences of his abandonment of reason. And in the couplet, he explains the source of his mad, diseased love – his lover’s betrayal of his faith:

My love is as a fever, longing still
 For that which longer nurseth the disease,
 Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
 The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
 My reason, the physician to my love,
 Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
 Hath left me, and I desp'rate now approve
 Desire is death, which physic did except.
 Past cure am I, now reason is past care,
 And frantic mad with evermore unrest,
 My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
 At random from the truth vainly expressed;
 For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
 Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

On thematic level Shakespeare has treated varied strands of emotions like love, lust, anger and what not. Let's briefly see the thematic and symbolic elements in Shakespeare's sonnets.

12.2.1. Thematic Elements

Modern readers associate the sonnet form with romantic love and with good reason. The first sonnets written in thirteenth century Italy celebrated the poet's feelings for their beloveds and their patrons. These sonnets were addressed to stylized, lionized women and dedicated to wealthy noblemen, who supported poets with money and other gifts.

Shakespeare dedicated his sonnets to "Mr. W. H.". He dedicated an earlier set of poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*, to Henry Wriothesly, earl of Southampton, but it's not known what Wriothesly gave him for this honor. In contrast to tradition, Shakespeare addressed most of his sonnets to an unnamed young man, possibly Wriothesly. Addressing sonnets to a young man was unique in Elizabethan England. Furthermore, Shakespeare used his sonnets to explore different types of love between the young man and the speaker, the young man and the dark lady, and the dark lady and the speaker. In his sequence, the speaker expresses passionate concern for the young man, praises his beauty, and articulates what we would now call homosexual desire. The woman of Shakespeare's sonnets, the so-called dark lady, is earthy, sexual, and faithless. Several sonnets also probe the nature of love, comparing the idealized love found in poems with the messy, complicated love found in real life.

In Shakespeare's sonnets, falling in love can have painful emotional and physical consequences. Sonnets 127 – 152, addressed to the dark lady. They express a more overtly erotic and physical love than the sonnets addressed to the young man. But many sonnets warn readers about the dangers of lust and love. According to some poems, lust just causes us to mistake sexual desire for true love, and love itself causes us to lose our powers of perception. Several sonnets warn about the dangers of lust. They claim that it turns humans "savage, extreme, rude, cruel" as in Sonnet 129. The final two sonnets of Shakespeare's sequence imply that lust leads to venereal disease. According to the conventions of romance, the sexual act, or "making love", expresses the deep feeling between two people. In his sonnets, however, Shakespeare portrays making love not as a romantic expression of sentiment but as a base physical need with the potential for horrible consequences.

Love causes fear, alienation, despair, and physical discomfort, not the pleasant emotions or euphoria we usually associate with romantic feelings. The speaker alternates between professing great love and professing great worry as he speculates about the young man's misbehavior and the dark lady's multiple sexual partners. As the young man and the dark lady begin an affair, the speaker imagines himself caught in a love triangle, mourning the loss of his friendship with the man and love with the woman. And he laments having fallen in love with the woman in the first place. In Sonnet 137, the speaker personifies love, calls him a simpleton, and criticizes him for removing his powers of perception. It was love that caused the speaker to make mistakes and poor judgments. Throughout his sonnets, Shakespeare clearly implies that love hurts. Shakespeare shows that falling in love is an inescapable aspect of the human.

To express the depth of their feelings, poets frequently employ hyperbolic terms to describe the objects of their affections. Traditionally, sonnets transform women into the most glorious creatures to walk the earth, whereas patrons become the noblest and bravest men. Shakespeare makes fun of the convention by contrasting an idealized woman with a real woman. In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare directly engages clichéd concepts of beauty. The speaker explains that his lover, the dark lady, has wires for hair, bad breath, dull cleavage, a heavy step, and pale lips. He concludes by saying that he loves her all the more precisely because he loves her and not some idealized, false beloved. The sonnet implies that real love begins when we accept our lovers for what they are or what they are not.

Shakespeare portrays beauty as conveying a great responsibility in the sonnets addressed to the young man, Sonnets

1 – 126. Here the speaker urges the young man to make his beauty immortal by having children, a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the poems: as an attractive person. Later sonnets demonstrate the speaker as angry at being cuckolded. The angry speaker lashes out at the young man and accuses him of using his beauty to hide immoral acts. Sonnet 95 compares the young man's behavior to a "canker in the fragrant rose" or a rotten spot on an otherwise beautiful flower. In other words, the young man's beauty allows him to get away with bad behavior. But this bad behaviour will eventually distort his beauty. Nature gives the young man a beautiful face, but it is the young man's responsibility to make sure that his soul is worthy of such a visage and countenance.

12.2.2. Poetic Motifs

Shakespeare portrays time as an enemy of love. Time destroys love because time causes beauty to fade, people to age, and life to end. One common convention of sonnets is to flatter either a beloved or a patron by promising immortality through verse. As long as readers read the poem, the object of the poem's love will remain alive. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 15, the speaker speaks of being "in was with time". Time causes the young man's beauty to fade, but the speaker's verse shall entomb the young man and keep him beautiful. The speaker beings by pleading with time in another sonnet, yet he ends by taunting time, confidently asserting that his verse will counteract time's ravages. From our contemporary vantage point, the speaker was correct, and art has beaten time. The young man remains young since we continue to read of his youth in Shakespeare's sonnets.

Through art, nature and beauty overcome time. Several sonnets use the seasons to symbolize the passage of time and to show that everything in nature is mortal. But nature creates beauty, which poets capture and render immortal in their verse. Sonnet 106 portrays the speaker reading poems from the past and recognizing his beloved's beauty portrayed therein. The speaker then suggests that these earlier poets were prophesizing the future beauty of the young man by describing the beauty of their contemporaries.

Growing older and dying are inescapable aspects of the human condition. Shakespeare's Sonnets give suggestions for halting the progress toward death. Shakespeare's speaker spends a lot of time trying to convince the young man to cheat death by having children. In Sonnets 1 – 17, the speaker argues that the young man is too beautiful to die without leaving behind his replica. In Sonnet 3, the speaker continues his urgent prodding and concludes, "Die single and thine image dies with thee". The

speaker's words aren't just the flirtatious ramblings of a smitten man: Elizabethan England was rife with disease, and early death was common. Producing children guaranteed the continuation of the species. Therefore, falling in love has a social benefit, a benefit indirectly stressed by Shakespeare's sonnets. We might die, but our children shall live on.

Shakespeare used frequent images throughout the sonnets to emphasize other themes and motifs. They are images of eyes, children as an antidote to death, art's struggle to overcome time, and the painfulness of love. For example the speaker, in several poems, urges the young man to admire himself in the mirror. Noticing and admiring his own beauty will encourage the young man to father a child. In Sonnet 24, the speaker's eye becomes a pen or paintbrush that captures the young man's beauty and imprints it on the black page of the speaker's heart. But our loving eyes can also distort our sight. In the sonnets addressed to the dark lady, the speaker criticizes his eyes for causing him to fall in love with a beautiful but duplicitous woman. Ultimately, Shakespeare uses eyes to act as a warning. The eyes allow perceiving beauty; they sometimes get so captivated by beauty that they cause to misjudge character and other attributes not visible to the naked eye.

Shakespeare encourages his readers to see by providing vivid visual descriptions. One sonnet compares the young man's beauty to the glory of the rising sun, while another uses the image of clouds obscuring the sun as a metaphor for the young man's faithlessness. Yet another sonnet contrasts the beauty of a rose with one rotten spot to warn the young man to cease his sinning ways. Other poems describe bare trees to symbolize aging. The sonnets devoted to the dark lady emphasize her colouring, her black eyes and hair. Sonnet 130 describes her by noting all the colours she does not possess.

12.2.3. Use of Symbols

Shakespeare employed many symbols in his poetic composition. Flowers and trees appear throughout the sonnets to illustrate the passage of time, the transience of life, the aging process, and beauty. Rich, lush foliage symbolizes youth, whereas barren trees symbolize old age death. Traditionally, roses signify romantic love. Rose as a symbol employed by Shakespeare in the sonnets signifies its attractiveness and fragrance in relation to the young man. Sometimes Shakespeare compares flowers and weeds to contrast beauty and ugliness. Giddy with love the speaker compares blooming flowers to the beauty of the young man.

Shakespeare uses stars to stand in for fate, a common poetic trope, but also to explore the nature of free will. Many sonneteers employ the stars as symbols which symbolizes fate. This symbol of star proves that their love is permanent and predestined. In contrast, Shakespeare's speaker claims that he relies, to make decisions, on his eyes rather than on the hands of fate. Using his eyes, the speaker reads that the young man's good fortune and beauty shall pass to his children. During Shakespeare's time, people generally believed in astrology because the scholars were engaged in the metaphysical system for ordering the universe. According to Elizabethan astrology, a cosmic order determined the place of everything (from planets and stars to people) in the universe. Although humans had some free will, the heavenly spheres with the help of God predetermined fate. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 25, the speaker acknowledges that he has been unlucky in the stars but lucky in love, thereby removing his happiness from the heavenly bodies and transposing it onto the human body of his beloved.

Shakespeare employed the pathetic fallacy in his plays. He has attributed human characteristics of emotions to inanimate objects throughout his plays. In the sonnets also, Shakespeare frequently employs the pathetic fallacy. Weather and the seasons also stand in for human emotions. Shakespeare's speaker conveys his sense of foreboding about death by likening himself to autumn, a time in which nature's objects begin to decay and ready themselves for winter, or death. Similarly, despite the arrival of "proud-pied April" in Sonnet 98, the speaker still feels as if it were winter because he and the young man are apart. The speaker in Sonnet 18 begins by rhetorically asking the young man, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". He spends the remainder of the poem explaining the multiple ways in which the young man is superior to a summer day. He ultimately concludes that when summer ends, the young man's beauty lives on in the permanence of poetry.

12.3. CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE' SONNET NO. 2

12.3.1. Text of the Poem

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
 And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
 Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
 Will be a tattered weed, of small worth held.

Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,
 Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
 To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes
 Were an all-eating shame and thriftless praise.

How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use
 If thou couldst answer, "This fair child of mine
 Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,"
 Proving his beauty by succession thine.

This were to be new made when thou art old,
 And see thy blood warm when thou feel's it cold

12.3.2. Summary of the Poem

The speaker in the poem advises his friend that when the forty years of his life will pass and the time will bring the wrinkles on the face symbolizing the old age, he will be in trouble because of old age. It would be meaningless and worthless. If someone asks his friend about his youthful beauty, its facial and physical charm and attractiveness, and his virility, the speaker's friend would be ashamed of answering and he would not be proud of excusing that the beauty faded along with the time. He would be speechless. On the other hand, if he reproduces and raises a child during young age, he would have a better reason to assign that his beauty is transferred to the beauty of the child he grows; the charm of his youth is given to the child. Because, according to the speaker, the past beauty of his friend would incarnate in the beauty and charm of his child which has stolen the beauty of the parents of the child. Giving birth to the beautiful child means being born again in the old age; it means that the blood that flows coldly in his old veins becoming warm again in his child.

12.3.3. Analysis of the Poem

The sonnet No 2 in the sonnet sequence of Shakespeare, "When Forty Winters Shall Besiege Thy Brow", is an advice given to the speaker's friend by the speaker on the preservation of beauty in the new way. It's the advice of the poet to the fair youth as the same as in the previous sonnet, nevertheless the arguments of the speaker differ in this sonnet. In the previous sonnet (Sonnet No. 1) the poet told him that if he did not leave behind copies of his beautiful form, the world would be poorer for that, and in this sonnet the poet tells him that if he leaves behind him his progeny, only then his beauty will be perpetuated. And only then the inevitable decay of his beauty will be compensated well. If he procreates a child only then can he say:

"This fair child of mine / Shall sum my count,
 and make my old excuse."

In this sense, the present sonnet is complementary to the previous one. The poet says that when the Fair youth will attain the age of forty years or these about ('forty winters shall besiege thy brow') then there will appear deep wrinkles ('trenches') in his

beautiful face. Here the word 'forty' does not exactly mean forty, but a large number. According to J. D. Wilson, this word 'forty' has been used "indefinitely to express a large number." Shakespeare himself was about thirty when he wrote this sonnet. It may be mentioned here that Shakespeare was fond of the numbers Four, Forty, Forty Thousand, etc. For instance, in 'Hamlet', Hamlet tells his queen-mother about his love for Ophelia:

"I loved Ophelia, forty thousand brothers / could not, with all their quantity of love / make up my sum." Again Sir Andrews in "Twelfth Night tells Olivia ..." I had rather than forty pounds I were at home."

The beauty of youth that the Fair youth feels proud of (Thy youth's proud livers) and which people now admiringly look at will become values (of small worth) tattered weed. The poet means to say that, like anything else, the beauty of the Fair youth is also transitory. At a future time (when he will be forty) one may ask the Fair youth "where is all his beauty?"

"Then being asked where all thy beauty lies?

where all the treasure of the lusty days."

Then if the fair youth answers that all the beauty and those amorous days are now. There, in his deeply shrunk eyes, then that will be an utter shame to him. Shame that will, as if eat up himself and that will be a short of praise to his 'wasteful unprofitableness' or praise which will not be profitable to him.

The poet represents because such praise is actually no praise at all. He wonders that if the Fair youth would procreate a child, then he could proudly says, pointing at his fair child that the child is showing the balance of his rights and wrongs in his doings is in his favour and thereby his wrong doings will be ignored. By saying so the Fair youth would be able to prove the worth of his beauty. He could also prove that his beauty is now inherited too.

"How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use,

If thou could not answer, "this fair child of mine,

Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse;

Proving his beauty by succession thine!"

In the concluding couplet, the poet tells the Fair youth that his beauty will have to be renovated or refurbished (This were to be new made when thou art old') when the Fair youth will become old. And further, the poet tells him that he should feel the warmth of his blood, when it will become cold, in the warmth of the blood of his child.

"And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold."

Structurally too, the poem is so powerful. The present sonnet is written in Shakespearean Sonnet Format. It is written in iambic pentameter. It consists of three quatrains followed by couplet. The rhyming scheme is: ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG. The poem is closely connected by the single argument, though the rhyming scheme of the stanzas doesn't intersect with one another. The vivid expression of concrete idea in the poem brings about a visual picture thanks to the language and diction employed deftly and powerfully by the poet.

12.4. CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE' SONNET NO. 26

12.4.1. Text of the Poem

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
 Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
 To thee I send this written embassy,
 To witness duty, not to show my wit.

Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
 May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,
 But that I hope some good conceit of thine
 In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it.

Till whatsoever star that guides my moving
 Points on me graciously with fair aspect
 And puts apparel on my tattered loving,
 To show me worthy of thy sweet respect.

Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
 Till then, not show my head where thou mayst prove me

12.4.2. Summary of the Poem

The speaker in this sonnet pledges his lord of love, his patron whom he is devoted to. He sends a message because his lord of love deserves it. It is not sent to show his scholarship and his skills of writing but to show that it is his duty to write and immortalize his patron by writing about him.

In the second quatrain he says that his skill of writing is so poor that it can't equal the greatness of his patron, his lord of love. The image of his lord of love is too great for him to express exactly in the words and through his skill of writing. His writing will fall short to depict his prestige. However, his lord of love, he says, is so brilliant that he will form the exact idea of the message intended by the speaker. And then the content of the message will enrich the

sense of the lord of love about how much the speaker owes to him, how much he is indebted to him.

In the third quatrain, the speaker exaggerates that his lord of love, as a star does to the planet, moves the speaker, who enlivens him, who makes him shine, who inspires him, and who bestows blessings and graces on the speaker. He makes the speaker fit to love. After doing this, the lord of love makes the speaker worthy of the sweet respect of his lord of love.

In the last lines, couplet, the speaker says that he will boast of how much he loves his lord of love. Until the speaker becomes worthy of love and respect, he doesn't like to show his face and to put himself and his love to test.

12.4.3. Analysis of the Poem.

The sonnet No 26, "Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage", is on love, respect and relationship between the master and the servant. The poet delineates two men: one the speaker and another the fair youth. The speaker addresses the Fair youth as 'the lord of his love' and calls himself a subject (vassalage) of the Lord. He tells his lord that his verses, as his duties directed him, have appropriately portrayed his external and internal beauties.

"Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage,
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit."

The verses which are the ambassador of the speaker are being sent to the Fair youth as a token of his faithful duty to the Lord, and not to flaunt his skill of writing verses.

"To thee I send this written ambassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit."

The speaker says that his duty to the fair youth is so great that his poor skill in versification will only prove inefficient or worthless if he tries to portray all his beauties, because he lacks in appropriate words for expressing these beauties or beautiful aspects:

"Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine,
May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,"

But the speaker hopes that some good and natural fancy (conceit) which reside within the soul of the fair youth will show the required favour to the verses.

"But that I hope some good conceit of thine,
In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it."

The speaker wishes that such favour be bestowed on him by the Fair youth, until his fate that controls his activities be generous and show a smiling face to him. He further says his fate bestows better clothes on his love which is now in tattered clothes and thus make his love attractive, so that the speaker's great duty and poor wit' may seem acceptable. He may prove himself worthy of portraying in his verses the beautiful and attractive aspects of the Fair youth. It may be mentioned here that in the Elizabethan period, sometimes 'Their') would be used for 'Thy'. However, in the concluding couplet he says that if the Fair youth really catches at a fancy and if his fate bestows added attractions to his seemingly shabby love, then he can be proud of his love for the Fair youth:

“Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee.”

But before that, before his love is fortified with the youth's favour and the clothes of his guiding star is bestowed on the youth, appeals the poet to the Fair youth not to see or count the speaker's reasons to prove how much the he loves the Fair youth.

“Till then not show my head where thou mayst prove me.”

The word 'show' at line 14 means 'see' or 'count' and so the phrase 'till then show my head' or 'reasons'. Again the word 'prove' at the same line means 'bring to the test' and so the phrase 'mayst prove me' means I may bring me to the test' (to test how much the poet loves the Fair Youth).

The poem is beautifully composed on the theme of love between two men. Because of Shakespeare's two addressees—his friend, in this sonnet fair youth, and dark lady who is assumed as Shakespeare's scornful beloved—the speakers in his sonnet is taken by many critics as Shakespeare himself. In this poem, the theme of homosexuality is conspicuously seen as in sonnet No 2 above. In sonnet No 2 the speaker is trying to flirt and seduce his homosexual partner.

This sonnet also complies with the structure, meter, and diction and language of typical Shakespearean sonnets.

12.5. CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE' SONNET NO. 116

12.5.1. Text of the Poem

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.

12.5.2. Summary of the Poem

In the first quatrain of the sonnet the speaker doesn't admit that anything can interfere with the union of two hearts and minds of the people who truly love each other. He is sure that true love can't be separated from each other. To him, the definition of true love is that the true love is a constant, steadfast and fixed phenomenon which doesn't change in any condition. Love, he says, isn't really a love if it changes when it sees the beloved or lover changes or it disappears when the beloved or lover leaves. Love that alters with changing circumstances is not love, nor does it bend from its firm state when someone tries to destroy it.

In the second quatrain of the sonnet, the speaker compares love with "ever-fixed mark" and "star" for their qualities and attributes of steadfastness. Love can't be shattered by anyone; it is a constant and unchanging light that shines on storms without being shaken. It is an eternally fixed point that watches storms but is never itself shaken by them. It is the star which guides every wandering boat and by which every lost ship can be guided. One can calculate its distance but not gauge its quality. And like a star, its value is beyond measure, though its height can be measured.

The third stanza continues with the argument for the eternity of love. Love doesn't depend on Time, although the rosy lips and cheeks of youth eventually come within the compass of Time's sickle. In other words love is not under time's power, though time has the power to destroy the living beings. Love doesn't alter as the days and weeks go by but endure until death and doomsday.

The last couplet is a concluding statement of the speaker. He confidently states that If he's wrong about his view on nature of love then he has never written anything and no man has ever loved.

12.5.3. Analysis of the Poem

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.

In this sonnet 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 and complex, exotic, or metaphysical in the thought. There are three run-on lines, one pair of double-endings. There 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.

Along with Sonnets 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") and 130 ("My mistress' eye are nothing like the sun"), Sonnet 116 is one of the most famous poems in the entire sequence. The definition of love that it provides is among the most often quoted and anthologized in the poetic canon. Essentially, this sonnet presents the extreme ideal of romantic love: it never changes, it never fades, it outlasts death and admits no flaw. What is more, it insists that this ideal is the only love that can be called "true" – if love is mortal, changing, or impermanent, the speaker writes, then no man ever loved. The basic division of this poem's argument into the various parts of the sonnet form is extremely simple: the first quatrain says what love is not (changeable), the second quatrain says what it is (a fixed guiding star unshaken by

tempests), the third quatrain says more specifically what it is not (“time’s fool” – that is, subject to change in the passage of time), and the couplet announces the speaker’s certainty. What gives this poem its rhetorical and emotional power is not its complexity; rather, it is the force of its linguistic and emotional conviction.

The language of Sonnet 116 is not remarkable for its imagery or metaphoric range. In fact, its imagery, particularly in the third quatrain (time wielding a sickle that ravages beauty’s rosy lips and cheeks), is rather standard within the sonnets, and its major metaphor (love as a guiding star) is hardly startling in its originality. But the language is extraordinary in that it frames its discussion of the passion of love within a very restrained, very intensely disciplined rhetorical structure. With a masterful control of rhythm and variation of tone – the heavy balance of “Love’s not time’s fool” to open the third quatrain; the declamatory “O no” to begin the second – the speaker makes an almost legalistic argument for the eternal passion of love, and the result is that the passion seems stronger and more urgent for the restraint in the speaker’s tone.

12.6. CRITICAL STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE’ SONNET NO. 141

12.6.1. Text of the Poem

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;
 But ‘tis my heart that loves what they despise,
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.

Nor are mine ears with thy tongue’s tune delighted,
 Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
 Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited
 To any sensual feast with thee alone.

But my five wits, nor my five senses, can
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
 Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
 Thy proud heart’s slave and vassal wretch to be.

Only my plague thus for I count my gain,
 That she that makes me sin awards me pain.

12.6.2. Summary of the Poem

In the first quatrain of the sonnet the speaker swears that he doesn’t love his beloved with his eyes because the eyes notice and record a thousand flaws of his beloved. Instead, it’s his heart that loves what his eyes hate and dote on her in spite of what she look like.

In the second quatrain the speaker continues that his ears are not delighted by the sound of her voice. Nor does he long for touching her sexually. Nor do his senses of taste and smell wish to be invited to any sensual feast in which she is the only item on the menu.

The third stanza goes on saying that but all his mental faculties and his five senses can't persuade his foolish heart not to serve his beloved. His body stands like an empty shell with no one to control it. His five senses and mental faculties leave him looking like a man but without the free will of a man. Then he is reduced to being the slave and property of her proud heart.

The ending couplet concludes that the only thing he gains from being plagued with love for the lady that the same lady who is making him sin rewards him with pain.

12.6.3. Analysis of the Poem

The sonnet, "In Faith, I Do Not Love Thee with Mine Eyes." Speaks of speaker's way of loving. He doesn't wish to love based on his mental faculty and other senses, instead he wishes to listen to his heart to love his beloved. The poet frankly tells the dark lady that he does not observe her with his eyes. He does not observe her beautiful physical features. And then loves her, being attracted by her physical beauty, because, in that case, he would find a thousand faults in her features or would find a thousand instances of her dishonesties.

Line 1 on the first quatrain may be compared with the song in the merchant of Venice III, ii (63-69).

"Tell me where in fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head,
How begot, how nourish'd?
Reply, reply.
It is engend' red in the eyes,
With gazing fed, and fancy dies,
In the cradle where it lies."

The speaker says that it is rather his heart that loves the lady whom his eyes hate or look down upon. And that heart (who) in spite of the negative attitude of the eyes to the lady gladly dotes on the lady.

Except his heart all the sense organs of the poet averse to the lady. The poet says that his ears are not delighted at the conversation of the lady and his delicate touch sensing organ, or

his skin. He is not inclined to touch the lady because he thinks that she is a base object:

“Nor are mine ears with thy tongue’s tune delighted,
Nor tender feelings to base touches prone.”

Again his tongue (taste) and nose (Smell) are also not interested in enjoying their appropriate sensation severally (alone) on the body of the lady.

“Nor taste nor smell desire to be invited,
To any sensual feast with thee alone.”

Line 8 may be compared with lines 445 -450 of Venus and Adonis.

“But, O, what banquet wert thou to the taste,
Being nurse and feeder of the other four!
Would they not wish the feast might even last,
And bid suspicion double-lock the door.
Lest Jealousy, that sour unwelcome guest,
Should by his stealing in disturb the feast?”

It adds a precious seeing to the eye. A lover’s eyes will gaze an eagle blind.

A lover’s ears will hear the lowest sound when the suspicious head of theft is stopped Love’s feeling is more soft and sensible. In spite of the indifference of his five organs, the heart of the poet is still interested in the Dark Lady. The speaker says that his five sense organs and his five kinds of sensations have been unable to dissuade his native simple and gullible heart from serving or loving the Dark Lady.

“But my five wits nor my five senses can,
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee.”

The five senses in ‘King Lear’ have been reckoned Thus: Common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation, memory” The heart is not controlled or governed by anything. And this heart, when it has fallen in love with the Lady, put off its manly quality, like the husk of a grain, and then becomes a slave of the proud heart of the Dark Lady – becomes a wretched Vassal of her heart.

“Who leaves unsway’d the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart’s slave and vassal wretch to be.”

In spite of all this, the speaker thinks that he is at the vantage point. He says that the contention or disagreement between his senses but nevertheless, he counts this disturbance as his benefit (gain). Because, though the Lady makes the speaker commits moral wrongs or faults ('sin') yet, she, thereby gives him pain-pain that the speaker happily enjoys:

“Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain.”

It seems probable that these lines are not usually understood. It might appear on the surface, that there could be little advantage in the seductress making the poet suffer for his 'sin' with her. Samuel Butler comments.

It is a beautiful poem on love deftly structured on both levels: Structurally and thematically. That is why the poem is universally acclaimed and being studied.

12.7. BASICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

12.7.1 Iambic Pentameter and the English Sonnet Style

Shakespeare's sonnets are written predominantly in a meter called iambic pentameter, a rhyme scheme in which each sonnet line consists of ten syllables. The syllables are divided into five pairs called iambs or iambic feet. An iamb is a metrical unit made up of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. A line of iambic pentameter flows like this:

baBOOM / baBOOM / baBOOM / baBOOM / baBOOM.

Here are some examples from the sonnets:

**When I / do COUNT / the CLOCK / that TELLS / the TIME
(Sonnet 12)**

**When IN / dis GRACE / with FOR / tune AND / men's EYES
I ALL / a LONE / be WEEP / my OUT/ cast STATE (Sonnet 29)**

**Shall I / com PARE/ thee TO / a SUM / mer's DAY?
Thou ART / more LOVE / ly AND / more TEM / per ATE (Sonnet 18)**

Shakespeare's plays are also written primarily in iambic pentameter, but the lines are unrhymed and not grouped into stanzas. Unrhymed iambic pentameter is called *blank verse*. It should be noted that there are also many prose passages in

Shakespeare's plays and some lines of trochaic tetrameter, such as the Witches' speeches in *Macbeth*.

12.7.1. Sonnet Structure

There are fourteen lines in a Shakespearean sonnet. The first twelve lines are divided into three quatrains with four lines each. In the three quatrains the poet establishes a theme or problem and then resolves it in the final two lines, called the couplet. The rhyme scheme of the quatrains is abab cdcd efef. The couplet has the rhyme scheme gg. This sonnet structure is commonly called the English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet. It is different from the Italian Petrarchan sonnet form which has two parts: a rhyming octave (abbaabba) and a rhyming sestet (cdcdcd). The Petrarchan sonnet style was extremely popular with Elizabethan sonneteers. Much to Shakespeare's disdain (he mocks the conventional and excessive Petrarchan style in Sonnet 130).

Only three of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets do not conform to this structure: Sonnet 99, which has 15 lines; Sonnet 126, which has 12 lines; and Sonnet 145, which is written in iambic tetrameter.

12.7.2. How to Analyze a Shakespearean Sonnet

Writing an essay on a Shakespearean sonnet can be quite a challenge. The following are a few tips to help you start the process:

I. Find the Theme

Although love is the overarching theme of the sonnets, there are three specific underlying themes: (1) the brevity of life, (2) the transience of beauty, and (3) the trappings of desire. The first two of these underlying themes are the focus of the early sonnets addressed to the young man where the poet argues that having children to carry on one's beauty is the only way to conquer the ravages of time. In the middle sonnets of the young man sequence the poet tries to immortalize the young man through his own poetry. In the late sonnets of the young man sequence there is a shift to *pure love* as the solution to mortality. While choosing a sonnet to analyze it is beneficial to explore the theme as it relates to the sonnets around it.

Sonnet 127 marks a shift to the third theme and the poet's intense sexual affair with a woman known as the *dark lady*. The mood of the sonnets in this sequence is dark and love as a sickness is a prominent motif.

II. Finding and Examining Literary Devices

Shakespeare likely did not write his sonnets with a conscious emphasis on literary devices with the exception of metaphor and allusion. However, while analysing or appreciating the poem much weight is given to the construction or *deconstruction* of the sonnets and Shakespeare's use of figures of speech such as alliteration, assonance, antithesis, enjambment, metonymy, synecdoche, oxymoron, personification, and internal rhyme.

Once you have identified such literary devices you can explore both how they contribute to a greater understanding of the theme and how they serve to give the sonnet movement, intensity, and structure.

III. Consult English Dictionary

Researching the history of words Shakespeare used is a sure way to gain a greater understanding of the sonnets and will sometimes lead to new and fascinating commentary.

Do not be afraid to develop your own thoughts on the sonnets. A persuasive argument, supported by ample evidence, is always the key to powerful appreciation and interpretative writing. By supported by ample evidences we mean to quote the lines from the original text or those from the critics.

12.8. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have studied Shakespeare as an Elizabethan poet, his poetic contribution not only to the Elizabethan period but also to the entire history of poetry. Shakespeare follows the classical patterns of literary genre partially and modifies the structure to suit his themes and eventually he propounded his own form and structure and that is how he paved the way for the successive poets and writers who attempted to write in the genre of Shakespeare. In this unit we saw Shakespearean sonnet and his themes of sonnet.

We have been prescribed four sonnets of Shakespeare in the syllabus. We studied his four sonnets under the heads: Text of the poem, Summary of the poem, and analysis of the poem, so that it will be easier for your understanding and interpreting the poem.

The concluding section, Basics of Shakespearean Sonnet in the unit gives general guidelines to the students as to how to study and analyze the Shakespearean sonnet.

12.9. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Write a summary of Shakespeare's sonnet No 2 in your own words.
2. Critically appreciate Shakespeare's sonnet No 2
3. Write a summary of Shakespeare's sonnet No 26 in your own words.
4. Critically appreciate Shakespeare's sonnet No 26
5. Write a summary of Shakespeare's sonnet No 116 in your own words.
6. Critically appreciate Shakespeare's sonnet No 116
7. Write a summary of Shakespeare's sonnet No 141 in your own words.
8. Critically appreciate Shakespeare's sonnet No 141



CRITICAL STUDY OF POETS: JOHN DONNE, GEORGE HERBERT AND JOHN MILTON

Unit Structure :

- 13.0. Objectives
- 13.1. Critical Study of John Donne
 - 13.1.1. Introduction to John Donne
 - 13.1.2. Study of the Poem, The Flea
 - 13.1.3. Study of This Is My Play's Last Scene
 - 13.1.4. Study of the Poem, Anniversary
 - 13.1.5. Study of the Poem, Hymn to God the Father
- 13.2. Critical Study of George Herbert
 - 13.2.1. Introduction to John Herbert
 - 13.2.2. Study of the Poem, Mortification
 - 13.2.3. Study of Love (III)
- 13.3. Critical Study of John Milton
 - 13.3.1. Introduction to John Milton
 - 13.3.2. Study of the Poem, Lycidas
 - 13.3.3. Study of the Poem, On His Blindness
- 13.4. Let's Sum up
- 13.5. Important Questions

13.0. OBJECTIVES

This unit will make you aware of the poems composed during Caroline Period which includes metaphysical schools of Poetry and Puritan Poetry. You will be introduced with the main features of the individual poets of the different poetic schools. Based on the knowledge gained in the earlier chapters of this module on background to English Literature, you will critically study, evaluate and interpret the prescribed poems.

13.1. CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN DONNE

13.1.1 Introduction to John Donne

John Donne was born in 1572 to a London merchant and his wife. Donne's parents were both Catholic at a time when England was deeply divided over matters of religion; Queen Elizabeth persecuted the Catholics and upheld the Church of England established by her father, Henry VIII. The subsequent ruler, James I, tolerated Catholicism, but advised Donne that he would achieve advancement only in the Church of England. Having renounced his Catholic faith, Donne was ordained in the Church of England in 1615. Donne's father died when he was very young, as did several of his brothers and sisters, and his mother remarried twice during his lifetime. Donne was educated at Hart's Hall, Oxford, and Lincoln's Inn. He became prodigiously learned, speaking several languages and writing poems in both English and Latin.

Donne's adult life was colorful, varied, and often dangerous. He sailed with the royal fleet and served as both a Member of Parliament and a diplomat. In 1601, he secretly married a woman named Ann More, and he was imprisoned by her father, Sir George More; however, after the Court of Audiences upheld his marriage several months later, he was released and sent to live with his wife's cousin in Surrey, his fortunes now in tatters. For the next several years, Donne moved his family throughout England, traveled extensively in France and Italy, and attempted unsuccessfully to gain positions that might improve his financial situation. In 1615, Donne was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church; in 1621, he became the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, a post that he retained for the rest of his life. A very successful priest, Donne preached several times before royalty; his sermons were famous for their power and directness.

For the last decade of his life, before his death in 1630, Donne concentrated more on writing sermons than on writing poems, and today he is admired for the former as well as the latter. (One of his most famous sermons contains the passage beginning, "No man is an island" and ending, "Therefore ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.") However, it is for his extraordinary poems that Donne is primarily remembered; and it was on the basis of his poems that led to the revival of his reputation at the beginning of the 20th century, following years of obscurity. (The renewed interest in Donne was led by a new generation of writers at the turn of the century, including T. S. Eliot.) Donne was the leading exponent of a style of poetry called "metaphysical poetry," which flourished in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Metaphysical poetry features elaborate conceits and surprising symbols, wrapped up in original, challenging language structures, with learned themes that draw heavily on eccentric chains of reasoning. Donne's verse, like that of George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and many of their contemporaries, exemplifies these traits. But Donne is also a highly individual poet, and his consistently ingenious treatment of his great theme—the conflict between spiritual piety and physical carnality, as embodied in religion and love—remains unparalleled.

John Donne, whose poetic reputation languished before he was rediscovered in the early part of the twentieth century, is remembered today as the leading exponent of a style of verse known as "metaphysical poetry," which flourished in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Other great metaphysical poets include Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick, and George Herbert.) Metaphysical poetry typically employs unusual verse forms, complex figures of speech applied to elaborate and surprising metaphorical conceits, and learned themes discussed according to eccentric and unexpected chains of reasoning. Donne's poetry exhibits each of these characteristics. His jarring, unusual meters; his proclivity for abstract puns and double entendres; his often bizarre metaphors (in one poem he compares love to a carnivorous fish; in another he pleads with God to make him pure by raping him); and his process of oblique reasoning are all characteristic traits of the metaphysical, unified in Donne as in no other poet.

Donne is valuable not simply as a representative writer but also as a highly unique one. He was a man of contradictions: As a minister in the Anglican Church, Donne possessed a deep spirituality that informed his writing throughout his life; but as a man, Donne possessed a carnal lust for life, sensation, and experience. He is both a great religious poet and a great erotic poet, and perhaps no other writer (with the possible exception of Herbert) strove as hard to unify and express such incongruous, mutually discordant passions. In his best poems, Donne mixes the discourses of the physical and the spiritual; over the course of his career, Donne gave sublime expression to both realms.

His conflicting proclivities often cause Donne to contradict himself. (For example, in one poem he writes, "Death be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so." Yet in another, he writes, "Death I recent, and say, unsaid by me / Whate'er hath slipped, that might diminish thee.") However, his contradictions are representative of the powerful contrary forces at work in his poetry and in his soul, rather than of sloppy thinking or inconsistency. Donne, who lived a generation after Shakespeare, took advantage of his divided nature to become the

greatest metaphysical poet of the seventeenth century; among the poets of inner conflict, he is one of the greatest of all time.

The verities of themes of John Donne's poetry, broadly speaking, include love as a microcosm, Neo-platonic concept of love, religious enlightenment as a sexual ecstasy, the research for one true religion, and discovery and conquest. His writing is replete with many symbols. They include angels symbolizing divine status attained by beloveds, the compass symbolizing the relationship between lovers, and the blood. Generally blood symbolizes life, and Donne uses blood to symbolize different experiences in life, from erotic passion to religious devotion. In "The Flea" (prescribed in your syllabus), flea crawls over a pair of would-be lovers, biting and drawing blood from both. As the speaker imagines it, the blood of the pair has become intermingled, and thus the two should become sexually involved, since they are already married in the body of the flea.

13.1.2. THE STUDY OF POEM, THE FLEA.

I. TEXT

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
 How little that which thou deny'st me is;
 It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
 And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
 Thou knowest that this cannot be said
 A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead.
 Yet this enjoys before it woo,
 And pampered, swells with one blood made of two,
 And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
 Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
 This flea is you and I, and this
 Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
 Though parents grudge, and you, we are met
 And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
 Though use make you apt to kill me,
 Let not to that self murder added be,
 And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
 Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
 Wherein could this flea guilty be
 Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
 Yet thou triumph'st, and sayest that thou
 Find'st not thyself, nor me, the weaker now.
 'Tis true, then learn how false fears be;

Just so much honor, when thou yieldst to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

II. SUMMARY OF THE FLEA

The speaker tells his beloved to look at the flea before them and to note “how little” is that thing that she denies him. For the flea, he says, has sucked first his blood, then her blood, so that now, inside the flea, they are mingled; and that mingling cannot be called “sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead.” The flea has joined them together in a way that, “alas, is more than we would do.”

As his beloved moves to kill the flea, the speaker stays her hand, asking her to spare the three lives in the flea: his life, her life, and the flea’s own life. In the flea, he says, where their blood is mingled, they are almost married – no, more than married – and the flea is their marriage bed and marriage temple mixed into one. Though their parents grudge their romance and though she will not make love to him, they are nevertheless united and cloistered in the living walls of the flea. She is apt to kill him, he says, but he asks that she not kill herself by killing the flea that contains her blood. He says that to kill the flea would be sacrilege, “three sins in killing three.”

“Cruel and sudden,” the speaker calls his lover, who has now killed the flea, “purpling” her fingernail with the “blood of innocence.” The speaker asks his lover what the flea’s sin was, other than having sucked from each of them a drop of blood. He says that his lover replies that neither of them is less noble for having killed the flea. It is true, he says, and it is this very fact that proves that her fears are false: If she were to sleep with him (“yield to me”), she would lose no more honor than she lost when she killed the flea.

III. Commentary on the Flea

This little poem again exhibits Donne’s metaphysical love-poem mode, his aptitude for turning even the least likely images into elaborate symbols of love and romance. This poem uses the image of a flea that has just bitten the speaker and his beloved to sketch an amusing conflict over whether the two will engage in premarital sex. The speaker wants to, the beloved does not, and so the speaker uses the flea to show how innocuous such mingling can be. He reasons that if mingling in the flea is so innocuous, sexual mingling would be equally innocuous, for they are really the same thing. By the second stanza, the speaker is trying to save the flea’s life, holding it up as “our marriage bed and marriage temple.”

But when the beloved kills the flea despite the speaker's protestations (and probably as a deliberate move to squash his argument, as well), he turns his argument on its head and claims that despite the high-minded and sacred ideals he has just been invoking, killing the flea did not really impugn (hold responsible) his beloved's honor- and despite the high-minded and sacred ideals she has invoked in refusing to sleep with him, doing so would not impugn her honor either.

This poem is the cleverest of a long line of sixteenth-century love poems using the flea as an erotic image, a genre derived from an older poem of Ovid. Donne's poise of hinting at the erotic without ever explicitly referring to sex, while at the same time leaving no doubt as to exactly what he means, is as much a source of the poem's humor as the silly image of the flea is. The idea that being bitten by a flea would represent "sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead" gets the point across with a neat conciseness and clarity that Donne's later religious lyrics never attained.

This poem alternates metrically between lines in iambic tetrameter and lines in iambic pentameter, a 4-5 stress pattern ending with two pentameter lines at the end of each stanza. Thus, the stress pattern in each of the nine-line stanzas is 454545455. The rhyme scheme in each stanza is similarly regular, in couplets, with the final line rhyming with the final couplet: AABBCDDDD.

13.1.3. Holy Sonnets: This Is My Play's Last Scene

I. Text

This is my play's last scene; here heavens appoint
 My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race,
 Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
 My span's last inch, my minute's latest point;
 And gluttonous death will instantly unjoint
 My body and my soul, and I shall sleep a space;
 But my' ever-walking part shall see that face
 Whose fear already shakes my every joint.
 Then, as my soul to 'heaven, her first seat, takes flight,
 And earth-born body in the earth shall dwell,
 So fall my sins, that all may have their right,
 To where they' are bred, and would press me, to hell.
 Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evil,
 For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devil.

II. Summary of This Is My Play's Last Scene

This is one of Donne's 'Holy Sonnets', possibly written round 1607, though some critics suggest 1609. The date is not important, especially as it is not the deathbed poem it appears to be at first reading. The depiction of death and dying is much more to do with ways of meditating, especially based on Ignatian meditation.

Donne is imagining himself at his death, described in a series of metaphors, 'playes last scene', 'pilgrimages last mile' and 'my race quickly runne', and several others. Donne likes to pile up words or images for dramatic effect. Death is seen like some monster, a very different image than in the sonnet '*Death be not Proud*' and more akin to *Oh my blacke Soule!*', where the pilgrim image is again used.

Some of the above images were biblical ones: races (Hebrews 12:1) and pilgrimages (Hebrews 11:13) particularly. The language and idea of sleeping 'a space' is also biblical (1 Corinthians 15:51), as 'shall see that face' (2 Corinthians 3:18). Donne makes a sharp distinction between body and soul. And in this we can see some of his own divided personality. His body 'in the earth shall dwell'; but his soul will come face to face with God as his judge. This is what seems to terrify him.

We may think this is rather morbid, but we need to remember that consciousness of sin and the awesomeness of God were typical emphases in early seventeenth century religion, of whatever sort. Even so, Donne's sensitivity to this seems to be much greater than someone like George Herbert's, who feels unworthy (as in *Love II*), but not terrified.

The last four lines are a concluding prayer to round off this meditation. 'So, fall my sins' is an order: 'Fall, my sins ...'. That is to say, let my sins drop down to Hell now, where they belong; then I shall be 'purg'd of evil' (cf. Hebrews 1:3). The phrase 'Impute me righteous' is as problematic as the phrase 'Teach me how to repent' in '*At the Round Earths imagin'd Corners*'. So is Donne really more concerned about getting rid of sin now; or being 'imputed' righteous because of Christ's life? It seems Donne wants it both ways, just to be sure.

13.1.4. Anniversary

I. Text of the Poem

All kings, and all their favourites,
 All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
 The sun it self, which makes time, as they pass,

Is elder by a year now than it was
 When thou and I first one another saw.
 All other things to their destruction draw,
 Only our love hath no decay;
 This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday;
 Running it never runs from us away,
 But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse;
 If one might, death were no divorce.
 Alas ! as well as other princes, we
 -- Who prince enough in one another be --
 Must leave at last in death these eyes and ears,
 Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;
 But souls where nothing dwells but love
 -- All other thoughts being inmates -- then shall prove
 This or a love increase Æt̃d there above,
 When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.

And then we shall be throughly blest;
 But now no more than all the rest.
 Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we
 Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.
 Who is so safe as we? where none can do
 Treason to us, except one of us two.
 True and false fears let us refrain,
 Let us love nobly, and live, and add again
 Years and years unto years, till we attain
 To write threescore; this is the second of our reign.

II. Summary of the Poem

Most of us use anniversaries to celebrate. This poem, too, is a celebratory one, on the completion of the first year of a relationship. It would be most obvious to think of Donne's marriage, which was deep if costly. The celebratory language is in terms of the royalty of love. In a way, this is an extension of the theme of the microcosm of the lovers' world, boldly proclaimed in *The Sunne Rising*. If the lovers' world consists of only two inhabitants, then they are both royalty, the King and Queen of their own little universe.

The other thing that anniversaries make us think of is the passing of time. Love and time were typically seen as enemies in Elizabethan poetry. There was a great fear of 'mutability', of the

temporariness of things – and the word ‘temporary’ comes from the Latin word ‘tempus’, which means ‘time’. Donne boldly defies this: their love is outside time. It has a timeless quality, unlike everything else from kings to the sun itself. ‘Only our love hath no decay’ is a typical Donne statement, drawing attention to the uniqueness of his experience of love. So, like heavenly time (cf. Hebrews 13:8), it has no yesterday or tomorrow; it is eternally present.

However, death is a reality, and Donne does not flinch from thinking about it, since love and death might be seen as even greater enemies. However, for him, death is a leveller, though not so much in the conventional sense of everyone being brought down to the grave. In stanza two he acknowledges this in passing, but goes on to stress the opposite: everyone being ‘thoroughly blest’ (1.21) by entering heavenly life. Their souls will have been liberated from their bodies. The image of the body as the soul’s grave (1.20) is more Platonic than Christian, it should be noted.

Death, therefore, does not threaten, but it is nothing to be celebrated, since in heaven their love will not be unique. So, at the end of the poem, he turns back to the unique present: let us live nobly, with no fear or jealousy, for the next sixty years. The final clause; ‘this is the second of our raigne’ returns us confidently to the here and now.

13.1.5. Hymn to God the Father

I. Text

Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
 Which was my sin, though it were done before?
 Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
 And do run still, though still I do deplore?
 When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
 For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
 Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
 Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
 A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
 When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
 For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spum
 My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
 But swear by Thyself, 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.

II. Summary of the Poem

Like *Hymn to God, my God, in my Sicknesse*, this was written fairly late in Donne's life. There is an alternative version of it entitled *To Christ*. It was reputedly set to music and sung to a solemn tune.

Though dealing with a serious topic, one very important to Donne, the poem is also an extended play on words on the poet's name. So 'done'/Donne must be seen as being pronounced in the same way. The poet is asking God's forgiveness for different types of sins, but feeling as if he will never finish confessing them all. This gives him a fear that when he dies, he will not have received God's forgiveness and will perish 'on the shore', the point between life and death.

The first sin mentioned is what is known as original sin. Adam and Eve are portrayed in the Bible as the first human beings. They are shown disobeying God and, as a result, are expelled from the Garden of Eden at the Fall. This first or 'original' sin was believed to have tainted their descendants, predisposing all human beings to disobey God's commandments and making it difficult for them to have a close relationship to him.

This original sin is referred to by Donne as 'it were done before' and its continuance in himself by 'I do run still'. He deplors it but cannot help it. The last two lines of the stanza act as a refrain. When God has done (forgiving), there will be more sins in the future to forgive, so God has not in fact done/finished (forgiving). Nor has he Donne (in the sense of possessing Donne's full allegiance), because Donne is still prone to disobey God as a result of his fallen nature and its bias to sin.

In stanza two, Donne appears to be referring to particular sins, by which he also caused other people to sin. These may be spiritual or moral. It may be that he is having doubts about his abandonment of Catholicism or he may be thinking of some of his secular love poems and their frank sexuality.

The final stanza deals with a particular sin, that of fear. Donne is so afraid of sin that he is now in danger of committing the very sin of fear, through doubting God's promises of mercy and grace. Interestingly, he does not use Christian imagery to express this struggle, but imagery drawn from pagan Greek belief in the Fates, the three blind goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life. One Fate spun, one wove, and one cut the thread – which was the moment of death.

Resolution comes through the narrator praying that God should swear by himself to allow his son Jesus to shine like the sun (another play on words as Jesus was called the 'Son' of God) in mercy and righteousness Malachi 4:2.

If God does this, then he will have Donne and have done! As at the end of some of the Holy Sonnets (*This is my Playes Last Scene* and *At the Round Earths Imagin'd Corners*), Donne seems to be expecting a special response from God, although Christianity in fact teaches that God's mercy is extended to everyone who repents.

13.2. CRITICAL STUDY OF GEORGE HERBERT

13.2.1. Introduction to George Herbert

George Herbert is an important metaphysical poet. He is also regarded as a major religious poet. His religious beliefs have caused him to be a rebel against the teachings of Bible and authority of churches. The poet has always expressed his ideas in an original manner. He once said, "My lines and life are free, as the road. In most of his poems he idealises God and his creation." The tones of his poem are colloquial and he always gives emphasis to the dramatic use of imaginary, hyperbole, sensuousness highly intellectual. He also makes elaborate comparisons in his poems. Herbert as a poet was highly influenced by the contemporary Renaissance poets. His best poems are note devotional poetry and lyrics. Herbert expresses his thoughts and lyrics with an emphasis to his individual belief. John Donne had equally influenced Herbert. However, Herbert's treatment to metaphysical poetry was different from John Donne's. His poems expressed his simple faith without serious criticism. The tones of the poems are simple, quiter, and more reflecting.

For example ... "You must sit down,

Say Love, and test my meat

So I did sit

And it."

Herbert's poetry has metaphysical wits brilliantly used but they are more homely and easily understood. S.T. Coleridge calls Herbert Style as natural. His poems convey the ideas which are free from fashion in most of his religious poems. He argues with

god and deals with the theme of rebellion and reconciliation of complaint and resolution.

When Herbert argues with himself or with god he makes effective use of rhetorical questions followed by telling answers which is knowed. For example, in his poem The Flower

“How Fresh Oh Lord
How sweet and clear
Are thy returns.”

Herbert makes effective use of paradox and creates a sense of dramas in his work.

“And how in age I again
After somany day I live and write.”

Herbert comes of the Noble family and a great scholar. He has served the church as a clergy man. He always encourages his friends for public worship rather private prayer. His poems deal with incantation. The passion and redemption to desire gods love – mans behaviour and his disobedience and the inadequacy of his obedience. The most serious criticism his Herbert that his moral scale he is flited towards one side. For example, Herbert argues that worldly pleasures cannot be compared to heavenly bliss. But Herbert shows hardly any conflict in some his poems he uses word like denial – self denial.

13.2.2. Study of the Poem, Mortification

I. Text of the Poem

How soon doth man decay!
When clothes are taken from a chest of sweets
To swaddle infants, whose young breath
Scarce knows the way;
Those clouts are little winding sheets,
Which do consigne and send them unto death. 6
When boyes go first to bed,
They step into their voluntarie graves,
Sleep bindes them fast; onely their breath
Makes them not dead:
Successive nights, like rolling waves,
Convey them quickly, who are bound for death. 12

When youth is frank and free,
 And calls for musick, while his veins do swell,
 All day exchanging mirth and breath
 In companie;
 That musick summons to the knell,
 Which shall befriend him at the houre of death. 18

When man grows staid and wise
 Getting a house and home, where he may move
 Within the circle of his breath,
 Schooling his eyes;
 That dumbe in closure maketh love
 Unto the coffin, that attends his death. 24

When age grows low and weak,
 Marking his grave, and thawing ev'ry yeare,
 Till all do melt, and drown his breath
 When he would speak;
 A chair or litter shows the biere,
 Which shall convey him to the house of death. 30

Man ere he is aware,
 Hath put together a solemnitie,
 And drest his herse, while he had breath
 As yet to spare:
 Yet Lord, instruct us so to die,
 That all these dyings may be life in death. 36

II. Summary of the Poem Mortification

Man's life is short, and he dwindles rapidly. When clothes are taken out of a scented box in order to wrap little babies whose young breath hardly knows the way it has to go, we get the feeling that these garments are little winding-sheets which commit the babies to death and which foretell their death. The swaddling clothes in which little babies are wrapped are symbolic of the shrouds or winding-sheets in which dead bodies are wrapped up for burial.

When boys first go to bed, it is as if they have stepped into their graves of their own accord. They fall fast asleep in those beds and would appear to be dead. The babies are hardly conscious of themselves at this stage in their existence. They do not even know which way their breath is to go.

The boys go to bed voluntarily or of their own accord. But these beds are reminders to us that ultimately these boys will have to be buried in their graves. As the boys are fast asleep, there is hardly any difference between them and dead bodies. The only

thing that distinguishes them from dead bodies is that they are breathing which the dead bodies cannot do.

A young man is open-hearted and talks freely. In his mood of exultation he asks for music, and he spends the day exchanging jokes with his friends and companions. The music which he had asked for and which is played at his request is a symbol of the death-bell which will ring when he dies and which will be like a friend to him at that time. Thus the sounds of music which a young man wants to hear are also a reminder of death.

When a human being has grown mature, he becomes sober and wise. He now has a house in which he moves about in his family circle. At this stage his eyes have become disciplined so that his glances do not wander at random. The house, which itself remains silent, claims a kinship with the coffin in which the man will be placed when he dies. Thus the very house in which a man lives in his middle years is also symbolic of death.

Ultimately a man grows old, and becomes weak and feeble. He is now heading towards his grave. With every year that passes, he becomes gentler and gentler, till all his strength and vitality melt away and he cannot even breathe any more. And this happens when he was still feeling the desire to talk. At this stage a chair or couch, in which he sits, represents the carriage in which his dead body will be taken to the grave-yard for burial.

Thus, without realizing it, a man has been performing at every stage of his life a solemn ceremony in anticipation of his final end. Throughout his life he has been preparing his bier (that is, the carriage which will convey his dead body to the graveyard); and he has been doing so while he was still alive. Yet, O God, teach us to die in such a way that at every stage (infancy, boyhood, youth, manhood, and old age) our death becomes life-in-death, so that at every stage we think ourselves to be alive even though we get a reminder of death.

III. Critical Commentary on Mortification

The word "mortification" means rigid self-discipline and self-control. Used as the title for this poem, the word also implies an absolute humility; a complete submission to the will of God, a complete surrender of oneself to God's will. In the poem, the idea of self-discipline and self-surrender comes only in the last two lines. The last two lines may thus be regarded as the climax of the poem in the course of which the poet builds up a case for that self-surrender.

The main argument of the poem is that man is mortal and that a reminder of this fact comes to a human being at every stage of his life if only he has the intelligence to perceive it. The swaddling clothes of babies should remind us of the winding-sheets in which ultimately their bodies will be wrapped up when, after having grown to maturity and old age, they die. In other words, the swaddling clothes of infants are symbolic of shrouds, and therefore a reminder to us of death. When boys go to bed at night, and fall asleep, there is hardly any difference between them and dead bodies except in so far as the boys are breathing while dead bodies cannot breathe. Thus the boys' action in going to bed and falling asleep is a reminder to us of their ultimate fate which is death. When a young man, in his mood of exuberance, calls for music, the sound of the music is a reminder to us of the death-bell which will ring when the same young man, after going through the years of old age, will be dying. When a mature man builds a house and has a family and when we see him moving about in that house, we are reminded of the coffin in which he will ultimately be put when he is dead. Thus even the house, which is a kind of enclosure, is symbolic of the coffin and therefore of death. When a man has grown very old, when his limbs have become weak and feeble, and when his breath is sinking, the chair or the couch on which he lies reminds us of the carriage in which his dead body will be conveyed to the grave-yard for burial. Thus the old man's chair is also symbolic of death.

In short, at every stage of human life we get a reminder of death. From this analysis of human life, the author draws a moral. The moral is that man should live his life in such a way that every stage of his life, though a reminder of death, should yet be fruitful and meaningful. The poet prays to God to teach human beings to shape their lives in such a manner that at every stage – childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood, old age – the very reminder of death becomes an incentive to them to spend their years in fruitful endeavour and in the service of God. It is obvious, then, that the poem has been written with a moral and a didactic purpose. In the first five stanzas the poet draws our attention to the reminders of death which await man at every stage of his life. In the final stanza, he first sums up what he has said in the foregoing stanzas, and then addresses a prayer to God to seek God's guidance.

The most remarkable feature of this poem is its vivid imagery. Each stage of human life is depicted by means of a vivid picture, though each stage is viewed from a particular angle, namely from the point of view of mortality. In the first stanza, we have the picture of clothes being taken from a scented box in order to cover infants; and this picture is then followed by another which is depressing in its effect. "Those clouts are little winding sheets" says the poet. In the second stanza, we are given a picture of boys

going to bed, though at the same time the poet states the melancholy fact that these beds are like graves into which the boys have stepped voluntarily. The sound sleep of the boys is compared to death itself, the only difference being that the boys are yet breathing. Then follows the picture of a young man who is frank and free, who in a mood of exultation calls for music, and who spends his day in mirth. This picture is preparatory to the statement that the music to which the young man is listening reminds us of the death-bell which will ring when he dies. The next stanza gives us the picture of a mature man who has become staid and wise, who moves about in his house among the members of his family, and who has learnt to discipline his eyes. In the context of the poem, the house, which is regarded by the poet as a "dumb enclosure", serves as a symbol of the coffin in which the dead body of the house-owner will be put for burial. Then comes the last stage of life when the old man's breath is sinking and when his very chair is a reminder to us of the carriage in which his dead body will be taken to the grave-yard. This is how, throughout his life, man "puts together a solemnity", that is, performs a ritual or a ceremony which points to his ultimate end.

All these pictures in the poem lend to it a metaphysical quality because each picture is a metaphysical conceit. To regard every stage of life as a reminder of death is a rather far-fetched idea. Who but a metaphysical poet would think the swaddling clothes of infants to "be little winding sheets" which consign the infants to death? Similarly, to say that, when boys go to bed, they step into their voluntarily graves, is a fantastic notion. Again, only Herbert can suggest that the music being heard by a young man anticipates the death-bell which will ring when that young man, in course of time, meets his end. To regard a house as a dumb enclosure which makes love to the coffin is perhaps the most fantastic of all the notions which constitute the thought of the poem.

The technique of this poem is noteworthy. Each stage of human life in the poem begins with the word "When". "*When* clothes are taken....", "*When* boys go first to bed....", "*When* youth is frank and free....", "*When* man grows staid and wise"; "*When* age grows low and weak". Then there is a certain similarity between all the stanzas so far as the third and sixth lines of each stanza are concerned. The third line of each stanza ends with the word "breath" and the sixth line of each stanza ends with the rhyming word "death". The two rhyming words – "breath" and "death" – offer at the same time a strong contrast, one signifying life and the other reminding us of the end of life. This kind of subtlety in technique is a peculiar feature of Herbert's poetry.

13.2.3. Study of the Poem, Love (III)

I. Text of the Poem

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
 But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, 6
 If I lack'd any thing.
 A guest, I answer'd worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
 I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I? 12
 Truth Lort, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
 And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
 You must sit downe, sayes Love, and taste my meat: 18
 So I did sit and eat.

II. Summary of the Poem Love (III)

God, who is Love, welcomed me to His feast, but my soul hesitated and stepped back because of its sense of its own sinfulness and its unworthiness. God perceived with His quick eyes my hesitation in going forward in the direction of the feast. He therefore came nearer to me and asked me in a sweet manner if I lacked anything.

I replied that I was not fit to be his guest at the feast, and that what I lacked was any real worth. God said that I was surely fit to be His guest. I asked how an unsympathetic and thankless man like me could be fit to sit at His feast as a guest. I told my dear God that I could not even look at Him because of my sense of shame. Thereupon God took hold of my hand and smiling, said to me, "do not feel any hesitation in looking at me. After all, it was I who gave you those eyes, and therefore I bid you make use of them."

I said: "It is right. Lord, that you gave me these eyes, but I have been misusing them and have therefore rendered them unworthy of looking at you. Let me therefore go where I deserve to be because of my sinful deeds and my sense of shame." I certainly do not deserve to stay here with you. God thereupon said: "You know very well that the blame for your sins is no longer yours,

because that blame has already been taken by my son Christ upon, himself. (Christ took upon himself the sins of all mankind)." I replied: "In that case, my dear God, I shall stay, but only as a waiter at the dinner-table not as a participant because I do not deserve that honour." God, who is Love, said: "No you must sit down to dinner as my guest and you must taste the food which I have to offer." Thereupon I sat down and ate the food at God's table.

III. Critical Commentary on "Love (III)"

In this poem, God is represented as Love, meaning that God is the source and fountain of all love, and that God's love for mankind is infinite. God forgives man for his sins provided man approaches God in a spirit of remorse, repentance, and humility. God knows that every human being commits sins, and therefore what God wants is that human beings should realize their sinfulness and should feel sorry for their sins. The act of repentance implies spiritual improvement and spiritual progress. It is only the unrepentant sinner who incurs the wrath of God. The repentant sinner can be sure of God's mercy and forgiveness.

The poem is written in the form of a dialogue between the poet and God, thus reminding us of the poem which has the title 'Dialogue' and which begins: "Sweetest Saviour, if my soul..." In other words the poet here also is holding a private conversation with God, thus showing an intimate relationship with Him. We are to imagine, of course, that the soul of the poet, after the poet's death, stands before God, feeling acutely conscious of its sinfulness. The feast to which the poet's soul has been invited is the one which sinfulness. The feast to which the poet's soul has been invited is the one which God is to hold in Heaven and at which God himself will serve the guests. This feast should not be confused with the sacrament in the church, the ceremony known as the Eucharist where every member of the congregation is served with bread and wine symbolizing the body and the blood respectively of Christ. This feast means the heavenly communion which the souls will attend after departing from the earth.

The dialogue between the poet and God is intended to emphasize the poet's sense of his own unworthiness and God's unlimited capacity for forgiveness. When the soul of the poet hesitates to advance toward the feast God speaks encouraging words to the soul. When the poet admits that he was unkind and ungrateful and does not therefore have the courage to look at God. God smiles and, taking the poet by his hand, tells him that the eyes with which the poet is to look at Him were God's own gift to him and that the poet should not hesitate to use them. When the poet says that he has married his eyes by misusing them, God assures him that his sins, as also the sins of other people, were taken by Christ

upon himself. Indeed, God's whole attitude here is one of such profound benevolence that even the reader is overwhelmed. The poem is, indeed, charged with intense feeling, and that feeling is effectively communicated to us.

The following comments by critics on this poem are very illuminating:

The plot of this poem is an argument, a simple discussion between two protagonists. The reaction between the poet's soul and God is symbolized by a commonplace human situation, a travel-worn and shamefaced guest receiving hospitality. George Herbert develops his single situation at leisure and governs his reader's emotion almost entirely by his management of the tension. Starting at a low pitch, he reaches the emotional climax in the middle of the poem with the following words:

I the unkind, ungrateful ? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

He can then afford to relax gradually completing his picture, but without emphasis. When the end is reached, the emotion has become so poignant that the simple monosyllables in their prose order, "So I did sit and eat", convey more than the most in passionate rhetoric. All the feeling, which Herbert has so gradually and unostentatiously accumulated, rests upon those words. A graph might be made of the emotional plan of the poem in the shape of a pyramid: the two statements, "Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back", and "So I did siand eat", are the bases upon which it rests; at the apex is the cry of self-disgust.

Love is an imaginative description of the first reception of the soul into the heavenly communion. It is a very moving poem, and it derives a large part of its power from the very simplicity of its means. The overpowering meeting; face to face with Incarnate Love, is told as the simplest narrative and dialogue of the most ordinary kind: a traveler conscious of his unworthiness is reluctant to be a guest; but his scraples are overcome by the kindest and most courteous host. What Herbert learned about rhetoric and Christian persuasion is evident in this poem.

13.3 CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN MILTON

13.3.1. Introduction to John Milton

John Milton was born in London in 1608 at the height of the Protestant Reformation in England. His father was a law writer who had achieved some success by the time Milton was born. This prosperity afforded Milton an excellent education, first with private

tutoring, then a private school, and finally Cambridge. Milton excelled in languages and classical studies.

His father had left Roman Catholicism and Milton was raised Protestant, with a heavy tendency toward Puritanism. As a student, he wanted to go into the ministry, but was disillusioned with the scholastic elements of the clergy at Cambridge. Cambridge, however, afforded him time to write poetry. After Cambridge, he continued his studies for seven years in a leisurely life at his father's house. It was here that he wrote some of his first published poems, including "Comus" (1634) and "Lycidas" (1638), both of which he published in 1645.

Milton toured the European continent in 1638-1639 and met many of the great Renaissance minds, including Galileo and Grotius. The beginning of the Puritan Revolution found Milton back in England, fighting for a more humanist and reformed church. For more than twenty years, Milton set aside poetry to write political and religious pamphlets for the cause of Puritanism. For a time, he served as Secretary for Foreign Tongues under Cromwell.

Milton was a mixed product of his time. On the one hand, as a humanist, he fought for religious tolerance and believed that there was something inherently valuable in man. As a Puritan, however, he believed that the Bible was the answer and the guide to all, even if it went against democracy itself. Where the Bible didn't afford an answer, Milton would turn to reason.

Milton himself was married three times, all of which were rather unhappy affairs. He defended divorce in "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" in 1643. With this and other treatises, Milton often came in conflict with the Puritanism he advocated.

At the end of the war, Milton was imprisoned for a short time for his views. In 1660, he emerged blind and disillusioned with the England he saw around him.

Nevertheless, he was yet to write his greatest work. *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, followed by *Paradise Regained* in 1671. Milton's ability to combine his poetry with his polemics in these and other works was the key to his genius.

The classical influences in his work can be clearly delineated: Homer, Ovid, but especially Virgil. Shakespeare was the leading playwright of his day, and there are some references to his works in Milton's own poetry. The style and structure of the Spenser's "The Faerie Queen," was another influence on *Paradise Lost*. It was one of only a few books that were owned by the Milton's during John's upbringing.

Milton died from "gout" in 1674 and was buried in the Church of St. Giles in London.

"Lycidas" is a pastoral elegy in which John Milton laments the drowning of his friend and schoolmate, Edward King, at the University of Cambridge. Mainly iambic pentameters, with irregularly appearing short lines of six syllables, the poem's 193 lines are divided into verse paragraphs of irregular length and changing rhyme schemes. In the convention of the pastoral poem, the first-person persona of Lycidas is a shepherd, who speaks of King as the lost shepherd Lycidas and in the convention of the elegy, "Lycidas" progresses through sadness over an individual's loss.

"Lycidas," a poem is a memorial to Edward King, a classmate at Cambridge which reflects Milton's reverence for nature, his admiration of Greek Mythology, and his deeply ingrained Christian belief system. In "Lycidas," Milton combines powerful images from nature and Greek Mythology along with Biblical references in order to ease the pain associated with the premature death of King. King Edward drowns at sea in the prime of his life and Milton is left to make sense of this tragedy. Milton not only mourns the loss of a friend; he is also forced to face his own mortality. Milton questions the significance of writing poetry when he will inevitably die. Milton copes with the subject of death by insisting on the glory of a Christian life and the promise of rebirth.

On His Blindness is about poet's blindness at the early age before making good and due use of his creative talent to redeem the God's gift. He craves for serving God but his lack of sight won't allow him to do so. While pondering on this predicament of the poet, the inner voice encourages the poet that he should not worry for God helps both the category of the people: those who serve and those who just wait and hold the burden of yoke because there are many ways to serve God, it's not the only way to serve by the talents.

13.3.2. Study of the Poem, Lycidas

I. Text of the Poem

In this Monody the Author bewails a
learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd in his Passage
from *Chester* on the *Irish* Seas, 1637, And by
occasion fortels the ruine of our corrupted
Clergy then in their height.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,

I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
 And with forc's fingers rude,
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year. [5]
 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 [10]
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
 He must not flote upon his watery bear
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
 Without the meed of som melodious tear.
 Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well, [15]
 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, [20]
 And as he passes turn,
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.
 For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd [25]
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
 We drove a field, 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 [30]
 Toward Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
 Mean while 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, [35]
 And old *Damoetas* lov'd to hear our song.

But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,
 Now thou art gon, and never must return!
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
 With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o 'regrown, [40]

And all their echoes mourn.
 The Willows, and the Hazle Copses green,
 Shall now no more be seen
 Fanning their joyous Keaves to thy soft layes.
 As killing as the Canker to the Rose, [45]
 Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
 Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,
 When first the White thorn blows;
 Such *Lycidas*, thy loss to Shepherds ear.

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep [50]
 Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd *Lycidas* ?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,
 Where your old *Bards*, the famous *Druids* ly,
 Nor on the shaggy top of *Mona* high,
 Nor yet where *Deva* spreads her wisard stream: [55]
 Ay me, I fondly dream!
 Had ye bin there – for what could that have don?
 What could the Muse herself that *Orpheus* bore,
 The Muse herself, for her in chanting son
 Whom Universal nature did lament, [60]
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
 His goary visage down the stream was sent,
 Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore.

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
 To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade, [65]
 And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
 Were it not better don as others use,
 To sport with *amaryllis* in the shade,
 Or with the tangles of *Neoera*'s hair ?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise [70]
 (that last infirmity of Noble mind)
 To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
 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, [75]
 And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,
Phoebus repli'd, 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, [80]
 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, [85]
 Smooth-sliding *Mincius*, crown'd with vocall reeds,
 That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
 But now my Oate proceeds,
 And listens to the Herald of the Sea
 That came in *Neptune's plea*, [90]
 He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Fellon 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, [95]
 And sage *Hippotades* their answer brings,
 That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd
 The Ayr was calm, and on the level brine,
 Sleek *Panope* with all her sisters play'd.
 It was that fatall and perfidious Bark [100]
 Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
 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 [105]
 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 Keyes he bore of metals twain, [110]
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)
 He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,
 How well could I have spar'd for thee young swain,
 Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold ? [115]
 Of other care they little reck'ning make,

Then 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 ought els the least [120]
 That to the faithfull Herdmans 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, [125]
 But swoln 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 sed,
 But that-handed engine at the door, [130]
 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 Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues. [135]
 Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,
 Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
 On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,
 Throw hither all your quaint enameld eyes,
 That on the green terf suck the honied showres, [140]
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowres.
 Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies.
 The gufted Crow-toe, and pale Jasmine,
 The white Pink, and the Pansie freakt with jeat,
 The glowing Violet. [145]
 The Musk-rose, and the well attir'd Woodbine,
 With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive hed,
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
 Bid *Amaranthus* all his beauty shed,
 And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears, [150]
 To stew the Laureat Herse 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 ere thy bones are hurld, [155]

Whether beyond the stormy *Herbrides*,
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,
 Sleep'st by the fable of *Bellerus old*, [160]
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
Looks toward Namancos and Boyona's hold;
 Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.
 And, O ye *Dolphins*, waft the haples youth.

Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more, [165]
 For *Lycidas* your sorrow is not dead,
 Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,
 So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled Ore, [170]
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
 So *Lycidas* sunk low, but mounted high,
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves;
 Where other groves, and other streams along,
 With *Nectar* pure his oozy Look's he laves, [175]
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
 In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
 There entertain him all the Saints above,
 In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
 That sing, and singing in their glory move, [180]
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
 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. [185]

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th' Okes and rills,
 While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,
 He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
 With eager thought warbling his *Dorick* lay:
 And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills, [190]
 And now was dropped into the Western bay;
 At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
 Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

II. Summary of the Poem

Lycidas is an elegy written on the premature death of poet's friend King Edward King who was a poet himself. That compels Milton to compose elegy. There is another occasion that made Milton to write a lamenting poem, *Lycidas*. *Lycidas*, therefore, is a mournful poem on the two losses: one, the death of his friend which caused a great loss at personal level because he was a friend of the poet and literary loss because he died before he could establish his literary canon; two, the corruption in the church also compels the poet to write this poem.

The poet recollects the potentialities and virtues of his friend and praises. Then he invites the mythological deities to join in his mourning after blaming the watery deities responsible for his death because they could not salvage the drowning poet. The poem is in the tradition of pastoral elegy in which the poet assumes himself as a shepherd and his friend as another. The setting of the poem is rural and natural. The profession of the mourner and mourned in elegy is grazing and tending the flocks of the sheep. The pagan deities are supposed to bless and protect the shepherds from the natural calamities and disasters. The virtues of the deceased are recounted and lamented as a great loss to the mourner. It is fully replete with personal strong feelings. In terms of this intimate feelings Dr. Johnson criticized the *Lycidas* saying that Milton feigned to show these feelings which are absent in the poem.

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. 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.

Lycidas is a pastoral elegy, a genre initiated by Theocritus, also put to 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. It employs the irregular rhyme and meter of an Italian canzone. Stella Revard suggests that *Lycidas* also exhibits the influence of Pindaric odes, especially in its allusions to Orpheus, Alpheus, and Arethusa. The poem's 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.

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.

III. Critical Commentary on the Poem

From the beginning Milton's sense of literature was both passionately humanistic and Christian. For Milton, poet and prophet of were combined in a very special way. Milton had acquired of classical and other language in greater depth.

Lycidas is an elegy on Edward King Milton has written *Lycidas* as a memorial which was, published in Poet that is 1638. The poem stands out at once for its gravity of themes artfully modulated has and the conventions of pastoral elegy as developed in Greek, Latin, Italian poetry. The verse of *Lycidas* has its source of Italian poetry of 16th century.

Lycidas begins with a statement of the occasion which prompted it the very final line introduces Milton in his capacity of a young and ambitious poet. In the opening lines the poet argues that because he is young he has to pluck the berries of his art before. He has already begun his cause as a poet. Similarly he would like to attend the status of a great poet in the great classical tradition. The subject of the poem is not only Edward King his friend and the memory. It is rather his glorification of a great Christian humanist and poetist. *Lycidas* has been disowned before he could fulfill his potentialities as a great poet. Milton laments over the unfulfilled dream of *Lycidas*. For instance Milton takes the image of the unripe berries and suggestive notion of the changing seasons with an emotional implication. The use of words like seed time and harvest symbolize the birth and death and perhaps the birth and rebirth. The young poet longs the premature death of his fellow poet. His first reaction is to sing or lament for *Lycidas*.

Milton begins the elegy in a pastoral tradition. He is invoking the muses (angels) suggesting that he would be blessed by them or fulfilling his duty. This more than a conventional Elegy its subject is Lycidas. Lycidas is a classical name given to his departed friend as a mark of respect. Milton in the poem Lycidas is glorifying Edward King's life and his achievements. He was not only a great poet but also a humanist. In Milton's words "Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew himself to see and builds the lofty rhyme."

Both Edward King and Milton are poets but the link of the themes with classical mythology makes them great in with the tradition of western literature. Milton expresses his education about nature. For example, in the first part of the poem the poet describes the "eye lids of the moon" and he rose till the states. Nature regarded with a scene of the passing of time has been hinted (indicated) in the poem. He also uses a single great phrase suggesting the dawn of a new day with human promise "Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures." The two poets are described pursuing their activities together against a background of changing nature. There Persuade (activity) culminates with the using of the evening star (from dawn to dusk). The fifth sentence of the poem moves up to a climatic Autumn image. 'Shatter your leaves before the mellowing years. Thus there is a contrast between the 'wither' and the 'ripe'. In other words it is contrast between death and hope. The theme has been fully presented in the opening lines. The young poet faces the pre-mature death of the unfulfilled mellow poet, this first reaction is to seeing a lament for him :

"He must not flate (float) upon his watery beiere.

Unwept, and welder to the packing wind.

Without the poet of some indodius tear.

It holds a note of anticipation and this awareness makes Milton invoke muses. The subject Lycidas has been taken from a classical name. Lycidas in reality was a critic genius. Milton wants this tribute (respect) to his departed friend. He is convinced that death is inevitable to all men however talented they might be. In this poem Milton identifies Lycidas with the general conception of man when he tells us why we should sing for Lycidas. In the next line he justifies that Lycidas deserves to be sung. Both Milton and Edward King were friends from the student life till they establish themselves as reputed poets. The pastoral imagery makes the poem more powerful in thoughts and ideas. For example: "The

glimmering eyelids of the moon” Nature has been regarded with a sense of the passing of time. Each at the end of the poem the poet emphasizes a single phrase suggested. The two poets are described pursuing their poetic character against a background of changing nature which culminates with the using of the evening state. Now the poet has shifted his hope from earth to Heaven. The poet listens to the music and its rhythm of his flute. The image of nature which have suggested progress and hope are linked with the images of nature suggesting decay and death. The emotional effects of some of the repetitive in this poem are is noteworthy. For example while invoking the muses Milton also feels the pangs (suffering) of his friend drowning. In a sentimental note he blames the water Nymelus who could have saved his friend who was drowned off the North coast of Wales. In traditional pastoral terms Milton not only invokes (prays) the muses and Nymelus but also blames the god of the sea because he holds them responsible for Lycidas’s death. “That’s sunk so low that recreates head of thine. Lycidas refuses to be smothered with flowers Lycidas is drowned. With a controlled passion Milton pays his tribute for the departed soul it believes that those who are noble and chaste on earth definitely got blamed by god. Milton returns at the end of those pastoral images most suggestive of the poet. He pays his respect to the great Greek and Latin poets with the western literacy tradition. Lycidas would remains in the hands of the living because of this poem. The sense of personal loss rises from the repeated refrain ‘Go home unfate, my lamps; your master has now no time for you.’ The real point of the poem lies in the question asked “To whom shall I confine my heart?” Milton also justifies his sand that Lycidas and his works were not ordinary subjects. His works can be considered as of Notional epic.

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”

13.3.3. Study of the Poem, On His Blindness

I. Text of the Poem

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide

And that one talent which is death to hide
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present
 My true account, lest he returning chide;
 "Doth God exact day labor, light denied?"
 I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
 Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and wait.

II. Summary of the Poem

The poet considers how his "light" and his ability to see is wasted or put forth in the world before he reaches to his half age. As Milton is a religious poet he regrets to lose an inner light or spiritual capacity. This line may refer to the Biblical parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) which speaks of a bad servant who neglects his master's talent (a talent was a kind of coin) instead of using it; he has "cast into outer darkness." It also means Milton's talent as a writer. "Lodged with me useless" means that his talent as a poet is useless now that he is losing his sight. Although his soul is inclined to serve god with that talent and with his writing, he feels his talent will be wasted as he becomes blind. He wishes ultimately to give a good account of himself and his service to God otherwise the god would scold him.

The speaker desires to serve God through his poetry, to use his talents for the glory of God. It refers to the second coming of Christ or to the judgment so that he won't chide or rebuke me when he returns. Milton grumblingly asks here if God just wants day-work, or smaller, lesser tasks, since Milton's blindness denies him his "light" and thus the use of his talents. Milton allows his grumbling tone to show first, and then qualifies his own attitude as foolish. Patience is not capitalized, but has often been thought of as a personification here rather than as another aspect of Milton's inner self. Either way, in the inner dialogue, patience speaks in the remaining six lines, quite effectively having the last word.

Patience speaks, to prevent that "murmur," Milton's questioning of God's will. Patience's reply explains one aspect of the nature of God and affirms a kind of service to God that is different from the service advocated in the parable of the talents. First of all God does not need man's work or God-given talents. The nature of service to God is explained that the people who are most obedient to God's will. These people are the ones who serve God best. The image of the yoke is also Biblical; a yoke was a kind

of harness put on oxen but in Matthew 11:29-30 it is an image for God's will. "His state is kingly" explains God's greatness; patience goes on to elaborate in the next lines on that greatness. At God's bidding or will, thousands of people and by implication angelic messengers "speed and post" all over the world all the time. This line implies a sort of constant worldwide motion of service to God's commands; that allows the last line to imply by contrast a great restfulness and peace. There is more than one way to serve God. And patience is telling the poet that even his waiting or the apparent inaction caused by his blindness can be a kind of service if it meets the criterion of bearing the yoke well.

III. Commentary on *On His Blindness*

This is a Petrarchan sonnet, of iambic pentameter and yet again simple diction, full and half-rhyme, enjambment and contraction. Milton has used his extensive knowledge of scripture to create a deeply personal poem, and gently guide himself and the reader or listener from an intense loss through to understanding and gain.

The main themes of this poem are Milton's exploration of his feeling, fears and doubts regarding his failed sight, his rationalisation of this fear by seeking solutions in his faith.

The tone of the poem is one of contrasting darkness and light, 'my light is spent' and spending half of his life in this dark world and wide, using alliteration and contrast to give understanding to his affliction, but Milton is also indicating a biblical reference to the 'Talent'; a unit of currency in those times, and used several by Jesus as a symbolic level of the meaning of forgiveness. The ending part of this line which is death to hide', Milton is referring to the Resurrection and that if one hides one's Talent or the gift of the forgiveness and compassion, and not extend it to others, will this will this be extended to you at the End of days?

The fourth line does refer to his useless eyes, thought hits handicap serves for Milton to be more resolute to do more, thought my soul bent' and goes on into the fifth To serve therewith my Maker, and present My true account, lest he returning chide; the judgement of Christ finds him wanting, his life's account shows no profit, by not extending forgiveness, and is rebuked.

Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd ? I fondly ask: Here Milton uses the word 'fondly' rather than the word foolishly, as if his question was not thought through, also the line is a similar question posed to Jesus by his disciples as they left the temple regarding why this man was blind.

Milton's question is similar to that of the disciples, asking if his blindness was a daily wage for his labours from God, and his answer from The Inner Guide, the Comforter or, that which Milton refers to as Patience, speaks to him that God does not require what man thinks of as important. That, his blindness, is but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

Milton uses the words 'mild' and 'yoke' as another reference to Jesus and again denotes Milton's deeper understanding of Christ's gentle disposition joined in the union of servitude towards mankind and his invitation to join in the world's salvation.

'Thousands bidding speed' appears to be a reference to the faithful awaiting Christ's Second Coming and their duty to 'Post o'er land and ocean without rest: to proclaim that, 'They also serve who stand and wait' appears to indicate that they who do, are also doing God's Will.

This poem is about re-evaluating after change and contains a subject matter which is difficult. He turns this tension into the positive by seeking for himself a truth or reason from blindness. By exploring his own emotional response to his future, in seeking comfort from the scripture regarding the role that blind people have served in the spreading of the Word of God. Milton appears to understand that it is not what this world perceives a person to be or does which establishes their value to God, but the very fact that they serve as part of God's creation which is Loved, and they need to love in a similar fashion.

13.4. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have critically studied the peculiarities of three poets along with their prescribed poems in the Caroline age: John Donne, George Herbert and John Milton.

John Donne in his *The Flea* speaks of the importance of flea as their marriage bed by using his typical metaphysical conflict. He requests his beloved not to kill the flea, for it will be an act of sacrilege and blasphemy. In his *This Is My Play's Last Scene*, Donne deals with the apocalyptic phenomenon of the nature. He imagines his death and describes it with the uses of the different metaphysical conceits. In the *Anniversary*, he celebrates the first marriage anniversary. He appraises if the lovers' world consists of only two inhabitants, then they are both royalty, the King and Queen of their own little universe. And in his *Hymn to God the Father*, Donne prays to God. The poet is asking God's forgiveness for different types of sins he committed, but feeling as if he will never finish confessing them all. This gives him a fear that when he dies, he will not have received God's forgiveness and will perish.

George Herbert in his poem, *Mortification* brings out that man has been preparing for his death unwittingly. A man has been performing at every stage of his life a solemn ceremony in anticipation of his final end. Throughout his life he has been preparing his bier. The poet earnestly requests God to teach us to die in such a way that at every stage (infancy, boyhood, youth, manhood, and old age) our death becomes life-in-death, so that at every stage we think ourselves to be alive even though we get a reminder of death. In *Love (III)*, Herbert depicts God's infinite love towards his creatures. God is represented as Love, as a source and fountain of all love. God forgives man for his sins provided man approaches God in a spirit of remorse, repentance, and humility. God knows that every human being commits sins, and therefore what God wants is that human beings should realize their sinfulness and should feel sorry for their sins.

John Milton's *Lycidas* and *On His Blindness* have been studied critically at the end of this unit. *Lycidas* is an elegy which mourns the premature death of his fellow. It's in the pastoral form of elegy in which the poet, the mourner, laments on the death of fellow shepherd. The setting of pastoral elegy is rustic, natural (forest, weeds and grass, streams and lake etc.) and rural life of shepherds. And the poem *On His Blindness* deals with Milton's exploration of his feeling, fears and doubts regarding his blindness at the tender age, his rationalization of this fear by seeking solutions in his faith.

13.5. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What is Metaphysical conceit? Illustrate with the examples from the prescribed poems of John Donne.
2. Write a note on Donne's poem, *The Flea*.
3. What is the central idea of Donne's poem, *This Is My Play's Last Scene*?
4. Critically appreciate John Donne's *Anniversary*.
5. Critically appreciate George Herbert's *Mortification*.
6. Compare and contrast Donne's *Hymn to God the Father*, Herbert's *Love (III)* and Milton's *On His Blindness*
7. Critically appreciate John Milton's *Lycidas*
8. Write short notes on the followings:
 - I. Nature of God's love as reflected in Donne's *Hymn to God the Father*
 - II. *Lycidas* as an Elegy
 - III. Themes in *Lycidas*
 - IV. Religious elements in the prescribed poems of Donne, Herbert and Milton



CRITICAL STUDY OF POET: JOHN DRYDEN

Unit Structure :

- 14.0. Objectives
- 14.1. Introduction to the Poet
- 14.2. Critical Study of Absalom and Achitophel
 - 14.2.1. Introduction to Absalom and Achitophel
 - 14.2.2. Summary and Analysis of Absalom and Achitophel
 - 14.2.3. Critical Approaches to Absalom and Achitophel
 - 14.2.4. Text of Absalom and Achitophel
- 14.3. Let's Sum up
- 14.4. Important Questions

14.0. OBJECTIVES

The prime objectives of this unit are to make you familiar with the satirical works and their peculiarities during the Restoration England. You will be introduced with major works of the satire by Dryden in general and Absalom and Achitophel in particular.

14.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

John Dryden was born at Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, in 1631. He came of a Puritan family, which had been for years very active in the political world. Dryden was sent to school at Westminster. He published some verses at the age of eighteen. In 1650 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and took a degree of B.A. four years later, but it is probable that he spent also the next three years at Cambridge. He went to London in 1657. His first important literary effort, *Heroic Stanzas* to the memory of Cromwell, was published in 1659. This was followed the next year by verses on the return of Charles. In order to add to his slender income, he turned to the stage, and after two unsuccessful attempts he produced his first play, *The Wild Gallant*, in 1663. This comedy was not well received, and Dryden confesses that his forte was not comedy. The same year he produced *The Rival Ladies*, and married Lady Elizabeth Howard. *The Indian Queen* (1664), written in collaboration with Sir Robert Howard, his wife's brother, enjoyed

considerable success. Dryden followed this with *The Indian Emperor* (1665). During the Plague Dryden lived with his father-in-law in Wiltshire, where he wrote his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). Howard's preface to his *Four New Plays* (1665) called forth a reply from Dryden: *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). From the re-opening of the theatres in 1666, to 1681, Dryden wrote little except his plays. The production of Buckingham's satirical play *The Rehearsal* in 1671, in which Dryden was the chief personage, called forth the preface *Of Heroic Plays and Defence of the Epilogue* (1672). *All for Love*, in all probability the poet's greatest play, was performed in 1678. He continued to produce plays to the end of his career.

In 1681 he turned to satire and wrote *Absalom and Achitophel*, which achieved instant and widespread popularity. This was followed by other satires. In 1687, after his conversion to the Catholic Church, he wrote *The Hind and the Panther*, a plea for Catholicism. His Catholic leanings lost for him the laureateship and other offices when the Revolution came. During his last ten years he translated many of the Latin classics: Virgil, Ovid, Lucretius, Horace, Theocritus, and others, and modernized Chaucer. He died in 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dryden's contribution to English literature, besides his poems and plays, was the invention of a direct and simple style for literary criticism. He improved upon the prose of the Elizabethan writers in the matter of ridding English of its involved forms, even if through that process he lost some of its gorgeous ornament and rugged strength. Jonson's method in criticism was after all not much more than the note-book method of jotting down stray thoughts and opinions and reactions. Dryden elaborated his ideas, sought the weight of authority, argued both sides of the question, and adduced proofs. Dryden performed an inestimable service to his countrymen in applying true standards of criticism to the Elizabethans and in showing them a genuine and sympathetic if occasionally misguided love for Shakespeare. Dryden also enjoyed the advantage of being able to bring his knowledge of the drama of Spain and France to bear on his criticism of English dramatists.

Dryden's stint with literature in general and satire in particular has been taken into account by the literary critics and literary historians. The term "Satire" is difficult to define, because the genre is extremely flexible. There is a surprising variety in the form (in both verse and prose) and in the intention of the writer. Invective, offensive vituperation, didactic instruction, corrective ridicule, personal abuse, pessimistic generalizations, mild scorn, amused raillery, genial or sharp parody, slapstick humour, gross vulgarity, ironic wit – all these and several other features are to be found in different satirical works. "the true end of satire is the

amendment of vices by correction, “ says Dryden. There is a general agreement that satire is a “criticism of life”, and that it destroys by ridicule and, implicitly, upholds certain moral values. But the variety of subject and style in the field of satire is amazing.

Whatever hints about the writing of satire Dryden took from his contemporaries, such as John Hall, John Cleveland, Andrew Marvell, Edmund Waller, or John Oldham, it is obvious that he had read the major Roman satirists. In fact, in his later years, he translated some of the Latin satires into English. And so, for good or bad, English satire once more modeled itself upon Horace, Persius, and Juvenal. When Dr. Johnson

The writing of satires is not an entirely safe pursuit. Some Roman satirists suffered exile. Dryden received a beating from hired ruffians in 1679. Voltaire was similarly treated in 1725. Although Dryden attacked Shadwell, Shaftesbury, Papists and Fanatics he paradoxically objected to Whigs meeting in coffee-houses in order to indulge in witty abuse of the government.

Concerning his position in the field of poetry, he said: “He found it brick and he left it marble.” It has been perhaps too readily assumed that Dryden and Pope likewise perfected the Roman satire which they found and left it Augustan marble. But this assumption is not strictly correct. All the Roman verse-satirists wrote in a bold, free-running hexameter, which has a range unequalled by that of any other metre except perhaps English blank verse at its fullest development. They could make it do almost everything from comical conversation to sustained and lofty declamation. On the contrary, Dryden and Pope wrote in the stopped couplet – a metre capable of great delicacy and wit, but quite unable to attain a wide range of emotion, or a copious variety of effects. Compared with their classical models, they were severely limited. Not only did they over-indulge in antitheses, but they were severely limited. Not only did they over-indulge in antitheses, but they “thought in couplets, and rode Pegasus on the snaffle.”* Besides, Dryden was somewhat influenced by the forces of genteel respectability, so that colorful slangy talk, eccentric vocabulary, or coarse abuse were replaced by polite sarcasms or abstract terms. (Pope was influenced by those forces to an even greater extent). The verbal tricks of *Hudibras*, which Dryden disapproved, were similar to some of the devices of the Roman satirists, and in refining his language and adopting the heroic couplet, Dryden had also to say farewell to the huge variety of Latin satire. Thus we have to revise radically the usual view that Roman satire brought clarity and discipline to English satire, enabling Dryden, Pope and Johnson to produce English marble from English brick. The fact is that these writers took the wonderful Roman

hotch-potch and reduced it severely to the limited couplet satire that we know.

In an interesting passage of his *Essay on Satire*, Dryden gives us his own recipe: "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily. But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! This is the mystery of that noble trade. Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive: a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. There is a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but, it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind-sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

14.2. CRITICAL STUDY OF ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

14.2.1. Absalom and Achitophel as a Satire

Absalom and Achitophel begins a new chapter in the history of English classical satire. Satire had passed successively through the hands of Gascoigne, Donne, Lodge, Hall, Marston, Wither, Cleveland, Marvell, and Oldham; but it had never attained an excellence comparable to what it attained here. Dryden's poem raised English satire to the level of that superb satirical literature which Quintilian claimed as the peculiar and exclusive product of the Roman genius. Not only did it furnish Pope, and the school of Pope as well as others (as, for instance, Byron) with models, but it exhibited for the first time the power, plasticity, and compass of the heroic couplet in departments of poetry where it was to achieve its greatest triumphs. The plan of the poem is perhaps not original. The idea of casting satire in the epic mould, which is an important feature of the work, was "suggested no doubt by the Fourth Satire of Juvenal. Horace and Lucan undoubtedly supplied models for the elaborate portraits, and Lucan's description of the political condition of Rome at the time of the great civil conflict is, unmistakably, Dryden's archetype for his picture of the state of parties in London. Nor was the ingenious device of disguising living persons and

current incidents under the veil of Scriptural names new to Dryden's readers. This poem is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent, for the verdict of those whom it delighted when it was published has been corroborated by the judgment of those who no longer feel interested in the local and ephemeral elements of the poem.

Commenting on Dryden's satirical thrusts, Bonamy Dobree says: "His attack is always superb, plunging you straight into the sweeping movement of his theme, as for instance in the first of his three wide-embracing occasional pieces, *Absalom and Achitophel*. This, called by him simply 'A Poem' and best described by Dr. Ian Jack as a 'witty, heroic poem', was written for the purpose of setting public feeling against Lord Shaftesbury, leader of the Whig faction, scheming to exclude the Catholic Duke of York from the succession, and perhaps put the King's natural son, the Duke of Monmouth, on the throne. Thus Dryden opens with a deliciously bland excuse for Charles II's virile manifestations: Lines 1-10. And then we are led into the story or, rather, situation. Though the poem is not primarily a satire, the satirical element soon appears – in the biting description of the English, the Jews of the story: Lines 47-50. Only a modicum of historical knowledge is needed to enjoy the poem; the drama unrolls itself to culminate in the great temptation scene, where Achitophel (Shaftesbury) lures Absalom (Monmouth) to his doom, pricking him into saying: 'Why am I scanted by a niggard birth?', the grip never being relaxed through the more than thousand lines. Yet Dryden orders the rise and fall, eases the tension as he will, partly by pace, but largely by the characters, in the main satirically drawn. The most famous of them is Achitophel though he himself thought that of Zimri (Buckingham) 'worth the whole poem', since it was not bloody, but ridiculous enough', in fact more subtle as being raillery rather than bludgeoning. Yet Shaftesbury must always be the favourite, as it contains more poetic power: 'for close designs and crooked counsels fit...', the pressure continuing for some 50 lines without a hint of monotony, the caesuras being brilliantly varied in depth as well as position as stroke follows devastating stroke. Other personages crowd upon the scene, treated bitterly, scornfully, or disdainfully as occasion serves, sometimes with one or two deft shafts of ridicule, as, for instance, Shimei (Bethel) who did wisely from expensive sins refrain ... for gain'. The religious sects receive due buffeting, as do the petty political intriguers together with the deluded populace. Not for a moment does the poem fail in pungency: and through it pierces Dryden's innate conservatism, summed up in one phrase: 'For innovation is the blow of fate' (Line 800).

Very different is *The Medal*, again directed against Shaftesbury, where Dryden achieved sheer Juvenalian satire.

MacFlecknoe, on the other hand, is a gloriously comic mock-heroic, the first in the language, in which Dryden lampooned Shadwell, treated with equal contempt in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*. The opening is delusively magniloquent; 'All human things are subject to decay', etc. the account of the enthronement of Shadwell a successor to the throne of Nonsense proceeds with a gorgeous pomposity. The piece is variegated by parodied echoes of other poets all the while that the low is exalted, and fantastic absurdities rocketed to dazzling heights.

Dryden was over fifty when he wrote his great satires – *Absalom and Achitophel* (in two parts, 1681 and 1682); *The Medal* (1682); and *MacFlecknoe* (1682). His genius at this time had attained its full maturity and vigour, and he was the master of perfect poetic expression. The motives which prompted these satires were not of one single kind. Personal conviction certainly counted for much. Following his tastes and the tendencies of his temperament, Dryden put his weight on the side of the monarchy. Suspicious of the Earl of Shaftesbury and of the principles with which the popular cause identified itself, he was led to denounce the most dangerous partisans of this cause, the middle-class Whigs of the town, in *The Medal*. Against his former friend, Shadwell, whom he gives the name of MacFlecknoe, he had many grievances – a now manifest divergence of political opinions the antipathy of an artistic nature as against a vulgar temperament, the legitimate resentment following a personal attack made by Shadwell on him (in *The Medal of John Bayes*, 1682). But, at the same time, he did not forget that he was supporting the cause of the King, and that he wrote with the implicit approval of the royal court. As the poet-laureate, he knew that he was expected to show both skill and self-command if he was engaged in strife during his tenure of office.

This is the explanation of the superiority of art in Dryden's satires. At times the violence of his tone is equal to that of his contemporaries like John Oldham (1653-83). Like Oldham, he knew how to hate strongly. But his mastery of expression allowed him in any case a careful attention to form; and the fire of his inspiration was tempered by the full and clear consciousness of the artist.

As a precaution against a possible turn of political fortunes, Dryden made a certain concession in his denunciation of Shaftesbury. The passage, in which Shaftesbury, the Magistrate as distinguished from the meddling politician, receives a tribute of praise, was introduced into the poem after the acquittal of the man whom the King and his supporters tried to ruin. There is little doubt that Dryden was influenced by the trend of circumstances. His sincere esteem for certain qualities of Shaftesbury could not be easily expressed when he himself was pursuing the latter's

condemnation. The acquittal of Shaftesbury restored to Dryden part of his independence. There is no need to accuse Dryden of baseness in this matter; but it must be recognised that he did not rise above the part of the political agent which he was called upon to play because of the royal patronage.

The matter of Dryden's satirical work is not original. The utilization of biblical personages and events for the purpose of satire was something very familiar. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer compared Monmouth to Absalom; in 1681, a satirist likened Shaftesbury to Achitophel. Dryden made use of this ready-made frame and, in making use of it, he displayed all the classical power of form. Aided by a clear and well-thought-out plan, his construction acquires a rare architectural quality. However, *Absalom and Achitophel* betrays some uncertainty, a development that is not balanced in every part. But the details are worked in by a touch that is broad and free, with a wonderful infallibility. The irony of the satire, at times indulgent and fraught with good nature, at others much more severe, controls the action, fraught with good nature, at others much more severe, controls the action, and groups the figures and their movement into one general irresistible suggestion. The poem succeeds in creating an impression of the innate goodness of an indulgent King, and of his beneficent majesty, and arousing the reader's sympathy. Behind the attractive but misguided son, and bathed in a doubtful light of ridiculous or ominous hue, stand the fomenters of revolt, dominated by the evil counselor. The argumentation in the poem and the speeches in it enhance its persuasive quality. Everything in the poem converges with admirable unity to the same end. The portraits with which the poem abounds especially reveal the art of Dryden. In these portraits we admire the very fine sense of delicate touch, the felicity of picturesque characterization; above all, as Coleridge said the living truth of organic wholes. Nowhere else do we find so free a display of Dryden's classicism, enriched and set off as it is by a romanticism of the imagination?

The style illustrates both (i.e., classicism and romanticism). There is a just accuracy and a guarded fitness; the fever of intellectual imagination is now sobered, and with it the "conceits" have disappeared. The inventive genius of the writer brings about an alliance of words and ideas in which brilliancy and novelty harmonies with the demands of taste. But all the central warmth, all the imaginative ardour remains; it acts as an animating force within the expression itself, lending it energy, vividness, and vitality. Condensed in brief evocations, in sober, striking images, the power of poetic suggestion is here to be found in its fullness, in no way hindered by the exercise of the writer's critical judgment. The writer's critical faculty and his creative verve do not impair each other, because they cannot be distinguished one from the other.

The style of Dryden, in his most decidedly classical pieces, is above all an inspired style; its purity and its firmness, just like its course and its luster, are a result of the union of spontaneity with artistic skill.

Dryden's satirical vein owes its outstanding quality to the fact that it represents reconciliation between the scholarly ideal and popular inspiration. It remains popular because of its biblical setting, its imaginative theme, its direct allusions, and the portraits to which the reader could always attach a name. It is scholarly by virtue of its deportment, its relative moderation, the choice and the dignity of its expression, the generality of the thought, and that standard value, that impersonal significance, which Dryden has vested in the individual and at the same time representative figures of Zimri, Achitophel, and Shimei.

Towards the end of 1682, there appeared a second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, published like the first anonymously, and in no way called for by the plan of the first. It is the work of a writer other than Dryden, but he had inserted therein two very fine passages, the portraits of Doeg and Og (Settle and Shadwell). Here the satire is no longer restrained by the desire for sober reserve which characterised the earlier poem, and a tremendous power of scornful realism finds vent in it.

Shadwell, the dramatist, and a Whig, is the hero of *MacFlecknoe*. The terrible denunciation to which he is subjected owes its origin to a disagreement in which there is an admixture of political motives, but of which the dominant reasons are of an individual order. Dryden therefore uses, and liberally, the right which he recognizes in the satirist of attacking, not only the vice, but the vicious. This personal satire has all the characteristics of a comic, mock-heroic fantasy – the pompous crowning, by Flecknoe, a prince among poetasters, of an heir worthy of himself. The blending of a crushing force of mockery with the sovereign good humour of a merry giant remains the particular feature of this poem.

14.2.2. Summary and Analysis of Absalom and Achitophel

Absalom and Achitophel is Dryden's best-known poem. It is the supreme example of a masterpiece written to order, a topical piece of Tory propaganda written probably at the suggestion of Charles II himself, with the specific aim of discrediting the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Whigs.

When Dryden wrote this poem, the parallel between certain incidents related in the Old Testament and the contemporary situation had already been recognised. Charles II was often compared to King David, and Achitophel was a familiar term for an

evil counselor. Dryden was not trying to be original; he was using a story and names which already were well-known. In addition, the Old Testament framework lends an air of sacred truth to the modern story, and gives the impression that man's revolt against his King is a recurrent phenomenon in history. Indeed, Dryden's treatment of the biblical narrative subtly suggests that this revolt itself offers a parallel to Adam's revolt against god as a consequence of his surrender to the temptations of the Devil. And we must remember that to the seventeenth-century reader the Bible was the most familiar and authoritative book to which a poet could allude. So by suggesting the parallels of God, King David, and King Charles II; Adam, Absalom, and the Duke of Monmouth; and Devil, Achitophel, and the Earl of Shaftesbury; and by equating the contemporary revolt against the King (Charles II) with the scriptural accounts of revolt by Absalom and Adam, Dryden had morally won his case even before he started writing the poem.

As it is a foregone conclusion that David (that is, King Charles II) will win in the conflict, the conflict hardly generates any tension in the poem nor is there any narrative action. Although the stage is promisingly set with semi-epical and satirical characters, the plot dissolves into lengthy speeches. The dramatic events of Absalom's death and King David weeping over that death* had no parallel in the contemporary political situation, and so

*In the Old Testament, Achitophel's advice is not taken and he hangs himself. Absalom, riding on a mule, is caught by the head in the branches of an oak-tree and is killed by Joab and others. King David's reaction to the news of his son's death is given in lines which have become famous: "O, my son Absalom, my son my son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, O, Absalom, my son my son!"

Dryden could not have included them. The indications are, in fact, that he hoped for reconciliation between King Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth.

The opening lines of many of Dryden's poems have a striking or arresting quality. In *Absalom and Achitophel*, the display of humour, seriousness, and tact, in the opening lines, is masterly. It was essential to Dryden's argument to show that Absalom's illegitimacy was the basic weakness in the Whig case, but at the same time he had to persuade the readers to respect and sympathize with Absalom's father, the King:

In pious times, ere priest-craft did begin,
 Before polygamy was made a sin:
 When man, on many, multiplied his kind,
 Ere one to one was, cursedly, confined:

When nature prompted, and no law denied
 Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
 Then, Israel's monarch, after heaven's own heard
 His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
 To wives and slaves: and, wide as his command,
 Scattered his maker's image through the land.

(Lines 1-10)

This account of the royal promiscuity as a genial excess of vitality is certainly amusing, but Dryden's enemies called him a cynical apologist for his royal patron (especially because Dryden refers to a Christian marriage as the cursed confining of one to one. But we may also see a hint in this passage that the tactful extenuation of Charles II's behavior is merely a trick to allow Dryden to criticize the King's sexual misconduct and political blunders in begetting bastards. The whole of this passage is ironical, written in exactly the jovial/cynical manner Charles might himself have employed to condone his misdeeds. Dryden had to be tactful when writing about Charles, but he also had the courage to be critical, and the weapon he chose was irony. Like Chaucer's, Dryden's humour is clear-sighted and not indulgent to the follies it amusingly depict.

Absalom and Achitophel does not have much action in it. It has been compared to a masterpiece of painting with its canvas "crowded with figures, clearly divided into two opposing groups and painted in varying perspective." In both its design and its material, however, its structure is complex. The poem opens with a narrative and the character-sketches of the main characters (Lines 1-229). The grand dialogue of seduction follows (Lines 230-476) exemplifying in action the characters of Achitophel and his victim (Absalom). The scene then opens wider, to expose the rout of malcontents and trouble-makers behind Achitophel (Lines 477-681); and it closes on Absalom's rebellion (Lines 682-752). The main political issue is then taken up. The author admits the danger of the absolutism against which the Whigs claimed to be fighting (Lines 759-64). But (Lines 765-76) even if the common view of the kingship is justified – as based not on divine right but on a covenant between the ruler and the people – that covenant is continuous, and cannot be contracted out of by altering the succession. The author next passes to the cognate problems of limiting the royal prerogative and popular power (Lines 777–94), and concludes with arguments against resisting the ruler to the ultimate destruction of the common welfare (Lines 795-810).

The political thesis of the poem has been stated as a calm and reasonable reply to the seductive arguments of Achitophel. It

is strengthened by a Tory counter-attack in terms of human quality- the rogues' gallery of Whigs (Lines 491-681) is balanced by a series of portraits of the king's friends (Lines 811-932). The poem ends with a dramatic monologue by David himself (Lines 933-1025). The main purpose of the poem was, of course, the vindication of Charles II.

The style of the poem, for all its variety of tones, is essentially heroic. The heroic style, according to Dryden, is one in which "the plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them." Such a style is appropriate both to biblical allegory and to a narrative of great political events. For the epic treatment of a biblical story, Dryden had several precedents in contemporary literature.

Absalom and Achitophel is heroic not only in style, but in the matter and scale of the action. It is heroic, too, in much of its characterization- in the flattering descriptions of the king's friends, where the qualities of loyalty and service are exemplified in ideal terms, and also in the portraits of Achitophel and Absalom. Tory pamphleteers had already described Shaftesbury as the chief advocate for hell, as old Machiavelli, as Mephistopheles, the fiend that haunts both Houses of Parliament. Dryden lifts this abusive commonplace to a heroic (and ironic) level by emphasizing Achitophel's virtues and ability. This effect is also achieved by drawing in parallels to Milton's "arch-Angel ruined – in the long, exquisitely seductive speeches to Absalom, the allusions to Lucifer in the address to the reader (Lines 66-73), and in Miltonic parody (Lines 373-75). The character of Absalom is more simply heightened; it owes much to the tradition of the heroic play, in which the struggle of duty and ambition, honour and passion, is the central theme. The disparity between birth and aspirations (Lines 366-72) is a common ground for complaint. Absalom's unlawful ambition, though it becomes active under Achitophel's flattering hand, has its origin in his nobility. Both Absalom and Achitophel exemplify – one seriously enough, the other satirically – the character as Dryden describes it in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*.

The success of *Absalom and Achitophel* in treating contemporary events in heroic terms depends on the deliberate incongruity between its subject and its style – although the degree of incongruity continually varies and at times disappears altogether. In itself, the perfunctory intervention of God at the end of the poem – to seal the triumph of Charles as a pensioner of Louis XIV – is as absurd as the divine fire-extinguisher in *Annus Mirabilis*, but it can be accepted as a compliment to Charles and as having a general reference to divine providence because the prophetic nature of the

concluding lines positively forbids the reader to take them quite literally, Dryden is not only showing that he is aware of a certain disparity between his fable and the historical events; he is also using it deliberately to employ a much more sophisticated response to the working of the divine providence in national affairs. These lines are recognised as part of the rhetorical mechanism that has promoted a critical and realistic attitude throughout the poem, an attitude that enables the reader to accept their serious meaning without feeling himself committed to an extravagant fancy.

In the writing of *Absalom and Achitophel*, what is perhaps most remarkable is the way in which Dryden used the allegory. There were serious difficulties in the way of investing a contemporary subject with any degree of grandeur. The very familiarity of the subject-matter was in this respect against the poet. Such unavoidable words as "parliament", "jury", "writ", and "committee" defy an elevated medium; they would have reduced Dryden's poem to the mock-heroic level, precisely as "Flecknoe", "Ogleby", and "Shadwell" reduce *MacFlecknoe*. The biblical allegory helped Dryden to raise his poem to a dignified level without falling into bathos.

But this was not the only advantage of employing the allegory. The allegory also acted as the instrument of Dryden's brilliant wit, and helped to give the poem an air of objectivity more impressive than the direct exclamatoriness so common in political satire. The action stands out in relief, because it is misleadingly over-simplified. The fact that such figures as the King, the Tempter, and the Mob are so readily recognised carries the action a step further from the realm of mere political wrangling in the direction of universal philosophical or poetic truth.

Dryden did not have much respect for mere lampoons. He did not want that his poem should remain on the same level as the majority of the productions of the "violent paper scuffle." By employing the biblical allegory and adapting it to his purpose, he found one method of raising political satire to the level of high art.

The peculiar quality of the poem, however, lies in the wit which pervades it – from the ironic opening picture of Charles II's harem-court,* through the representation of Achitophel as the Devil's advocate, to such detail as the parallel of Moses and Corah and the portrait of Issachar. Dryden's wit is explicitly and brilliantly satiric in the characters of the Whigs and Oates. To these portraits, touched with every satirical device, the poem owes its fame. But *Absalom and Achitophel* is not a satire in the limited modern sense, though its author called it such and thought the character of Zimri worth the whole poem. In the Dedication of his translation of Juvenal (1693). Dryden points out that, while nowadays we restrict

the term satire to “invective poems”, the Romans used it in a “more general signification.” The early Latin satirist Varro describes his work thus: “Notwithstanding that those pieces of mine are sprinkled with a kind of mirth and gaiety: yet many things are there inserted, which are drawn from the very entrails of philosophy, and many things are severely argued.” *Absalom and Achitophel* – part history and propaganda, part satire, part eulogy – is satirical in this mixed tradition. The complexity of its form and art is pointed out in Dr. Johnson’s comment. “If it be considered as a poem political and controversial it will be found to comprise all the excellences of which the subject is susceptible: acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of characters, variety and vigour of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers; and all these raised to such a height as can scarcely be found in any other English composition.

The supreme excellence of *Absalom and Achitophel* lies in its descriptions of character. Dryden’s exquisite etchings live in the memory with unequalled tenacity. The pre-eminence of Achitophel among the opponents of the royal government is unmistakably signalized by his being commissioned to master the shaken virtue of Absalom. When the satire proceeds from the leader to the followers, no composite body of malcontents has ever been analyzed with surer discernment and more perfect insight. The honest Whigs, the utilitarian radicals, the speculators who use the party for their private ends, the demagogues and mob-orators who are the natural product of faction – all are there; but so, too, are the republicans on principle, headed by survivors of the fanatics who believed in their own theocracy. Of course, the numerical strength of the party is made up by the unthinking crowd that takes up a cry – in this case, the cry ‘No Popery’. Of the chiefs of the faction, for the most part, a few incisive lines, or even a damning epithet, suffice to dispose; but there are exceptions, suggested by public or by private considerations. In the latter class, Dryden’s own statement obliges us to include Zimri – a character which he

*In this opening picture, the old Puritan identification of the English with the Chosen People is turned to justify a licentious king.

Declares to be ‘worth the whole poem’. What he says of his intentions in devising this masterpiece of wit, and of his success in carrying them into execution, illustrates at once the discretion with which he applied his satirical powers, and the limitation which his nature, as well as judgment, imposed upon their use. Moral indignation was not part of Dryden’s satirical stock. Even the hideously true likeness of Titus Oates (Corah) preserves the accent of sarcasm which has suited the malicious sketch of Shimei, the inhospitable sheriff of the city; it is as if the poet’s blame could

never come with so full a tone as the praise which, in the latter part of the poem, is gracefully distributed among the chief supporters of the crown.

Absalom and Achitophel create an awkward problem for modern readers. It is regarded as a striking achievement. It is certainly a unique blend of satirical portraiture, semi-epical conflict, and didactic argument. But most people today cannot share Dryden's strong royalist, conservative opinions. How can then one whole-heartedly praise Charles II's official propagandist, the Tory partisan who saw the constitutional struggles of the time as a contest between a god-like King and a devilish Whig opportunist? Various answers to this question have been suggested. One answer is that Dryden was a moderate royalist who wanted both Parliament and King to obey the established law of the land. Another answer is that Charles II and Shaftesbury are type-portraits of the good ruler and the evil rebel, true symbols of the eternal conflict between good and evil in every period of history, but not necessarily accurate assessments of Charles II and Shaftesbury. Dryden's poem, from this point of view, becomes poetically, if not historically, true. But the problem is not so simple. We cannot divide all the forces, inner and outer, which act upon the human mind, into two clear and exclusive categories of good and evil.

Absalom and Achitophel is not primarily a satire, but a political narrative written to vindicate the King and his court party. It consists of a witty historical introduction leading up to the seduction of Absalom (Monmouth, the 'Protestant Duke') by Achitophel (Shaftesbury); a brilliant series of satiric portraits of Whig personalities; a medial discussion of the fundamental political issues behind the crisis of 1676-81; a series of panegyric portraits of the King's friends; and a statement of Charles's own case. The application of the biblical story of Absalom is not a novelty; but Dryden's use of the old testament is wonderfully consistent, complex and witty. And the whole story is beautifully turned to serve his political design. The heroic style, with echoes of the grand seduction in *Paradise Lost* and the exalted debates of the heroic play, is an instrument of both panegyric and satire; and the portraits of the Whigs illustrate the notion of satire as a kind of heroic poetry, gaining its effects by irony and 'fine raillery', which Dryden later set out in his essay on Juvenal and Persius. In *Absalom and Achitophel* he lifts the tradition of English satire, as represented in the works of John Oldham, Andrew Marvell and Samuel Butler, to a new level of art and sets the tone of the dominant mode in Augustan verse. A *Second Part* which followed in 1682 is mainly the work of Nahum Tate, with a number of satiric portraits by Dryden. Dryden's later attack on Shaftesbury in *The Medal* (1682), following the failure of the indictment for treason, has

great energy and intensity; but it is on a smaller scale, with neither the variety nor the heroic ironies of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

14.2.3. Critical Approaches to *Absalom and Achitophel*

“This poem [*Absalom and Achitophel*] is said to be one of the most perfect allegorical pieces that our language has produced. It is carried on thought the whole with equal strength and propriety. The veil is nowhere laid aside. There is a just similarity in the characters, which are exactly portrayed; the lineaments are well-copied; the coloring is lively; the groupings show the hand of a master, and may serve to convince us that Dryden knew his own power when he asserted that he found it easier to write severely than gently.”

(Samuel Derrick, 1760, *Miscellaneous Works of John Dryden*)

“You will find this a good gage or criterion of genius-whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden’s *Achitophel* and *Zimri*, *Shaftesbury* and *Buckingham*; every line adds to or modifies the character, which is as it were a-building up to the very last verse; whereas, in Pope’s *Timon*, etc., the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirised.”

(S.T. Coleridge, 1832, *Table Talk*)

“The greatest of his satires is *Absalom and Achitophel*, - that work in which his powers become fully known to the world and which, as many think, he never surpassed. The admirable fitness of the English couplet for satire had never been shown before; in less skilful hands it had been ineffective; he does not frequently, in his poem, carry the sense beyond the second line, which except when skillfully contrived, as it often is by himself, is apt to enfeeble the emphasis; his triplets are less numerous than usual, but energetic. The spontaneous ease of expression, the rapid transitions, the general elasticity and movement, have never been excelled. It is superfluous to praise the discrimination and vivacity of the chief characters.”

(Henry Hallam, 1837-39, *Introductions to the Literature of Europe*)

In one respect this poem (*Absalom and Achitophel*) stands alone in literature. A party pamphlet dedicated to the hour, it is yet immortal. No poem in our language is so interpenetrated with contemporary allusion, with contemporary portraiture, with

contemporary point; yet no poem in our language has been more enjoyed by succeeding generations of readers. Scores of intelligent men who know by heart the characters of Zimri and Achitophel are content to remain in ignorance of the political careers of Buckingham and Shaftesbury. The speech in which Achitophel incites his faltering disciple has been admired and recited by hundreds who have been blind to its historical fidelity and to its subtle personalities.”

(J.C. Collins, 1878-95, “Dryden”, *Quarterly Review*)

14.2.4. Text of Absalom and Achitophel

Of these the false Achitophel was first:

A name to all succeeding ages curst.

For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;

Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit:

Restless, unfixt in principles and place;

In pow'r unpleas'd, impatient of disgrace.

A fiery soul, which working out its way,

Fretted the pigmy-body to decay:

And o'er inform'd the tenement of clay.

A daring pilot in extremity;

Pleas'd with the danger, when the waves went high

He sought the stroms; but for a calm unfit,

Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.

Great wits are sure to madness near alli'd;

And thin partitions do their bounds divide:

Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,

Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?

Punish a body which he could not please;

Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?

And all to leave, what with his toil he won

To that unfeather'd, two-legg'd thing, a son:

Got, while his soul did huddled notions try;

And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.

In friendship false, implacable in hate:

Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.

To compass this, the triple bond he broke;

The pillars of the public safety shook:

And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke.

Then, seiz'd with fear, yet still affecting fame,
 Usurp'd patriot's all-atoning name.
 So easy still it proves in factious times,
 With public zeal to cancel private crimes:
 How safe is treason, and how sacred ill,
 Where none can sin against the people's will:
 Where crowds can wink; and no offence be known,
 Since in another's guilt they find their own.
 Yet, fame deserv'd, no enemy can grudge;
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.
 In Jewish courts ne'er sat an Abethdin
 With more discerning eyes, or hands more clean:
 Unbrib'd, unsought, the wretched to redress;
 Swift of dispatch, and easy of access.
 Oh, had he been content to serve the crown,
 With virtues only proper to the gown;
 Or, had the rankness of the soil been freed
 From cockle, that opprest the noble seed:
 David, for him his tuneful harp had strung,
 And heav'n had wanted one immortal song.
 But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand;
 And fortune's ice prefers to virtue's land:
 A chitophel, grown weary to possess
 A lawful fame, and lazy happiness;
 Disdain'd the golden fruit to gather free,
 And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.
 Now, manifest of crimes, contriv'd long since,
 He stood at bold defiance with his prince:
 Held up the buckler of the people's cause,
 Against the crown; and skulk'd behind the laws.
 The wish'd occasion of the plot he takes;

Some circumstances finds, but more he makes.
 By buzzing emissaries, fills the ears
 Of list'ning crowds, with jealousies and fears
 Of arbitay counsels brought to light,
 And proves the king himself a Jebusite.
 Weak arguments! Which yet he knew full well,

Were strong with people easy to rebel.
 For, govern'd by the moon, the giddy Jews
 Tread the same track when she the prime renews:
 And once in twenty years, their scribes record,
 By natural instinct they change their lord.
 Achitophel still wants a chief, and none
 Was found so fit as warlike absalom:
 Not, that he wish'd his greatness to create,
 (For politicians neither love nor hate:)
 But, for he knew, his title not allow'd,
 Would keep him still depending on the crowd:
 That kingly pow'r, thus ebbing out, might be
 Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.
 Him he attempts, with studied arts to please,
 And sheds his venom, in such words as these.
 Auspicious Prince! At whose nativity
 Some royal planet rul'd the southern sky;
 Thy longing country's darling and desire;
 Their cloudy pillar, and their guardian fire:
 Their second Moses, whose extended wand
 Divides the seas, and shows the promis'd land:
 Whose dawning day, in very distant age,
 Has exercis'd the sacred prophet's rage:
 The people's pray'r, the glad diviner's theme,
 The young men's vision, and the old men's dream!
 Thee, Saviour, thee, the nation's vows confess;
 And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless:
 Swift, unbespoken poms, thy steps proclaim,
 And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.
 How long wilt thou the general joy detain;
 Starve, and defraud the people of thy reign?
 Content ingloriously to pass thy days
 Like one of virtue's fools that feeds on praise;
 Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,
 Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.
 Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be,
 Or gather'd ripe, or rot upon the tree.
 Heav'n has to all allotted, soon or late,

Some lucky revolution of their fate:
 Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill,
 (For human good depends on human will,)
 Our fortune rolls, as from a smooth descent,

And, from the first impression, takes the bent:
 But, if unseiz'd, she glides away like wind;
 And leaves repenting folly far behind.
 Now, now she meets you, with a glorious prize,
 And spreads her locks before her as she flies.
 Had thus Old David, from whose loins you spring,
 Not dar'd, when fortune call'd him, to be king.
 At Gath an exile he might still remain;
 And Heaven's anointing oil had been in vain.
 Let his successful youth your hopes engage;
 But shun th'example of declining age:
 Behold him setting in his western skies,
 The shadows lengthening as the vapours rise.
 He is not now, as when on Jordan's sand
 The joyful people throng'd to see him land,
 Cov'ring the beach, and black'ning all the strand:
 But, like the Prince of Angels from his height,
 Comes tumbling downward with diminish'd light:
 Betray'd by one poor plot to public scorn:
 (Our only blessing since his curst return:)
 Those heaps of people which one sheaf did bind,
 Blown off, and scatter'd by a puff of wind.
 What strength can he to your designs oppose,
 Naked of friends and round beset with foes?
 If Pharaoh's doubtful succor he should use,
 A foreign aid would more incense the Jews:
 Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring;
 Foment the war, but not support the king:
 Nor would the royal party e'er unite
 With Pharaoh's arms, t'assist the Jebusite;
 Or if they should, their interest soon would break,
 And with such odious aid, make David weak.
 All sorts of men, by my successful arts,

Abhorring kings, estrange their alter'd hearts
 From David's rule: And 'tis the general Cry,
 Religion, Common-wealth, and Liberty.
 If, you, as champion of the public good,
 Add to their arms a chief of royal blood;
 What may not Israel hope, and what applause
 Might such a general gain by such a cause?
 Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flow'r,
 Fair only to the sight, but solid pow'r:
 And nobler is a limited command,
 Giv'n by the love of all your native land,
 Than a successive title, long, and dark,
 Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's Ark.

14.3. LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have estimated John Dryden as a satirist. Then we made a survey of Dryden's satirical works in general and Absalom and Achitophel in particular. We have given a detail summary and analysis of the poem. And finally we have seen the various critics' perceptions on the poem.

14.4. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Dryden's portrayal of Achitophel as a character.
2. Examine Absalom and Achitophel as a political satire.
3. Write a note on Dryden as a satirist.
4. Critically appreciate the poem, Absalom and Achitophel.



CRITICAL STUDY OF A POET: ALEXANDER POPE

Unit Structure:

- 15.0. Objectives
- 15.1. Introduction to Pope
- 15.2. Study of Rape of the Lock
 - 15.2.1. Introduction to Rape of the Lock
 - 15.2.2. Summary and Analysis of Rape of the Lock
 - 15.2.3. Text of Rape of the Lock Canto I
 - 15.2.4. Summary of the Canto I
 - 15.2.5. Critical Commentary on Canto I
- 15.3. Let's Sum up
- 15.4. Important Questions

15.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are to make you familiar with Alexander Pope's Rape of the Lock as a finer example of mock epic during the Augustan Age of English Literature.

15.1. INTRODUCTION TO POPE

Alexander Pope was born in London in 1688. As a Roman Catholic living during a time of Protestant consolidation in England, he was largely excluded from the university system and from political life, and suffered certain social and economic disadvantages because of his religion as well. He was self-taught to a great extent, and was an assiduous scholar from a very early age. He learned several languages on his own, and his early verses were often imitations of poets he admired. His obvious talent found encouragement from his father, a linen-draper, as well as from literary-minded friends. At the age of twelve, Pope contracted from tuberculosis that settled in his spine, leaving him stunted and misshapen and causing him great pain for much of his life. He never married, though he formed a number of lifelong friendships in London's literary circles, most notably with Jonathan Swift.

Pope wrote during what is often called the Augustan Age of English literature (indeed, it is Pope's career that defines the age). During this time, the nation had recovered from the English Civil Wars and the Glorious Revolution, and the regained sense of political stability led to a resurgence of support for the arts. For this reason, many compared the period to the reign of Augustus in Rome, under whom both Virgil and Horace had found support for their work. The prevailing taste of the day was neoclassical, and 18th-century English writers tended to value poetry that was learned and allusive, setting less value on originality than the Romantics would in the next century. This literature also tended to be morally and often politically engaged, privileging satire as its dominant mode.

15.2. STUDY OF RAPE OF THE LOCK

15.2.1. Introduction to Rape of the Lock

The Rape of the Lock is one of the most famous English-language examples of the mock-epic. Published in its first version in 1712, when Pope was only 23 years old, the poem served to forge his reputation as a poet and remains his most frequently studied work. The inspiration for the poem was an actual incident among Pope's acquaintances in which Robert, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair, and the young people's families fell into strife as a result. John Caryll, another member of this same circle of prominent Roman Catholics, asked Pope to write a light poem that would put the episode into a humorous perspective and reconcile the two families. The poem was originally published in a shorter version, which Pope later revised. In this later version he added the "machinery" the retinue of supernatural's who influence the action as well as the moral of the tale.

After the publication of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope spent many years translating the works of Homer. During the ten years he devoted to this arduous project, he produced very few new poems of his own but refined his taste in literature (and his moral, social, and political opinions) to an incredible degree. Pope struck a more serious tone than the one he gave to *The Rape of the Lock*. These later poems are more severe in their moral judgments and more acid in their satire: Pope's *Essay on Man* is a philosophical poem on metaphysics, ethics, and human nature, while in the *Dunciad* Pope writes a scathing expose of the bad writers and pseudo-intellectuals of his day.

15.2.2. Summary and Analysis of Rape of the Lock

Belinda arises to prepare for the day's social activities after sleeping late. Her guardian sylph, Ariel, wanted her in a dream that

some disaster will befall her, and promises to protect her to the best of his abilities. Belinda takes little notice of this oracle, however. After an elaborate ritual of dressing and primping, she travels on the Thames River to Hampton Court Palace, an ancient royal residence outside of London, where a group of wealthy young socialites are gathering for a party. Among them is the Baron, who has already made up his mind to steal a lock of Belinda's hair. He has risen early to perform an elaborate set of prayers and sacrifices to promote success in this enterprise. When the partygoers arrive at the palace, they enjoy a tense game of cards, which Pope describes in mock-heroic terms as a battle. This is followed by a round of coffee. Then the Baron takes a pair of scissors and manages, on the third try, to cut off the coveted lock of Belinda's hair. Belinda is furious. Umbriel, a mischievous gnome, journeys down to the Cave of Spleen to procure a sack of sighs and a flask of tears which he then bestows on the heroine to fan the flames of her ire. Clarissa, who had aided the Baron in his crime, now urges Belinda to give up her anger in favor of good humor and good sense, moral qualities which will outlast her vanities. But Clarissa's moralizing falls on deaf ears, and Belinda initiates a scuffle between the ladies and the gentlemen, in which she attempts to recover the severed curl. The lock is lost in the confusion of this mock battle, however; the poet consoles the bereft Belinda with the suggestion that it has been taken up into the heavens and immortalized as a constellation.

Pope states the theme of the poem in the opening lines; he will write of the great conflicts that are caused by insignificant events. He tells the muse of poetry that Caryll had suggested the poem and that he feels sure of success, since Belinda inspired the poem, and he hopes Caryll would approve of it.

The structure of the poem: As the reader views the rather formal opening lines, he realizes immediately that Pope is using the structure of the epic poem. Since the materials rise from what Pope himself admits is "trivial", his purpose is obviously satiric. The traditional conventions for the writing of the epic poem demanded a statement of the theme in the opening lines, an invocation of the muse of poetry, division into cantos, grand speeches of heroes, descriptions of warriors (dress and equipment), battles and the use of supernatural machinery, as well as some minor features of verification.

The opening lines also set the mood and atmosphere of the poem—sophisticated and genial. Since it deals with an actual event in society, it can be termed 'vers de societe'; the treatment of the subject is charming, witty and always delightful. (Lines 1-6)

The poet asks the muse to explain what could cause such a terrific response, what breach of etiquette could arouse the well-bred to act in such a way.

The poet-as-commentator in his poem is not to be viewed as Pope personally. Instead, he becomes the voice of a character in the poem (persona), and it must be remembered that while Pope as poet has complete control over the poem, the persona can pause for comment on the action. Of course, the rhetorical questions are part of epic convention. The focus is on the well-bred of society; they are the last whom we might expect to act violently. The implied comparison of a trivial incident causing a mighty outcome is of course, the Trojan war.

The sun shines in the window and the heroine (Belinda) briefly opens her eyes that are brighter than daylight. Although, it is the fashionable waking hours, (noon) when “sleepless” lovers and lap dogs are up and about, she still dozes on, ignoring her clocks warning, and the fact that she has rung for her maid. The prolonging of her sleep is explained by the fact that her guardian sylph has caused a dream to appear, in the form of a handsome young man, he tries to give her the warning described in the next section.

The Artificial world: The persona’s views on the artificial world can be gleaned from the comment on Belinda’s loveliness outshining natural beauty (her eyes are brighter than sun’s). The behavior patterns of Belinda’s fashionable crowd ordain that noon is the fashionable waking hour; lovers are expected to be conventionally sleepless, but are not. Pope’s dualism is evident in the charm of the world, and its fragile fraction, as well as in his underlying satiric comment on it.

The guardian sylph addresses Belinda as “Fairest of mortals” and she is told that she is protected by thousands of spirits who roam airy regions. He suggests that whatever knowledge she has of the world of elves or fairies, or miraculous viritationy (despite common sense) from her nurse or priests, it comes from a revelation made only to children and young girls. These secrets are kept from skeptics and the intellectually proud. He begins to describe the world of the sylph and their existence.

Use of supernatural machinery: The first version of the poem in two cantos did not include the use of the sylphs. Pope’s skill as a poet is evident in his ability to expand the poem and add this feature, without ruining the original poem. Pope, as Christian poet, was hampered in the use of this technique, or feature of epic poetry, since he could not rely, as the classic pagan authors to

direct the action. He had to devise a clever substitution and the order of beings he creates, the sylphs, was a perfect solution.

Another example of the epic convention used in this section, is sylph's speech, which faintly echoes Satan's speeches in 'Paradise Lost' (Milton) and the heroes' speeches in the classical epics. The subject matter of his speech carries out the "diminishing" tone of the mock epic; he hints at the superstition taught children by nursemaids and priests (a popular contemporary jest) and hits at the vanities of women in this and the next section.

A good portion of the speech concerns the sylph's earnest explanation of the world of sylphs, largely feminine in interests. The sylphs are the spirits of females, especially transposed to their sylph existence after death. Their vanities on earth are not forgotten, but take a very different form: some card minded sylphs super-intend card games; others sip tea. Serious sober ladies still roam the earth as guardians some of the more prudish minds are groome-like. Other enjoys a life of merriment and gaiety.

The major task of the sylphs is to guard the honour and reputations of those unmarried girls still living. These girls are to be kept from yielding to alluring promises or being lulled by handsome suitors or soft music or dancing. The sylphs assume a protective, as well as interested, air when young ladies are swayed by the promise of noble stations in life. Although the credit goes elsewhere, even to the young ladies insistence on maintaining their chastity, it is really the ingenuity of the sylphs that keep reputations in fact. When it seems to worldly eyes that women are temporally wandering from straight courses, it is really the sylphs who guide them through intricate paths. Strategie such as introducing new because (implied by the "wigs" and "sword knots") or new coaches, or invitations to another party, distract the young ladies from temptation. If serious people think that the careful guidance of the sylphs is mere fantasy, it is because they are blind to the truth of the sylph's ingenuity.

The satire intended for the level of the young ladies' attention span and vanities even at their lack of serious values and at having a casual sense of morality are obvious. Their hearts are compared to toy-shops", reducing them to the level of children and implying that like children they are easily gulled. Their virtue seems easily assailable and the sylphs must be constantly diligent and vigilant in their guardianship.

The "box" referred to is a box at the theatre, the "Ring" is the fashionable carriage driven in Hyde Park.

Ariel introduces himself as one of the guardian sylphs and tells Belinda that he saw an omen that some dread event is about to take place. Unfortunately the details of this imminent disaster are not clear (he cannot tell when, where or how it will happen) but he can only warn her that danger is near and that she must be especially cautious of man. Her sleep and dreams are suddenly interrupted by shock, her lap dog who awakens her with his tongue lapping at her face. Belinda's waking thoughts are distracted by the sight of a love letter, and all of Ariel's warnings vanish from her mind.

The tongue-in-check commentary of the 'Persona' on the vanities of women is beautifully the solid warnings given her by Ariel. Ariel's name links him with Shakespeare's mischievous airy spirit in the 'Tempest' and it will be remembered that his mistakes guide the outcome of the play another level of humour was open to Pope's contemporary audience, in this passage, particularly since several of the lines are parodies of lines in literary works familiar to readers of Dryden, for instance, "Shock" given as a name to a lap dog would amuse the readers who knew that the "Shock" or "Shough" was an Icelandic dog of "a pretty bigness".

Belinda's dressing table is covered with beauty aids from all parts of the world; gems from India, and perfumes from Arabia. Tortoise shell and ivory, combs lie near shining rows of pins, and mixed into this odd assembly are powders, beauty patches, love letters and Bibles. The lovely "goddess of beauty" reflected in the mirror is aided in her efforts to aid to her natural beauty by a "lesser" priestess, her maid, Betty, and by the busy attendant sylphs who receive little credit in achieving the final effect.

A religious atmosphere is captured in the almost ritualistic session at Belinda's dressing table. The two women become "goddess" and "Priestess" at their tasks, but the satiric thrust is still present in the profession of articles on the table: "Bibles" are casually placed in the midst of her beauty aids. Pope achieves a special comic effect by placing the word "Bibles" in an insignificant place in the line, just as the actual books seen carelessly tossed on the table.

An echo of the serious epic can be detected in the donning of the beauty aids, which parallels the arming of the hero before battle; it is especially reminiscent of Achilles; preparation for battle in 'Iliad'. This echo is borne out in the line describing the array of shining pins, which evokes an image of the shining rows of men in arms before battle.

15.2.3. Text of Rape of the Lock Canto I

Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos;
Sedjuvat, hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis.

(Martial, Epigrams 12.84)

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,
What mighty contest rise from trivial things,
I sing – This verse to Caryl, Muse! Is due:
This, ev'n Belinda may vouchasfe to view:
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
If she inspire, and he approve my lays.
Say what strance motive, Goddess! Could compel
A well-bred lordt' assault a gentle belle?
O says what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?
In tasks so bold, an little men engage,
And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?

Sol thro' white curtains shot a tim'rous ray,
And op'd those tyes that must eclipse the day;
Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake,
And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake:
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground
And the press'd watch return'd a silver sound.
Belinda still her downy pillow press'd
Her guardian sylph prolong'd the balmy rest:
'Twas he had summon'd to her silent bed
The morning dream that hover'd o'er her head;
A youth more glitt'ring than a birthnight beau,
(that ev'n in slumber caus'd her check to glow)
Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to lay,
And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to say.

“Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care
Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!
If e'er one vision touch'd thy infant thought,
Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,
Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,
The silver token, and the circled green,
Or virgins visited by angel pow'rs,
With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'rs,

Hear and believe! Thy own importance know,
 Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.
 Some secret truths from learned pride conceal'd,
 To maids alone and children are reveal'd:
 What tho' no credit doubting wits may give?
 The fair and innocent shall still believe.
 Know then, unnumber'd spirits round thee fly,
 Th' elight militia of the lower sky;
 These, though unseen, are ever on theg,
 Hang o'er the box, and hover round the Ring.
 Think what an equipage thou hast in air,
 And view with scorn two pages and a chair.
 As now your own, our beings were of old,
 And once inclos'd in woman's beauteous mould;
 Thence, by a soft transition, we repair
 From earthly vehicles to these of air.
 Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,
 That all her vanities at once are dead;
 Succeeding vanities she still regards,
 And tho' she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.
 Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,
 And love of ombre, after death survive.
 For when the fair in all their pride expire,
 To their first elements their souls retire:
 The sprites of fiery termagants in flame
 Mount up, and take a Salamander;s name.
 Soft yielding minds to water glide away,
 And sip with Nymphs their elemental tea.
 The graver prude sinks downward to a Gnome,
 In search of mischief still on earth to roam.
 The light coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,
 And sport and flutter in the fields of air.

Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste
 Rejects mankind, is by some sylph embrac'd:
 For spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease
 Assume what sexes and what shapes they please.
 What guards the purity of melting maids,
 In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades,
 Safe from the treach'rous friend, the daring spark,

The glance by day, the whisper in the dark,
 When kind occasion prompts their warm desires,
 When music softens, and when dancing fires?
 'Tis but their sylph, the wise celestials know,
 Though honour is the word with men below.

Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face,
 For life predestin'd to the gnomes' embrace.
 These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,
 When offers are disdain'd, and love denied:
 Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
 While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,
 And garters, stars, and coronets appear,
 And in soft sound 'Your Grace' salutes their ear.
 'Tis these that early taint the female soul,
 Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,
 Teach infant cheeks a bidden blush to know,
 And little hearts to flutter at a beau.

Of, when the world imagine women stray,
 The Sylphs through mystic mazes guide their way,
 Thro' all the giddy circle they pursue,
 And old impertinence expel by new.
 What tender maid but must a victim fall
 To one man's treat, but for another's ball?
 When Florio speaks, what virgin could withstand,
 If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand?
 With varying vanities, from ev'ry part,
 They shift the moving toyshop of their heart;
 Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive,
 Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive.
 This erring mortals levity may call,
 Oh blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all.

Of these am I, who thy protection claim,
 A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name,
 Late, as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air,
 In the clear mirror of thy ruling star
 I saw, alas! some dread event impend,
 Ere to the main this morning sun descend,

But Heav'n reveals not what, or how, or where:
 Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware!
 This to disclose is all thy guardian cen.
 Beware of all, but most beware of man!"

He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
 Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.
 Twas then, Belinda, if report says true,
 The eyes first open'd on a billet-doux;
 Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,
 But all the vision vanish'd from thy head.

And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd
 Each silver vase in mystic order laid.
 First, rob'd in white, the nymph intent adores
 With head uncover'd, the cosmetic pow'rs.
 A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
 To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
 Th' inferior priestess, at her altar's side,
 Trembling, begins the sacred rites of pride.
 Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here
 The various off rings of the world appear;
 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
 And decks the goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.
 This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
 The tortoise here and elephant unite,
 Transfrom'd to combs, the speckled and the white.
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
 Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux.
 Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
 The fair each moment rises in her charms,
 Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
 And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
 Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
 And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
 The busy Sylphs surround their darling care;
 These set the head, and those divide the hair,
 Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown;
 And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.

15.2.4. Summary of the Canto I

The Rape of the Lock begins with a passage outlining the subject of the poem and invoking the aid of the muse. Then the sun ("Sol") appears to initiate the leisurely morning routines of a wealthy household. Lapdogs shake themselves awake, bells begin to ring, and although it is already noon, Belinda still sleeps. She has been dreaming, and we learn that the dream has been sent by "her guardian Sylph," Ariel. The dream is of a handsome youth who tells her that she is protected by "unnumbered Spirits" – an army of supernatural beings who once lived on earth as human women. The youth explains that they are the invisible guardians of women's chastity, although the credit is usually mistakenly given to "Honour" rather than to their divine stewardship of these Spirits, one particular group – the Sylphs, who dwell in the air serve as Belinda's personal guardians; they are devoted, lover-like, to any woman that "rejects mankind," and they understand and reward the vanities of an elegant and frivolous lady like Belinda. Ariel, the chief of all Belinda's puckish protectors, warns her in this dream that "some dread event" is going to befall her that day, though he can tell her nothing more specific than that she should "beware of man!" Then Belinda awakes, to the licking tongue of her lapdog, Shock. Upon the delivery of a billet-doux, or love-better, she forgets all about the dream. She then proceeds to her dressing table and goes through an elaborate ritual of dressing, in which her own image in the mirror is described as a "heavenly image," a "goddess." The Sylphs, unseen assist their charge as she prepares herself for the day's activities.

15.2.5. Critical Appreciation of Canto I

The opening of the poem established its mock-heroic style; Pope introduces the conventional epic subjects of love and war and includes an invocation to the muse and a dedication to the man (the historical John Caryl) who commissioned the poem. Yet the tone already indicates that the high seriousness of these traditional topics has suffered a diminishment. The second line confirms in explicit terms what the first line already suggests: the "am rous causes" the poem describes are not comparable to the grand love of Greek heroes but rather represent a trivialized version of that emotion. The "contests" Pope alludes to will prove to be "might" only in an ironic sense. They are card-games and flirtatious tussles, not the great battles of epic tradition. Belinda is not, like Helen of Troy, "the face that launched a thousand ships" (see the Spark Note on *The Iliad*), but rather a face that – although also beautiful – prompts a lot of foppish nonsense. The first two verse-paragraphs emphasize the comic inappropriateness of the epic style (and corresponding mind-set) to the subject at hand. Pope achieves this discrepancy at the level of the line and half-line; the

reader is meant to dwell on the incompatibility between the two sides of his parallel formulations. Thus, in this world, it is “little men” who in “tasks so bold...engage” and “soft bosoms” are the dwelling-place for “mighty rage.” In this startling juxtaposition of the petty and the grand, the former is real while the latter is ironic. In mock-epic, the high heroic style works not to dignify the subject but rather to expose and ridicule it. Therefore, the basic irony of the style supports the substance of the poem’s satire, which attacks the misguided values of a society that takes small matters for serious ones while failing to attend to issues of genuine importance.

With Belinda’s dream, Pope introduces the “machinery” of the poem—the supernatural powers that influence the action from behind the scenes. Here, the sprites that watch over Belinda are meant to mimic the gods of the Greek and Roman traditions, who are sometimes benevolent and sometimes malicious, but always intimately involved in earthly events. The scheme also makes use of other ancient hierarchies and systems of order. Ariel explains that women’s spirits, when they die, return “to their first Elements.” Each female personality type (these types correspond to the four humours) is converted into a particular kind of sprite. These gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and nymphs, in turn, are associated with the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The airy sylphs are those who in their lifetimes were “light Coquettes”; they have a particular concern for Belinda because she is of this type, and this will be the aspect of feminine nature with which the poem is most concerned.

Indeed, Pope already begins to sketch this character of the “coquette” in this initial canto. He draws the portrait indirectly, through characteristics of the Sylphs rather than of Belinda herself. Their priorities reveal that the central concerns of womanhood, at least for women of Belinda’s class, are social ones. Woman’s “joy in gilded Chariots” indicates an obsession with pomp and superficial splendor, while “love of Ombre,” a fashionable card game, suggests frivolity. The erotic charge of this social world in turn prompts another central concern: the protection of chastity. These are women who value above all the prospect marrying to advantage, and they have learned at an early age how to promote themselves and manipulate their suitors without compromising themselves. The Sylphs become an allegory for the mannered conventions that govern female social behavior. Principles like honor and chastity have become no more than another part of conventional interaction. Pope makes it clear that these women are not conducting themselves on the basis of abstract moral principles, but are governed by an elaborate social mechanism – of which the Sylphs cut a fitting caricature. And while Pope’s technique of employing supernatural machinery allows him to critique this situation, it also helps to keep the satire light and to

exonerate individual women from too severe a judgment. If Belinda has all the typical female foibles, Pope wants us to recognize that it is partly because she has been educated and trained to act in this way. The society as a whole is as much to blame as she is. Nor are men exempt from this judgment. The competition among the young lords for the attention of beautiful of beautiful ladies is depicted as a battle of vanity, as “wigs with wigs, with sword-knots strive.” Pope’s phrases here expose an absurd attention to exhibitions of pride and ostentation. He emphasizes the inanity of discriminating so closely between things and people that are essentially the same in all important (and even most unimportant) respects.

Pope’s portrayal of Belinda at her dressing table introduces mock-heroic motifs that will run through the poem. The scene of her toilette is rendered first as a religious sacrament, in which Belinda herself is the priestess and her image in the looking glass is the Goddess she serves. This parody of the religious rites before a battle gives way, then, to another kind of mock epic scene, that of the ritualized arming of the hero. Combs, pins, and cosmetics take the place of weapons as “awful Beauty puts on all its arms.”

15.3. LET’S SUM UP

This unit speaks of Alexander Pope’s poetic career in general and his Rape of the Lock in particular. It introduces Pope’s satirical works. We have studied The Rape of the Lock, its genre of literature, its summary and analysis of all cantos. Thereafter the unit goes on to give a summary and analysis of Canto I of The Rape of the Lock. It ends with the critical commentaries on the prescribed canto I so as to inculcate the critical opinions in the students.

15.4. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Belinda’s dressing table rites.
2. Discuss Rape of the Lock as a mock epic
3. Portray a character sketch of Belinda as she has been depicted in the poem, Rape of the Lock.
4. Write a short note on :
 - I. use of supernatural machinery
 - II. The poet as a commentator (persona) in this poem



Question Paper

PAPER IV – BRITISH LITERATURE (1550 – 1750) MARCH 2009

(3 Hours)

Total Marks : 100

- N.B. :** 1) Attempt all **five** questions.
2) **All** questions carry **equal** marks.

Prescribed Texts :

- 1) Shakespeare : A Midsummer Night's Dream
- 2) Shakespeare : Romeo and Juliet
- 3) Wycherley : The Country Wife
- 4) Selected Verse from the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration Periods
- 5) The Background of English Literature (1550 – 1750).

- Q.1 a) Comment on the view that Elizabethan poetry was a rich and varied expression of the Renaissance and its ideas. Support your answer with appropriation references to the poetry of the period.

OR

- b) Who were the prominent prose writers during the Jacobean period? Write briefly about their contribution.

OR

- c) Evaluation the contribution of the major dramatists to the development Restoration drama.

- Q.2 a) Compare and contrast the characters of Romeo and Juliet. How do they develop throughout the play?

OR

- b) Romeo and Juliet involves the lovers' struggle against public and social institutions. Discuss.

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) The significance of dreams in the play
 - ii) Mercutio, the Witty Sceptic
 - iii) The role of the Friar in the play

Q.3 a) Discuss love as a theme in Shakespeare's play :
A Midsummer Night's Dream

OR

b) What are Puck's functions? How does he contribute to the action of the play?

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following :

- i) Egeus, the self-righteous father
- ii) The significance of the moon
- iii) The importance of love-juice

Q.4 a) Explain the significance of the title The Country Wife.

OR

b) In most cases the characters are general and types rather than individuals notwithstanding their broad division into wits, pseudo-wits, the police and pretenders to politeness. Discuss with reference to Wycherley's The Country Wife.

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following :

- i) The role of women in the play
- ii) Mr. Sparkish, a would-be Wit
- iii) Horner, the rake

Q.5 a) How is Shakespeare's treatment of love different from that of Edmund Spenser?

OR

b) Discuss the religious theme in the poems of Donne and Herbert.

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following.

- i) Belinda's dressing table rites
- ii) Milton's 'On His Blindness'
- iii) Dryden's portrayal of Achitophel



321

**PAPER IV – BRITISH LITERATURE
(Revised Course)**

OCTOBER 2009

(3 Hours)

Total Marks : 100

- N.B. :** 1) Attempt all **five** questions.
2) **All** questions carry **equal** marks.

Prescribed Texts :

- 1) Shakespeare : A Midsummer Night's Dream
- 2) Shakespeare : Romeo and Juliet
- 3) Wycherley : The Country Wife
- 4) Selected Verse from the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration Periods
- 5) The Background of English Literature (1550 – 1750).

Q.1 a) Assess the contribution of some major prose writers to the development of English prose in the sixteenth century.

OR

b) Discuss the contribution of the dramatists to Jacobean tragedy.

OR

c) What were the main features of Neo-classical poetry? Explain with suitable illustrations.

Q.2 a) Explain the subtle interplay of chance and choice, fate and character in **Romeo and Juliet**.

OR

b) Describe the significance of the Prologue and the opening scene in **Romeo and Juliet**.

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) The role of Escalus, the Prince
 - ii) The accelerated time scheme
 - iii) The use of poison in the play

Q.3 a) What in your opinion is the relative importance of Theseus and Oberon in the conduct of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**?

OR

- b) Establish the links between the play-within-the-play and the larger play which is **A Midsummer Night's Dream**.

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) Puck's function in the play
 - ii) The Athenian craftsmen
 - iii) The role of Women as lovers.

- Q.4 a) Do you accept the view that **The Country Wife** is an extremely witty play, but coarse and indecent at the same time? Elaborate.

OR

- b) Show how every step that Pinchwife takes, in **The Country Wife**, to prevent being cuckolded seems to bring him closer to it – with a little help from Merger and Horner.

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) The excessive credulity of Sparkish
 - ii) The role of men as fops and coxcombs
 - iii) Alithea

- Q.5 a) What is Colin's complaint to God Pan in Spenser's December Eclogue? How does he compare his life to the four seasons of the year?

OR

- b) Discuss Donne's treatment of God and his state a sinfulness in his "Holy Sonnets."

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) The 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets.
 - ii) The character of Achitophel in Dryden's **Absalon and Achitophel**.
 - iii) The use of classical imagery in **Milton's Lycidas**.



**PAPER IV – ENGLISH LITERATURE (1550 – 1750)
(Revised Course)**

APRIL 2010

(3 Hours)

Total Marks : 100

- N.B. :** 1) Attempt all **five** questions.
2) **All** questions carry **equal** marks.

Prescribed Texts :

- 1) Shakespeare : A Midsummer Night's Dream
- 2) Shakespeare : Romeo and Juliet
- 3) Wycherley : The Country Wife
- 4) Selected Verse from the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration Periods
- 5) The Background of English Literature (1550 – 1750).

Q.1 a) Attempt an analysis of the impact of the Renaissance on Elizabethan poetry.

OR

- b) Examine the development of prose in the Jacobean era and briefly discuss the contribution of the prose writers of the age.

OR

- c) Comment on the unique characteristics of Restoration Drama. How was it reflected in the works of the major dramatists of the age.

Q.2 a) Comment on the dramatic significance of the soliloquies in the play **Romeo and Juliet**.

OR

- b) "Shakespearean tragedy is the outcome of Desting and Fate." Examine this statement with reference to **Romeo and Juliet**.

OR

- c) Write short notes on any two of the following :
- i) Friar Lawrence the most scheming character
 - ii) The role of the Nurse
 - iii) The imagery of Light and Darkeness
 - iv) The element of 'Haste' in the play

Q.3 a) Consider **A Midsummer Night's dream** as a romantic comedy.

OR

b) Attempt a critical analysis of the roles played by the women characters in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**.

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following :

- i) Nick Bottom
- ii) Repeated references to the moon in the play
- iii) The Fairy World
- iv) The role of Puck

Q.4 a) "**The Country Wife** is a satirical attack on affectation, hypocrisy and infidelity, that were common amongst a certain class of people in 17th century England." Substantiate with illustrations from the text.

OR

b) Examine the view that Margery Pinchwife is the only character who grows and develops during the course of the play **The Country Wife**.

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following :

- i) Mr. Sparkish, a would-be wit
- ii) The role of women in the play
- iii) Harcourt's courtship of Alithea
- iv) The Title of the play

Q.5 a) Examine Shakespeare's treatment of "Love" and "Friendship" in the sonnets you have studied.

OR

b) Evaluate the thematic concerns of Milton's poems "On His Blindness" and "Lycidas".

OR

c) Write short notes on any two of the following :

- i) The character of Achitophel in Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel".
- ii) Pastoral elements in Spenser's poetry
- iii) John Donne and George Herbert as Metaphysical poets.
- iv) Epic machinery in Pope's "The Rape of The Luck".



